

# University of Phoenix celebrates initial graduate in collaboration with IAA on apprenticeship to degree career pathway model for employers



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**By Sharla Hooper**

*Model offering employers a unique talent retention and career enhancement solution with a skills-mapped curriculum to enrolled students sees first graduate completing in eight-month timeframe*

The [University of Phoenix](#) agreement with [Institute for American Apprenticeships](#) (IAA) on an apprenticeship to degree career pathway model celebrated its initial graduate this spring. Developed in close partnership by the University's College of General Studies and [Workforce Solutions](#) team, the program established a new option for employers seeking to increase retention and upskilling opportunities by providing a framework for a clear pathway from registered apprenticeship programs to associate and bachelor's degrees. IAA is a non-profit organization with a mission to educate, train, and employ workers nationwide.

"Our agreement with IAA provides an intentional, inclusive approach to workforce opportunities, retention and the cultivation of talent, and helps working adult learners save time and money to achieve their education goals," states Raghu Krishnaiah, chief operating officer at University of Phoenix. "The model works and is ready to grow."

[According to the U.S. Department of Labor](#), apprenticeships offer a proven track record of retention and lifetime earning advantage with access to hundreds of occupations in high growth as well as emerging industries. This includes an average starting salary of \$80,000 upon completion of an apprenticeship program, and an employment retention of 90% of apprentices after apprenticeship completion. The career pathway of apprenticeship to college credit and degrees [provides a unique solution](#) for companies to attract and retain diverse talent.

"We're happy to offer the University of Phoenix associate degree pathway to our employer partners," said Matthew McKenney, President and Chief Executive Officer of IAA. "For many of the apprentices, they would not otherwise have an opportunity to earn a college degree. This degree validates the apprenticeship learning experience and results in a valuable additional credential."

The agreement between IAA and University of Phoenix to offer the apprenticeship-to-degree pathway was formed as a natural progression of the organizations' shared missions to educate and train working adults of diverse backgrounds in preparation for and achievement of professional goals.

Focused on the working adult learner, the University's [innovative skills-mapped curriculum approach](#) also applies to the apprenticeship-to-associate degree pathway program. The program includes undergraduate courses required in most degree programs, which provide the opportunity to claim digital badges for demonstrated skills. "These courses offer widely relevant skills for students beginning their academic journey, including those in the apprenticeship-to-associate pathway," states Briana Houlihan, MBA, dean, College of General Studies.

The company Hypertherm Associates was the initial adopter of the program. A 100% Associate-owned company developing plasma, waterjet systems, software, motion controls, and consumables, Hypertherm already has a unique history of graduating over 800 apprentices in the past 12 years. "This degreed Apprentice program is a natural and seamless progression to help us fulfill our

mission of developing our Associate Owners to their maximum potential,” said Mariah Whitcomb, Talent Management and Development Team Leader at Hypertherm.

Matthew Dierickx was the first graduate of the program in January 2023, completing his apprenticeship and associate degree after eight months in the program. “The training I received from Hypertherm's Technical Training Institute (HTTI) introduced a lot of advanced learning and concepts that resembled college,” Dierickx shares. “I was elated to earn college credits for that apprenticeship and use the online courses that University of Phoenix offers to obtain my associate degree. I hope more opportunities like this will be made available and that more companies discover the value in providing their employees with a postsecondary education. This apprenticeship to degree program was the opportunity I needed to further my goals and open the possibility for a bachelor's degree.”

The apprenticeship to associate degree model has a new cohort of Hypertherm employees currently enrolled.

More employers are anticipated to adopt the program this fall.

The University of Phoenix [Workforce Solutions](#) team offers companies across diverse industries as well as community colleges tailored learning and career pathways to recruit, upskill, reskill, and retain their workforce in an affordable and timely manner. Their flexible solutions are aligned to workplace needs and feature live support, career guidance and support tools, education programs, learning pathways, and credit options, including certificates, workshops, single courses, degree programs, or any combination of these tools.

[Learn more here about University of Phoenix Workforce Solutions.](#)

### **About IAA**

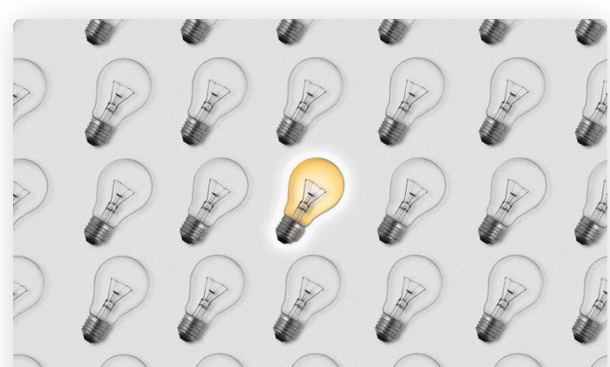
*Vermont HITEC, doing business as Institute for American Apprenticeships (IAA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to educate, train and employ Vermonters in a variety of fields. Since 2000, IAA has partnered with over 30 Vermont and New Hampshire businesses to employ over 1,800 individuals in the health care, information technology and advanced manufacturing fields. IAA also consults with employers and other organizations around the country to assist with the development of apprenticeship programs. [Learn more at https://iaahitec.org/](https://iaahitec.org/).*

### **About Hypertherm Associates**

*Hypertherm Associates is a manufacturer of industrial cutting software and products based in the USA. Their products, including Hypertherm plasma and OMAX waterjet cutting systems, are used by many companies worldwide for building ships, airplanes, trains, steel structures, manufacturing heavy equipment, erecting wind turbines, and more. In addition to cutting systems, the company develops reliable CNC and software known for their performance and dependability, offering increased productivity and profitability to hundreds of thousands of businesses. Founded in 1968, Hypertherm Associates is a 100 percent associate-owned company that employs around 2,000 associates and has operations and representations worldwide. To learn more about Hypertherm Associates, please visit our [website](#).*

### **About University of Phoenix**

*University of Phoenix is continually innovating to help working adults enhance their careers in a rapidly changing world. Flexible schedules, relevant courses, interactive learning, and Career Services for Life® help students more effectively pursue career and personal aspirations while balancing their busy lives. [For more information, visit phoenix.edu](#).*



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