Travis Anderson
GE – Excelsior College Program

PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT GENERAL ELECTRIC'S PARTNERSHIP WITH EXCELSIOR COLLEGE'S RENEWABLE ENERGY TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM.

GE has partnered with Excelsior College, a leading nonprofit, regionally accredited distance education institution, to enable GE wind technicians to earn up to 49 college credits — or 40 percent of the minimum credits to earn a college degree — for completing the training and work experience received by GE wind technicians. These college credits can be applied toward a Bachelor of Professional Studies in Technology Management degree from Excelsior College in its newly launched focus on Renewable Energy Technology.

AS SITE LEAD FOR GE'S BLUE CANYON WIND FARM, HOW WERE YOU INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THIS PROGRAM?

Initially, as this program was being developed, the Energy Learning Center asked for volunteers from across the GE sites to participate in the pilot program. I jumped at the opportunity to further my education and participate in the program. I went through the same steps that any technician out in the field would go through to participate in the program. However, I was the first to do this program while actually working as a site lead and performing daily technician duties as well.

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?

I have an associate's degree and had been working as an electrician in Texas for four years when I joined GE in 2007. At that time, the wind industry was booming. I saw it as an opportunity for myself to develop a specialized skill set — and work on one of the neatest technologies around. I sought out jobs with GE in the wind industry and have been with the company since my first role as a wind technician in Oklahoma. It was an exciting opportunity for me, as I could have continued on my path working as an electrician if I wanted, but working on wind turbines is something that not everybody gets to do. I learn something new every day.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO ENROLL IN THE CREDITS-FOR-WORK PROGRAM?

Choosing to enroll in the credits-for-work program was an easy decision for me. I saw it as an opportunity to continue to grow myself and my future career opportunities. I felt that earning my degree would enhance my opportunity for career growth within GE.

HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM BENEFIT GE AND TECHNICIANS?

The program benefits technicians because it is an incredible jump start to earning a bachelor's degree in a flexible way. It also shows the technicians that the business is taking care of them and helping them to grow and progress. This leads to not only a more trained and skilled workforce, but hopefully employees that will remain to have long careers within the company.

As a wind technician at GE, individuals learn the ins and outs of the machines by working on them every day. With the addition of a four-year degree, new career opportunities are available to you that may not have been before. For GE, it is a benefit to have those with experience working hands on with their equipment then in design engineering, management, finance, or any other specialized role within the organization. It is a highly positive program for both sides.

IS ENROLLMENT OPEN TO OTHERS? WHERE DO THEY GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Enrollment in Excelsior College's Renewable Energy concentration is open to the general public. You can learn more and register at Excelsior's program page, bit.ly/ECrenewable.

TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT HOW THIS WORKS FOR THE STUDENT. DO YOU HAVE COURSE WORK IN ADDITION TO FIELD TRAINING?

To earn this bachelor's degree you need a total of 120 credits and up to 49 of these can be transferred in from GE's renewable energy program. This alone puts someone more than one-third of the way toward the degree. In addition to other requirements, students pursuing this degree from Excelsior also take five 3-credit courses in areas such as Electrical Theory, Electrical Power Distribution, and Applied Instrumentation and Control, all of which are delivered online.

To complete the program as a wind technician is an extremely manageable process. I set aside time each day to participate in the online message boards, write papers, and complete my weekly assignments — which often involve discussing how our course work applies to the real world and your current job.

For the complete Q&A with Travis Anderson, visit windsystemsmag.com.

For more information about the GE/Excelsior College program, visit partnership.excelsior.edu/ge or call 800-896-1627.