

Project Description

The Air Force Medical Readiness Agency (AFMRA) in partnership with Pima Community College located in Tucson, Arizona offers a dynamic and innovative approach to the delivery of Paramedic instruction to meet the needs of our United States Air Force (USAF) on a global scale. Based on a tremendous shortage of Paramedics, the USAF contracted with PCC in 2014, seeking to upskill approximately 700 Emergency Medical Technicians over the next five years. Based on a competitive process and superior outcomes and performance, Pima was awarded a second contract in 2019 supporting airmen in the attainment of nationally recognized civilian paramedic credentials.

Pima developed an accelerated Paramedic instructional model based on best practices to meet the identified needs of the USAF. The project provides an academically rigorous and challenging curriculum that requires participants to incorporate 560 classroom hours of instruction with a minimum of 500 clinical and field hours working in local hospitals and ambulances. The airmen complete the program in only 4 ½ months, cutting the typical completion time nearly in half. The high quality, accelerated program meets National Emergency Medical Education Standards and prepares students for their National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) credentialing exams. By accelerating the program, the Air Force is able to upskill large numbers of airmen and quickly return them to their home base or new assignment where their life saving skills are most needed.

Partnerships and Collaborations

The Pima Paramedic Program has enjoyed a long-standing and successful partnership with the local USAF at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. Building on that relationship, PCC successfully responded to a Request for Proposal (RFP) through the Air Force Medical Operations Agency (AFMOA), now named AFMRA to develop the program. AFMRA has oversight of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) programs in the USAF to meet the dire need for qualified Paramedics on a global scale.

Pima has strong partnerships to support the design and delivery of quality, tailored Paramedic instruction. These partners include: 12 fire departments/districts, 6 hospitals, including a Level 1 and Level 2 Trauma Center, as well as 1 ambulance company. These strategic partnerships expanded their support to accommodate the airmen's accelerated program and they provide academically relevant and rigorous "hands-on" training under the mentorship and guidance of seasoned and experienced clinical preceptors. AFMRA students, who came from all over the globe, receive relevant, real world training both in Pima County hospitals and by riding on ambulances side-by-side with local EMS professionals.

The PCC Paramedic Program has been able to successfully expand to accommodate the accelerated AFMRA contract through their unique staffing model and approach. The Program Manager oversees the contract and maintains close communication with AFMRA. A full-time Course Lead/Manager provides direct oversight of the Air Force program and supervises a cadre of highly qualified part-time instructors (i.e. Paramedics, Doctors, and Nurses working in the community). These part-time instructors are the "skills-matter experts" delivering the curriculum (for example, one instructor is the expert on anatomy and physiology, one instructor strong in chemistry, drug therapy, etc.). This unique staffing model ensures that students are instructed by those community providers that are most current in their profession, allowing students to receive didactic and clinical knowledge from instructors that share their real-world experience that creates diversity in their education.

Economic Impact

The preparedness and training of America's military is paramount to our safety and economic well-being. Tucson, like many cities fortunate to have a military base in our community, receives tremendous economic benefit from the base. The airmen enrolled in this program come from USAF military bases across the United States or overseas. Due to the training and certifications they receive, many graduates will be reassigned to another base where their advanced skills are most needed. Many have deployed supporting personnel fighting the war on terrorism and are saving lives.

As our service men and women leave the military and begin their careers in the civilian sector, the transition is often difficult and rarely seamless. Because these airmen have earned a national credential recognized by the civilian EMS community, they are able to transition quickly and easily into employment upon separating from the military. Having trained side-by-side with civilian EMS workers, these Veterans bring not only the credentials and military experience, but also experience and knowledge of non-military emergency services.

Program Results

The initial contract from October of 2014 through September of 2019, required two instructional Paramedic cohorts each year, maintaining a 90% first-time pass rate 90% of the time. The initial project enrolled 221 participants, with 216 of the 221 (97.7%) completing the program, and 212 of 216 (98.1%) participants passing their NREMT credentialing exam. The first-time pass rate attempt for the project was 96%, exceeding both the contract benchmark and the national average. The 2019 national average first-time attempt pass rate was 73%.

The second contract from December of 2019 through September of 2024, requires two instructional Paramedic cohorts each year, as well as 10, two-week Paramedic Refresher courses annually, while maintaining the 90% first-time pass rate 90% of the time. To date, 48 participants have been enrolled with 47 (97.9%) completing the program, and 45 of 47 (95.7%) participants passing their NREMT credentialing exam. The first time pass rate for this cohort is 91.5%.

The program had 20 participants start in January of 2020, and although delayed due to COVID-19, we anticipate another 20 participants projected to start in August of 2020. Additionally, we had 104 participants complete the Paramedic refresher training in 2019 and to date in 2020, 43 participants completed the training.

The outcomes and performance of program participants has been exemplary and is a result of significant time, effort, and challenging, but rewarding work building partnerships, sharing resources, and making programmatic improvements to support the needs of our USAF. Ultimately, the program provides participants with Nationally-recognized certifications, such as the American Heart Association (AHA) – Basic Life Support for Healthcare Providers (BLS CPR), Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), Pediatric Education for Prehospital Professionals (PEPP), and National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians – Prehospital Trauma Life Support (PHTLS) and Advanced Medical Life Support (AMLS), while saving lives.

Replication

The AFMRA Project serves as a model for how Community Colleges can partner with the military to upskill current service men and women with civilian credentials. Paramedics is only one example of many training needs within our Armed Services.

The replication process requires “thinking outside the box” and being creative and taking a non-traditional approach to design and delivery of instruction to meet the identified need of the military. This includes developing strong partnerships with community partners and identifying resources, both internal and external, to ensure graduates have industry recognized credentials and hands-on experience.