

Maximizing Training Dollars

Capella University Helps Farmers Insurance Employees Receive College Credit for Professional Designation.

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A GOAL for the human capital group at Farmers Insurance Group is to help more employees earn a college degree. Capella University, an online accredited university, is helping Farmers achieve that goal.

“No one wakes up one morning and says ‘I want to work in insurance,’” said Alysia Vanitzian, assistant vice president of human capital for Farmers Insurance Group. “Many people wander into the insurance business and stay. To advance their careers, they spend hours studying and testing for a CPCU, the insurance industry’s gold standard designation.”

Farmers Insurance Group, headquartered in Los Angeles and doing business in 41 states, has 19,000 employees. Vanitzian estimates that 400 of them have the CPCU designation and 300 are actively pursuing it.

The CPCU is the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter professional designation, offered by the American Institute of CPCU (AICPCU) and the Insurance Institute of America (IIA), for professionals in the property and liability insurance business. The CPCU program consists of eight courses. Participants must pass all of those courses to earn the designation.

“A lot of our employees will get the CPCU professional designation in lieu of going to college,” continued Vanitzian. “Earning a CPCU is almost equivalent to earning a master’s degree.”

A primary focus of Vanitzian’s department is succession planning and executive development for the company’s top positions. She also manages its high-potential pool, known as Emerging Leaders.

“Four of our Emerging Leaders don’t have college degrees. I wanted to encourage those individuals and send a message to our employee base that getting a degree is very important to us. Because the CPCU is seen as an acceleration tool for career advancement within the insurance industry, I wanted to find a way to leverage the CPCU with a college degree.”

Vanitzian sought help from Capella University. Capella offers graduate degree programs in business, information tech-

nology, education, human services, and psychology, plus a bachelor’s degree with 10 specializations in business and information technology. An array of online services minimizes time spent on the daily details associated with higher education. Students have convenient online access to registration, financial aid, and support from academic advisors. More than 85 corporations nationwide recommend Capella University to their employees through a formal education alliance.

“Capella is one of our strategic business partners,” Vanitzian explained. “I told them my woes and they said, ‘We’ll take it on.’”

Bill Young, director of business alliances for Capella University, said, “One of our main efforts is to ensure employee learning at Capella matches the employers’ business challenges. Alysia told us they wanted more employees to have college degrees, and they’re spending a lot of their training dollars on CPCUs and other courses offered by the AICPCU/IIA. We knew that if we could wrap college credits around CPCUs, we could put them closer to meeting that goal and help Farmers save money on tuition reimbursement.”

Because Capella is an online academic institution, it could help all Farmers employees, regardless of their locations, gain equivalency credit. Some traditional universities have credit equivalencies in place for industry designations, but those programs are confined to specific locations.

Capella University worked with AICPCU and IIA to map the CPCU curriculum to equivalent Capella courses, and to identify the appropriate number of college-level credits that were applicable to a Capella bachelor’s or master’s degree, as recommended by the American Council on Education. As a result, Capella accepts credits earned through CPCU courses for the following degrees:

- master of business administration with a specialization in finance
- master of science in organization and management

Have a success story and want to tell us about it? Contact Eric Brandt at 703.683.8175; ebrandt@astd.org

- bachelor of science with a specialization in business administration
- bachelor of science in business with a specialization in finance.

A small team consisting of faculty and staff reviewed each of the AICPCU/IIA course descriptions, syllabi, objectives, and other course components to assess the similarity between the CPCU course learning outcomes and Capella's course competencies. "We were delighted that several of the CPCU courses matched courses in our undergraduate and master's programs' curriculums," said Barbara Butts Williams, faculty director for Capella's School of Business and Technology.

"The minute we announced to employees that they could earn college credit for AICPCU/IIA courses through a dashboard and employee brochure, we immediately had a couple dozen employees look into it," said Vanitzian.

Farmers and Capella formed an educational alliance that entitles all Farmers employees, immediate family members, and retirees to a 5 percent discount on all Capella courses. In addition, Farmers offers its employees tuition reimbursement for Capella courses.

Farmers manager Jim Harmon likes the flexibility of an online university. "Today's busy lifestyle demands a flexible, accessible outlet for professional development, and I have found that online learning addresses this issue," said Harmon, who is working on a bachelor's degree in business administration. "Capella is similar to the traditional brick-and-mortar institutions in that you have access to lecture content, faculty feedback, educational resources, and administrative services. However, it provides me with a crucial factor not found in traditional organizations—convenience! I can achieve personal growth while minimizing the effect on career or family."

"Capella's willingness to work with us is a wonderful example of a business partner stepping forward and filling a business need," said Vanitzian.

Capella University has since worked with the AICPCU/IIA to announce to insurance professionals the possibility of earning college credit for CPCU courses. The response has been extremely positive.