



Hands-On Courses Help Student Launch Her IT Career

Kathy Price, a graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, credits much of her success to the practical experience she gained through lab exercises.

"I'm just thankful the program existed at my college. Before I got involved in the academy, I was unsure where I would go or what I would do after I got my degree. Once I started taking the classes, I knew that I wanted to pursue a career in networking."

Kathy Price,
Networking Academy Graduate
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

A key factor shaping the transformation of education in the 21st century is a growing demand for instruction that aligns with the skills needed in an increasingly connected and globalized workforce. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), a leading engineering university with campuses in New York and Connecticut, has put this principle into practice by integrating Cisco[®] Networking Academy[®] courses into the undergraduate curriculum.

Kathy Price, who recently graduated from RPI with a degree in mathematics and computer science, is now working as a customer support engineer in Cisco's Technical Assistance Center (TAC), where she helps customers resolve network routing issues. At RPI, Price excelled in her Networking

Academy studies and later earned a prestigious Cisco CCIE[®] Routing and Switching certification, becoming the ninth RPI student to earn the CCIE in the last three years. Recipients of the CCIE, which is the highest Cisco technical certification, must demonstrate an in-depth understanding of a networking specialty by passing a written exam and a hands-on laboratory exam.

"The instructors were helpful and down to earth, but the labs were the best part," Price recalls. "Getting your hands on equipment is not only exciting, it really helps in the learning process. And there were so many resources available to help if a topic was particularly challenging.

The Networking Academy also gave Price a professional boost. "The contacts I made through the academy helped put me in touch with the right people," she says. "After an on-campus interview I got the internship at TAC, and while working in the lab there, I met many of the people I work with today. When my nontechnical friends ask me what I do I say that I 'fix the Internet,' but my real job involves working with customers to solve critical problems that have to do with network components like the MPLS data-carrying service, routing protocols, and quality of service."

Two RPI alumni, Carl Redfield, Cisco Senior VP of Manufacturing Worldwide



Operations, and Mike Quinn, Cisco VP of Technical Services, were instrumental in establishing the Networking Academy at Rensselaer. “By integrating the Networking Academy coursework into freshman requirements, we have established Cisco certifications as goals that students can pursue along with their other studies,” explains Quinn. “Besides the value to students, the program’s business value lies in developing the expertise that has been foundational to Cisco’s technical prowess in the networking industry.”

In addition to the courses offered during the regular school year, the academy at RPI has established the CCIE Summer of Love. This initiative helps prepare students for the CCIE exam by giving each learner access to a pod of seven Cisco routers and four switches for conducting practice scenarios. “Through self-driven study and conversation with others in the group, we endeavor to create an atmosphere of teamwork and excellence that will prepare students for the certification and also arm them with the practical expertise they need to become technical leaders in the IT industry,” says David Kotfila, director of the Cisco Networking Academy at RPI.

The Networking Academy continues to support Price in her professional advancement. “In the future, I hope to get my CCIE certification in the service provider specialty,” she says. “I may stay with routing or move to another technology. I’ve also thought about designing networks. Someday, I’d like to be considered a true expert in the field. But right now, I’m happy to be the newest member of my team, learning as much as I can every day.”



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