



**CERTIFIED
ASSOCIATE**

VALLEY REGIONAL OCCUPATIONAL PROGRAM SUCCESS STORY



- Valley Regional Occupational Program (Valley ROP) is a joint power agreement ROP with seven school districts in the Central Valley, California.
- Valley ROP provides high-quality career and technical education programs to over 6400 students at 12 high schools and middle schools.
- Over the past several years they have developed a successful Adobe Certified Associate certification program and they are partnering with Fresno City College to help their students earn dual enrollment credit on a path to a career in digital design.

Valley ROP Program and Fresno City College Work Together to Prepare Students for Digital Design Careers with Adobe Certified Associate Certification

"Our schools are all 90 to 100 percent free and reduced lunch, meaning a high percentage of our student population is classified as socio-economically disadvantaged," said Fabrizio Lofaro, Valley ROP Superintendent. "Not to mention we are in the Central Valley. Since we aren't in a big city with industry and resources like Los Angeles or San Diego, we work very hard to make sure our students are successful."



When Lofaro became the Director of Instructional Services at Valley ROP, he had a background teaching broadcasting and photography. He was also familiar with industry-recognized certification and had worked with Certiport on administering certifications several years prior.

"I was always familiar with certification through Certiport and also Adobe products, and I wanted to develop a large multimedia program at Valley ROP," said Lofaro. "I knew I wanted to integrate Adobe Certified Associate certification and started to get my teachers on board right away."

Introducing Adobe Certified Associate to Valley ROP

Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) certification is an industry-recognized credential offered by Certiport that validates skills in Adobe's Creative Cloud software including Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere Pro, Animate and others. After Lofaro came on board, Valley ROP started offering ACA certification to students in their Photography, Graphic Design, Animation, Video Production, and Web Design classes.

"What we found when we first implemented ACA was that the teachers were already doing this – there was no additional work and they could just add the certification into their courses," said Lofaro. "We found funding so the certification would be affordable for students and we hit the ground running."

 **Fresno City College**

**Valley
ROP**
Education that builds careers!



Teachers rallied behind the project and now Valley ROP has certified over 750 students in the past three years.

"We encourage the students by putting their names on the wall when they pass the certifications – it's small but everyone wants their name on the wall," said Lofaro. "The best part is once these students graduate they take the certification with them. We work with industry partners and they have told us ACA certification is important for students to show they are proficient in the Adobe Creative Suite."

Partnership with Fresno City College

Valley ROP has collaborated with multiple departments at Fresno City College for college articulation classes for the past 20 years. More recently they have collaborated on a number of dual enrollment courses. After Valley ROP offered ACA for a few years, Fresno City College began to offer it to their students as well.



Some of the dual enrollment courses include Beginning Photoshop, Video Production, Graphic Design, and Animation. Valley

ROP students are able to dual enroll in the course at Valley ROP and also receive college credit at Fresno City College.

"The collaboration with the Photography program at Valley ROP and Fresno City College has been strengthened in the past five years with dual enrollment and the ACA exams," said Lofaro. "Our instructors meet with those at Fresno City College to discuss curriculum, projects, and pathways. We even share instructors that teach part-time at the college and part-time for Valley ROP."

Valley ROP schools graduate approximately 1400 students each year and approximately 25 percent of them transfer to Fresno City College, so the relationship is important for the success of the ACA program at both schools. Every Spring, Fresno City College holds a "Skills Challenge" to welcome Valley ROP and all high school students in the county to come and compete in Photography and Graphics.

"The Skills Challenge is a great way for students to show off their technology skills and see what additional classes they can take on our campus to continue the Media Arts pathway they started at Valley ROP," said Carolyn De Anda, Department Chair of Visual Media Technology at Fresno City College.

Fresno City College Finds ACA Success

De Anda worked for about five years getting the ACA program up and running at Fresno City College. She came from the freelance world

as a photographer and designer, and knows the value of Adobe certification.

"In my freelance career I had earned Adobe Expert level certification and also became an expert instructor," said De Anda. "I saw the value of showing potential clients that Adobe recognized my skillset and it separated me from everyone else in the freelance community. I knew earning ACA certification would help my students validate their skills and separate themselves from anyone else who claims to know Photoshop but can't prove it with certification."

De Anda was determined to bring ACA to Fresno City College but the challenge was finding funding. The school had various Deans and as soon as De Anda was able to convince one that adding ACA certification was an important step into industry the course work was written.

"The majority of our students go into freelance," said De Anda. "On their resume they show their certifications which is a huge enhancement, I've seen it help them leap into industry."

When Dr. Becky Barabe took over as the Dean of Instruction and felt very strongly that if ACA was the industry standard then they should be offering it at Fresno City College. She had extensive grant writing experience and worked with De Anda to finally obtain funding from California's Strong Workforce Program.

De Anda made ACA certification optional for students and it has crossed into the Photography program and the Graphic Arts program. It is a non-credit class, so there is no cost to the student to register for the class and they typically learn the skills necessary to take the certification exams in their classes and then come to take the certification exam when they are ready.

There is a lot of peer pressure for students to get certified and everyone who has done that is on the wall in the Graphics department.

"We have students of all ages certifying because of the recognized value of certifying with Adobe," said De Anda. "My first semester offering ACA certification with Certiport, I had a student go to Los Angeles because her sister worked there in web design and told her the certifications would get her a guaranteed job. The results are amazing."

In just two years Fresno City College students have earned more than 100 ACA certifications. They have a wide range of paths, from workforce to a college degree program.

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