

Public Relations Plan - MCCC Aviation Program

Prepared by Brian J. Kelley, Sept. 25, 2012

Background:

Mercer County Community College's Aviation Flight Technology program is nationally accredited and recognized for its high standards and quality instruction. Students who are members of the program's Flight Team score highly at the National Intercollegiate Flying Association's annual regional event, where they compete against counterparts from four-year and other two-year colleges. The Flight Team followed up back-to-back regional championships in 2007 and 2008 with a second-place finish in 2009 and second place in flying and ground events in 2010.

Most careers in aviation require a college degree. To assist graduates who wish to continue on to a bachelor's degree, MCCC has transfer agreements with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida, the Florida Institute of Technology, Metropolitan State College in Colorado, New Jersey's Thomas Edison State College, Southern Illinois University, Dowling College in New York and Central Missouri State University.

The job outlook for pilots is excellent. According to an article in the June 24, 2011, issue of Aviation Week, Boeing is predicting a shortage of qualified pilots. "Based on aircraft numbers from its commercial market outlook, the company predicts a need for 1.1 million air and ground crew by 2030. Of these, around 460,000 will be pilots and 650,000 technicians. Expressed in terms of annual recruitment, this represents training 22,000 new pilots and 22,500 technicians every year to support the industry's predicted growth."

However, according to a May 1, 2011, article in The Times of Trenton, MCCC's Aviation Flight Technology program, which graduates far fewer students than it enrolls, operated at an annual loss of \$400,000 and repeatedly faced elimination. After avoiding the chopping block in 2009, the program faced elimination again in 2011. Then, in July 2011, the college entered into an agreement with Royal Karina Air Service to operate the flight training component of the Aviation Flight Technology program out of Trenton-Mercer Airport. With RKAS providing aircraft, instructors, facilities and other resources, the college was able to control the program's costs and create a long-term solution for the aviation program's sustainability.

Purpose of this Plan:

This document is intended to identify key issues, tactics and tools for increasing public awareness of MCCC's aviation program and eventually establishing the college as a leader in aviation education and instruction. Also included is an initial, general timeline of activities included in this public relations campaign.

The plan is to roll out communications to all stakeholders in relatively quick succession soon after launch.

Expected challenges:

The college must first portray the aviation program as “flying high” since entering the agreement with Royal Karina Air Service via local and state media outlets.

Also, while the aviation program at MCCC is affordable relative to individual, private instruction, it is still quite costly and only caters to a very niche market of students. However, this type of flight education and training is not available anywhere else in the region and draws students from throughout New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania.

Stakeholders:

- Local (The Times of Trenton, Trentonian, U.S. 1, NJ 101.5) and state (Star-Ledger/NJ.com, Asbury Park Press, The Press of Atlantic City, Courier-Post, News 12 NJ) media outlets
- Prospective students
- Program faculty and staff
- Program students and graduates
- Aviation enthusiasts
- Royal Karina Air Service
- Aviation business partners (area airports, airlines, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, etc.)
- General public

Strategic Objectives:

- Promote the stability of the program by pitching a story of how a program’s long-term prospects have turned around in the year since entering the agreement with Royal Karina Air Service at Trenton-Mercer Airport.
- Create a new identity for the aviation program through new program-specific branding that is inclusive of all the aviation department’s programs while still connecting with the college as a whole.
- Establish a presence on social media outlets, such as Twitter (@MercerAviation), Facebook, YouTube, Google+, etc.
 - Promote program news and events, establish connections with aviation enthusiast groups
 - Post videos of competitions and “day in the life” videos of instructors, students and alumni
- Although it seems to be currently parked by someone, investigate purchasing the domain name merceraviation.com and having it redirect to the program’s section of the MCCC web site.
- Redesign the program’s web site and literature to be in line with the new branding. Incorporate a program-specific blog featuring posts written by faculty/staff, students, graduates and guest experts from the industry.

- Build public awareness of the aviation program through both on- and off-campus events:
 - Open houses on the West Windsor campus and, if possible, at Trenton-Mercer Airport in conjunction with RKAS (at least two per calendar year).
 - Present industry guest speakers on campus with meet-and-greets/networking events to follow.
 - Make staff and instructors available to media as faculty experts.
 - Explore having a presence at regional air shows, such as an exhibition booth.
 - Seek inexpensive advertising opportunities, such as local cable TV spots and on-screen placements at movie theaters during the summer.

- Engage aviation-related businesses in the region to become partners or strengthen previously arranged connections with the MCCC aviation program:
 - Establish sponsored scholarships and internships at airlines, area airports and companies like Boeing and Lockheed Martin.
 - Provide networking opportunities for the program's students and alumni.
 - Explore the possibility of hosting an annual, regional aviation industry conference and expo at The Conference Center at Mercer.

- Position MCCC as a leader in aviation education and training.

Key Messages:

- The Mercer County Community College aviation program has a long, storied history of success and is unique to the region
- The program's long-term viability has been secured through a partnership with Royal Karina Air Service.
- The integration of the MCCC Aviation Flight Technology program with Royal Karina Air Service has been seamless with Mercer faculty and staff still handling student training and instruction.
- The program provides affordable aviation education and training to a niche market of students from throughout New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania that cannot be found anywhere else in the region.
- Aviation degrees are in high demand. According to the June 24, 2011, issue of Aviation Week, Boeing predicts a need for 1.1 million air and ground crew by 2030—including 460,000 pilots and 650,000 technicians.
- In terms of annual recruitment, this represents training 22,000 new pilots and 22,500 new technicians each year.
- To best serve its students wishing to continue their education at a four-year college, the aviation program has transfer agreements in place with seven schools in various

states, including two in Florida and another in Denver, Colo.

- Mercer County Community College is a regional leader in aviation education and training and looking to expand its horizons.

Tactics:

- Pitches to local and state media about the stability of the aviation program
- Updated graphic identity and rebranding of the aviation program
- Revamped web site with interactive features and integrated faculty/staff/student/alumni blog
- Social media outlets - Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, etc.
- Letters and outreach to prospective students, alumni, aviation-enthusiast clubs, regional businesses in and affiliated with the aviation industry
- Press releases, as necessary
- Open houses (West Windsor and Trenton-Mercer Airport)
- Air show presence
- High school college night representation
- Speaking engagements/networking events
- Cost-effective ads placed on cable TV and in movie theaters

Materials:

Internal

- Q&A - mostly dealing with Royal Karina Air Service partnership
- Talking points (for individual audiences as needed)
- Marketing and graphic identity plan
- Web site and social media plan
- Open house plan
- Off-campus events plan
- Business development/partnership plan

External

- Letters and outreach to prospective students, alumni, aviation-enthusiast clubs, regional businesses in and affiliated with the aviation industry
- Press releases
- Revised program fact sheets
- Web site/blog content
- Social media activity
- Open house exhibits
- Open house follow-up letters to attendees

Schedule of public relations activities (estimated):

Audience	Vehicle	Message	Timing	Responsibility
Media	Story pitch	Promote stability of aviation program one year after partnership with RKAS	Day 1-5	TBD
Prospective students and alumni.	Letter	Provide detailed background information on the aviation program, notify them of upcoming campaign to increase awareness and build on the strength of the program. Ask for input and assistance in spreading the word.	Day 5-10	TBD
Aviation-enthusiast clubs and regional businesses in and affiliated with the aviation industry	Letter	Provide detailed background information on the aviation program and invite them to find out more about the program.	Day 5-10	TBD
MCCC Marketing & Communications Aviation Dept.	New logos and branding	Discuss development of new graphic identity/branding for the aviation program	Day 5-30	TBD
MCCC Marketing & Communications, Aviation Dept., Web staff; general public	Web site/blog	Develop plan for updated web site content/features; concepts for initial blog articles by faculty/staff/students/alumni	Day 5-30	TBD
MCCC Marketing & Communications Aviation Dept.; general public	Social networks (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, etc.)	Establish accounts, begin posting program-related news/events and interact with interested parties and aviation groups	Day 15-30	TBD
MCCC Marketing & Communications, Aviation Dept., general public	On-campus/off-campus event plans	Plan/schedule for open houses at West Windsor campus and at airport; coordinate possible off-campus events like air shows, college nights, community events, etc.	Day 30-40	TBD
MCCC Marketing & Communications, Aviation Dept.,	Letters	Draft and prepare letters to send to all open house attendees, booth visitors at	Day 40-50	TBD

event attendees		on- and off-campus events		
MCCC Marketing & Communications, Aviation Dept., general public	Local cable TV, movie theaters	Plan for cost-effective advertising; design and place ads, when needed	Day 40-55	TBD
MCCC Marketing & Communications, Aviation Dept., business partners	Business development/partnership plan	Draft and produce plan to develop partnerships with aviation-related companies in the region; establish sponsored scholarships and internships; provide networking opportunities and other avenues for growth.	Day 50-60	TBD
All audiences	Miscellaneous	Additional outreach and correspondence, as needed	Ongoing	TBD