JetBlue Celebrates First Graduates of Its Employer-Sponsored College Degree Program

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Focusing on the Needs of "Non-Traditional" Students, JetBlue Scholars Partners with Online Course Providers and Thomas Edison State University to Help Crewmembers Earn Low-Cost, Fully-Accredited College Degrees

NEW YORK--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- JetBlue (NASDAQ:JBLU) recently celebrated the first graduates of its JetBlue Scholars program. JetBlue Scholars offers the airline's crewmembers the opportunity to earn a fully-accredited associate or bachelor's degree with JetBlue covering most of the cost. The program features high-quality online courses at a fraction of the cost of traditional college. This year, 50 crewmembers will earn a college degree through the newly-launched program.

This Smart News Release features multimedia. View the full release here: http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160916005781/en/



JetBlue's Chief Executive Officer and President, Robin Hayes congratulates the first graduates of JetBlue's employer-sponsored college degree program - JetBlue Scholars. (Photo: Business Wire)

Through JetBlue Scholars, the airline is making the process of earning a college degree more inclusive and accessible than ever. With college costs at an all-time high, the average student graduates $33,000 in debt, according to a government data analysis by financial aid experts, Edvisors. And, more than 31 million Americans have some college education and no degree. JetBlue recognized this dilemma faced by many of its own crewmembers and charted a new, low-cost, high-quality path to make college affordable again.

"JetBlue Scholars is proof that unbundling the higher education process works. In our first year, 50 students will complete their college degrees," said Bonny Simi, founder of JetBlue Scholars and president of JetBlue Technology Ventures. "Many started college years ago but couldn't afford to finish. There are pilots, reservation agents, flight attendants, mechanics and administrative staff participating in the program. The average Scholar is 42 and has been out of the classroom for over 20 years. They have tremendous work experience, but no degree."

JetBlue Scholars utilizes low cost, high quality alternative college credit options including new technology-based learning platforms like Study.com, Sophia.org and StraighterLine.com. These courses are accepted for college credit at partner school -Thomas Edison State University, and are a fraction of the cost of traditional college classes.

"Thomas Edison State University's mission and core work aligns so well with the JetBlue Scholars program, especially our ability to assess college-level knowledge that has been acquired outside the traditional classroom," said Dr. Mary Ellen Caro, vice president of Enrollment Management and Learner Services at Thomas Edison State University. "It is an honor to partner with JetBlue to help its crewmembers achieve their goals, and we are very proud of the progress that so many crewmembers have made to earn their degrees."

JetBlue covers the full cost of the degree up to the final semester, and even that cost may be covered by JetBlue scholarships or Pell grants, which mean a degree may be completely free for those in financial need.

"Some scholars just need a few classes to graduate and others need up to 100 credits or 3.5 years to finish. We provide courses for free, with no upfront cost to crewmembers. We're making it possible for them to get college credit for their professional credentials and work experience and providing access to online approved courses from our partners to fill in the rest," said Simi.

This program gives crewmembers the flexibility to learn at their own pace. The program offers step-by-step support to make it easier for crewmembers that have some previous college credit but do not know how to move forward to complete their degree. JetBlue's goal is to make higher education more inclusive and affordable so that any crewmember who wants a college degree is able to earn one.

The growing need for employees with more advanced skills, demands that corporations find a way to upskill the American workforce. Typical grant and employer tuition reimbursement programs do not always cover alternative credit options, and require students to pay upfront and get reimbursed later, which many cannot afford to do. Therefore, corporate-driven education initiatives must take into consideration the unique needs of today's non-traditional students.

How it Works

Once enrolled in JetBlue Scholars, crewmembers are assigned a Success Coach and share their education background, including transcripts from previous coursework, copies of licenses or certifications held, records from past military, police or fire training and any other experiences or documentation that demonstrates past college-level learning. Many crewmembers already hold special licenses or professional certifications from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Much of this is worth college credit. The crewmember then takes online courses as guided by their coach.

Once crewmembers have earned 114-117 credits, they enroll for the final semester online with JetBlue's launch partner Thomas Edison State University. When 120 credits are reached, the bachelor's degree from Thomas Edison State University is conferred. Scholars are able to obtain degrees in aviation, liberal studies or business through JetBlue Scholars.

JetBlue Scholars has proven to be a valuable retention and development tool, leading to increased crewmember engagement and loyalty, resulting in a greater return on investment for JetBlue. For more information, visit www.jetbluescholars.com.

Graduates Speak Up on Receiving Their Degrees:

"It's been more than 25 years. I want to finish what I started. Once my transcripts were evaluated, I was surprised to see how close I was to getting my bachelor's degree."
Roxanne Hawkins is a dispatcher at JetBlue and received her Bachelors of Arts, Liberal Studies degree

"It was so satisfying to engage and complete a Bachelor's. It was a bit challenging, but with the push and support from my manager, it was easy to succeed. Next is law school."
Jorge Deolarte is a senior analyst in flight standards at JetBlue and received his Bachelor of Science in Applied Science and Technology - Aviation Maintenance Technology degree.

"I started college right after high school, but once my son came along, I put college on hold. This sets a good example for my son. If he sees me going through college, it's a big motivator for him. It shows him how important it is to have a degree."
Yeniett Elswood is a talent management analyst at JetBlue and received her Associate in Arts degree

About JetBlue

JetBlue is New York's Hometown Airline® and a leading carrier in Boston, Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood, Los Angeles (Long Beach), Orlando and San Juan. JetBlue carries more than 32 million customers a year to 97 cities in the U.S., Caribbean, and Latin America with an average of 925 daily flights. For more information, please visit JetBlue.com.

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