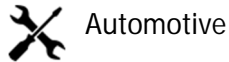


Ventura College and Ventura Toyota in the Toyota T-TEN Program

Ventura, CA



Background

Overview

Toyota's Technician & Education Network (T-TEN) program, a partnership between Toyota dealers and their local community colleges, provides a fast-track, two-year program to become a certified automotive technician that combines classroom hours, job shadowing, and internships at Toyota dealers. There are currently 36 T-TEN partnerships throughout the country anchored in part by Toyota Corporate's sponsorship of the program through monetary and in-kind donations. Ventura College hosted one of the earliest T-TEN programs beginning in 1986 when it partnered with Ventura Toyota. Since its inception, Toyota T-TEN has been the preferred route to becoming a certified technician for Toyota and its sister dealerships. In Ventura, the demand for skilled T-TEN graduates far exceeds the college's capacity to train and graduate students. As a result, the college is looking at ways to expand and improve the quality of the program going forward.

Ventura College serves more than 13,000 students just outside of Los Angeles. The Toyota T-TEN program falls under a broader umbrella of automotive programs in the Workforce and Economic Development department of the college. This department houses over 20 different programs that lead to associate's degrees and certifications in various technical industries. The Automotive program at Ventura College has been evaluated by the National Automotive Technical Education Foundation (NATEF) and had been certified in all eight Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) automotive repair categories. The college is also certified by the California Bureau of Automotive Repair (BAR) to teach all BAR related courses.

Graduates of the T-TEN program earn Toyota-certified technician credentials in addition to the ASE certifications. Students also have the option to earn an Associate of Science (A.S.) degree. All graduates of the program have completed at least 640 hours of on-the-job applied training at a Toyota dealership. T-TEN colleges adhere to strict and high-quality curriculum standards guided by Toyota and students work hands-on in the classroom on modern Toyota cars and engines. Nearly all graduates are placed at

Toyota or one of its sister dealerships. Ventura Toyota is currently operating at its maximum capacity of 50 students in the program.

"Toyota basically found out it was better to go through a schooling process, intern at the job, then start [working] full time" Program Coordinator, Ventura College

Getting Started

The partnership between Ventura College and Ventura Toyota began in 1985, one year before the official launch of the T-TEN program. Drawing on the experiences of leaders who were accustomed to the European apprenticeship models, Ventura

Toyota reached out to Ventura College to create a similar apprenticeship program in order to build a pipeline of automotive technician candidates. The manager at Ventura Toyota, one instructor at Ventura College, and the Dean of Education at Ventura College sat down and developed one of the earliest iterations of the T-TEN program. Toyota was interested in combining classroom instruction with hands-on training to develop the most successful technicians. It was the Dean of Education's passion for apprenticeships and connecting with industry at the time that drew Toyota to Ventura College, so strong leadership buy-in at the college played a major factor in forming the partnership.

Toyota secured corporate buy-in and they formalized the T-TEN program shortly thereafter. Securing corporate support ensured that Toyota provided the colleges the necessary resources needed for the program, such as a high-quality curriculum and Toyota equipment to train students. The colleges secured program support staff and instructors that were certified to teach automotive courses and prepared to co-develop curriculum with Toyota. As a result, most T-TEN instructors and program staff have worked in the automotive industry as technicians. The T-TEN program exploded over the next several years, growing to over 80 T-TEN sites at one point.

T-TEN's program design has evolved over the years. Ventura Toyota was interested in students attending courses and working at dealership sites simultaneously so they could directly apply what they learned in the classroom. Due to constraints at the college and scheduling conflicts, the program compromised with job shadowing opportunities during the school year and full internships over the summer. In the early years of the program, Toyota's high standards for curriculum design were not strictly enforced, which led to the proliferation of T-TEN sites with relatively lax oversight.

The early Ventura T-TEN program was built on the dedication of a handful of individuals involved in the program's inception. It is important to designate clear roles and responsibilities for each partner to ensure sustainability and institutionalization; as key players in the Toyota T-TEN partnership between Ventura College and Ventura Toyota left their respective organizations, the program underwent ebbs and flows in its quality until the right mix of individuals were hired to run the program at the college. Toyota has remained committed to funding the necessary resources to ensure a successful program, but the day-to-day management of the program falls primarily on the college. At Ventura College, the current program coordinator is a graduate of the T-TEN program himself and returned to run the program after working for Toyota dealerships and Toyota Corporate.

Implementation of the Partnership

"I've never seen this level of support from any manufacturer at all, and I've never seen this level of success from any program as well, as far as how to engage employers." Instructor, Ventura College

Toyota T-TEN retains support from Toyota Corporate to this day. Recently, however, Toyota audited its program and found that the quality of individual T-TEN sites varied greatly and many sites were not meeting the standards required of the T-TEN program. Since then, Toyota has scaled back the number of T-TEN sites, but has focused on quality through its strict curriculum review process. In fact, college faculty and Toyota staff reported that the strongest aspect of the program currently is the high-quality curriculum that colleges must develop to meet Toyota's standards. Ventura College is currently undergoing Toyota's extensive curriculum review process and expects to renew its certification as a T-TEN site in 2017.

There is currently no official advisory board for the program at the local or national level. Although, with a smaller number of T-TEN sites (36), the program is able to support regular communication between the T-TEN sites regionally and nationally. Regional T-TEN sites meet yearly and many attend an annual T-TEN conference. Presentations and workshops in these conferences are led by T-TEN program administrators at various colleges and by Toyota staff members. Sites share ideas and curriculum materials while working together to help streamline the operation of the program.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- ✓ CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
- ✓ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COLLEGE FACULTY AND STAFF
- ✓ MONETARY AND IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS
- ✓ DIRECT HIRING OF PROGRAM GRADUATES
- ✓ WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

Toyota’s current strategy for selecting T-TEN sites involves using customer service and satisfaction data to identify local dealership areas that may benefit from having a T-TEN program. Areas with lower customer satisfaction are targeted for T-TEN to ensure there are highly-qualified technicians in local dealerships. Toyota regards the T-TEN program as the best training program for its technicians.

Curriculum Development

Toyota remains heavily involved in shaping the curriculum at individual T-TEN sites. Existing T-TEN colleges must obtain a periodic recertification of the program in order to obtain monetary and in-kind support from Toyota. This rigorous process can take several years, with many layers of reviews and resubmissions of the curriculum and course materials associated with T-TEN courses. While colleges have some autonomy to tweak the curriculum to local needs, most of the standards are set by Toyota Corporate. This is the primary method that Toyota uses to ensure high quality and consistency across its T-TEN sites.

Monetary and In-Kind Donations

One of the greatest benefits of the T-TEN program is the amount of equipment and monetary resources Toyota provides to the college for the program. Ventura College makes a “wish list” of items they would like purchased for the program and Toyota Corporate will try and procure the items. Local Toyota dealers commit resources as well. Ventura Toyota has donated tools and faulty parts needed to simulate real-world challenges for students. Ventura College faculty estimated that Toyota donates roughly \$300,000 a year in equipment to Ventura College, which they saw as Toyota’s most important contribution to the partnership.

Work-Based Learning Opportunities and Direct Hiring of Program Graduates

Ventura’s T-TEN program offers job shadowing opportunities for its students during the school year and paid summer internships at local Toyota dealerships. Students work in the service department, gaining hands-on knowledge and skills under the tutelage of seasoned technicians. Students are required to have a minimum of 640 hours of on-the-job experience to graduate from the program. The originators of the program hoped for better integration of classroom instruction and hands-on experience, similar to a true apprenticeship model. There were some logistical

“The partnership’s about creating careers.” Shop Manager, Ventura Toyota

and cost-related issues that prevented this from happening, but the quality of the candidates that graduate from the program is still very high according to local employers.

Most students are hired by Toyota after completion of the program. Turnover at Toyota dealerships, however, is common among T-TEN graduates, largely because of their highly coveted skills. There is currently a dearth of qualified technicians across almost all the major car companies in the Ventura area. T-TEN graduates have a reputation as highly-qualified and well-trained technicians. There is no requirement that students must work for Toyota for any length of time after they graduate, T-TEN graduates are often hired away. Low starting salaries from Toyota for T-TEN graduates seem to be exacerbating the issue, so Toyota is currently exploring options to provide better starting salaries for their technicians in order to reduce turnover.

Professional Development for Faculty

Since T-TEN's inception, Toyota has introduced a requirement that all T-Ten instructors become fully Toyota-certified themselves. In order to accomplish this goal, T-TEN instructors may attend training at the nearest Toyota School at no cost; these courses are normally thousands of dollars. These instructors are able to become Toyota-certified in the subjects they teach and keep their skills up-to-date with the latest advances in the automotive industry.

Program Staffing

The number of staff at Ventura College who support T-TEN has remained relatively small for the program's size and complexity. It is currently being managed by three faculty members who also serve as instructors, curriculum developers, and liaisons with the local dealerships. These college employees are wearing multiple hats and stretched thin. T-TEN's strict curriculum requirements are also adding an additional burden as Ventura College works to get recertified as a T-TEN site. There is some planning at the college to hire an additional staff member to lessen the load.

Because staff are overextended, programmatic activities such as developing a student recruitment plan have been overlooked. The program relies primarily on word-of-mouth from its current students and alumni to recruit new students to the program. Despite little to no official recruitment outreach, the program continues to fill beyond capacity every year.

"The people in the dealers that are hiring our students, they don't want to talk to someone that doesn't know anything about the industry." Instructor, Ventura College

Demand from students and from Toyota, which faces a skilled technician shortage, has pushed for growth in the program. Commitment from the college is key to maintaining and growing the program further, but as budget constraints and other priorities have taken precedence, the T-TEN program is currently unable to meet the demand for the number of technician positions open in the local area. The college enrolls about 50 students in the T-TEN program in the 2016-17 academic year, which is the maximum that they can support with their current levels of staffing, space, and equipment.

Program Funding

The majority of funding for the program comes from Toyota's sponsorship. While Ventura College used to provide some funding for the operations of the program in its earliest years, they have since scaled back their support. The college, however, pays for the salaries of instructors and program staff and

allocates an operating budget of \$4,500 per year. The automotive program at Ventura College faces competition for resources from other career and technical fields in the Workforce and Economic Development department that have a greater number of students and more recognition in the community (such as nursing), and therefore does not receive a level of support that would ensure T-TEN's growth in the college.

Toyota funds operations of the program, from the donation of tools and equipment to paying for students industry certifications. Ventura College faculty estimated that Toyota donates roughly \$300,000 a year in equipment and other resources. The majority of this donation comes in the form of newer-model used cars for the students to practice on. Toyota also donates faulty engines, which are ideal learning tools for students. Toyota also waives fees for T-TEN instructors to get certified at their local Toyota School. Toyota remains committed to the partnership and appears satisfied with the level of support they are giving to the T-TEN sites.

Benefits of the Partnership

The primary benefit of the T-TEN partnership to the college is being able to place students in jobs. College leaders have expressed their commitment to making sure students are finishing their technical programs with the ability to get hired. The T-TEN program provides a natural pipeline to employment at Toyota for their students. They have also been very pleased with the equipment and resources Toyota has provided for the program. While many automotive programs have students working on cars that may be 10 to 20 years old, Toyota ensures that the program is equipped with models that are no more than four years old. Thus, students are learning with models that they would see on the job. Procuring newer-model cars is very costly and the college would not be able to support it without Toyota's donations.

As for the benefit to Toyota, they secure a pipeline of highly-skilled, well-trained candidates to fill their technician positions. There is currently a shortage of qualified technicians to meet growing demand in the area, which has been one of Toyota's major motivations in starting and maintaining the program. The quality of technicians that graduate from the T-TEN program also benefits Toyota and the cost to train them was not absorbed by Toyota directly. Attending Toyota Schools is the only other route to Toyota-certification, which costs local dealerships approximately \$21,000 per technician and can take several years. T-TEN is able to get candidates Toyota-certified in two years and at a fraction of the cost to Toyota. While Toyota provides internships and job shadowing, they currently do not pay T-TEN students' tuition.

Challenges

"It's more about the level of quality program that we want. If we want the highest quality program, we need more personnel." Program Coordinator, Ventura College

As Ventura College and Ventura Toyota have faced a number of challenges in T-TEN implementation. The biggest challenge has been the shortage of staff to manage and teach in the program. Ventura College's three program staff members currently serve multiple roles in the program; it is unclear how sustainable that model will be in the long run.

As with many other employer engagement programs, differences between the cultures of industry and education have been a challenge in Ventura. Rules and regulations of the community

college system have prevented Ventura College from implementing some program features requested by Toyota. For example, Toyota would like the T-TEN cohort to be a separate cohort from the other automotive students, but Ventura College is required by California law to open the T-TEN classes to all students and cannot limit who can and cannot enroll. In addition, changes in industry occur much faster than at the community colleges, so Toyota's requests for changes may take a year or more to implement. The program coordinator at Ventura College works diligently to try and find a middle ground in any request for changes. His industry background helps him understand both sides of the partnership.

Finally, the stigma around community college technical programs has also challenged Ventura's T-TEN partnership because of a disconnect between local high schools and the community college. Counselors at the local high schools send students who are not prepared for college work because they do not understand how advanced and sophisticated automotive technology has become. As a result, students entering the T-TEN program often do not have the foundational math and reading skills to be successful as technicians. Better communication between the high schools and community colleges, coupled with robust recruitment efforts by the college and industry, might help mitigate the stigma of technical programs and attract high-caliber students. Another barrier to recruitment is the low starting pay for technicians. Toyota may update its salary structure, but low starting salaries are not helping to recruit the best students into the profession.

Sustainability

Toyota remains committed to the program and is satisfied with the amount of funding it currently contributes to Ventura College. Ventura College is currently not training enough students to meet the demand for technicians in the local economy, so there is some discussion around expanding the program to accommodate more students. Ventura College's T-TEN staff hope the college will be able to contribute extra funds for additional staff members and instructors. Without additional support from the college, Ventura College will be unable to expand and grow the program.

Ventura College is looking to implement some changes within the program. T-TEN staff would prefer that T-TEN students be in a separate cohort from other automotive technology students, an update they are working to implement. Based on feedback the college received from the employers, they also plan on integrating soft skills into their curriculum, including new requirements around wearing uniforms and discussions around appropriate workplace etiquette.

"We need to stick to what [the program] was originally designed to do. If you do that, that wheel will run and run and run." Leadership, Ventura Toyota

There are currently no plans to diversify funding for the program from additional sources. The program is funded primarily by Toyota and Ventura College. There also does not appear to be a marketing strategy in place for the program. Toyota maintains a T-TEN website that highlights the Ventura program along with others across the country. Growth or changes in the overall T-TEN program across sites is likely to come at the behest of Toyota Corporate if at all.

Lessons Learned

Partnership leaders and staff identified several lessons learned to share with other community colleges, including:

- Invest in planning: College faculty recommended devoting time with college administrators, faculty, and employer partners to iron out roles and responsibilities and long-term plans for the program.
- Secure leadership buy-in: The college should be committed to the program just as much as the employer is. Employers appreciate college leadership that believes and invests in industry engagement.
- Secure institutional support for the program: The college should be committed to growing the program when appropriate. In addition to committing staff members, technical programs need space, equipment, and other resources to run successfully.
- Reach out to other colleges who have implemented similar programs well: There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Colleges implementing similar programs can share potential challenges that may arise so colleges can plan for them accordingly.