

The aviation industry has a diverse workforce, including pilots, mechanics, educators, and other support staff keeping aircraft flying in a safe operating environment. With nationwide aviation staffing shortages, Florida's airport system and military aviation installations are doing their part to fill this workforce by supporting aviation educational institutions across the state. The following profiles highlight just a few educational centers in Florida that are supporting critical jobs in the industry and encouraging the next generation of aviators.

Wayman Aviation Academy

Florida has long been a top destination for flight training, attracting students from every corner of the U.S. But in the case of the Wayman Aviation Academy, flight training has also attracted students from over 80 countries. In fact, international students make up about half of all annual enrollments! Located at North Perry Airport (HWO), Wayman Aviation Academy is a nationally accredited college and flight school that provides an Associate of Aeronautics Science Degree and extensive flight training services. Wayman Aviation Academy has an average of 200 enrollments annually, supported by over 40 flight instructors and aircraft.

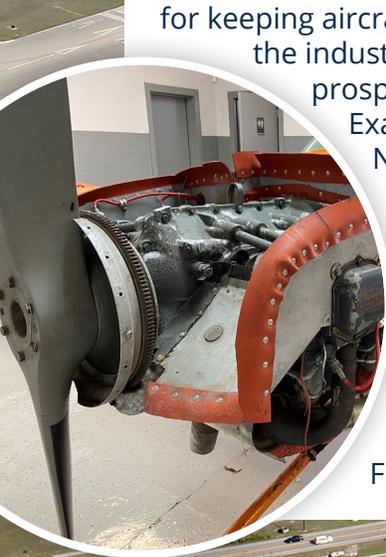
Wayman Aviation Academy is an FAA Part 141 flight school. This certification that means students can benefit from the time and cost savings of qualifying for an airline transport pilot (ATP) certificate after completing 1,000 flight hours, rather than the standard 1,500 flight hour requirement. Graduates have landed at some of the largest airlines in the world including Delta Air Lines, Singapore Airlines, and Qatar Airways.



Source: Wayman Aviation Academy

Aircraft Mechanic Certification

The thousands of aircraft that traverse Florida every year rely on routine inspections and maintenance. Aircraft mechanics, or airframe and/or powerplant (A&P) mechanics, are critical for keeping aircraft airworthy and represent a critical piece of the aviation workforce. With the industry facing a shortage of A&P-certified mechanics, it is even more critical that prospective mechanics have access to an FAA-approved Designated Mechanic Examiner (DME) to receive their FAA-issued A&P certification. DME Services of North Florida is providing that critical service in Winter Haven, Florida. This family owned- and operated business is based at Winter Haven Regional Airport (GIF) and is an authorized FAA facility for testing and certifying new A&P mechanics with aircraft and helicopters. DME Services of North Florida has a DME on staff; one of only about 160 DMEs in the U.S. The DME completes over 400 tests each year with prospective mechanics originating from all over the world. In fact, about 25 percent of applicants are from other countries including Brazil, England, and Thailand. As the aviation industry continues to experience staffing shortages, it's even more important that Florida's airports continue to support these critical services.



Polk State College

Polk State College's Aerospace Program provides a unique aviation education experience for aspiring aviation professionals. Based out of Lakeland Linder International Airport (LAL), the Aerospace Program provides several degree options that can be paired with a professional pilot track to train pilots for a career in the aviation industry. With ideal year-round flying conditions and several single-engine and multi-engine aircraft under contract, the Aerospace Program can prepare students to earn the FAA's Commercial Pilot Certificate in as little as two years. Additionally, as a restricted ATP school, students can qualify for an Air Transport Pilot Certificate in as little as 1,000 flying hours rather than the standard 1,500-hour requirement – a key designation representing a significant time and cost savings for aspiring airline pilots. Polk State College notes that LAL has been “very supportive to aviation” and the Aerospace Program including by hosting large events such as the Sun N’ Fun Aerospace Expo, where the Aerospace Program has recruited new students. In Fall 2022, the Aerospace Program recorded 375 active students – the highest enrollment ever recorded for the program!



Source: Polk State College Office of Communications

Youth Education

The aviation industry is facing a historic pilot shortage and is also faces shortages in many other aviation professions. Florida has made strides to inspire youth to enter the aviation industry, including one influential foundation in the Panhandle area. Located near Eglin Air Force Base outside of Pensacola, the National Flight Academy hosts several youth education programs every year for students in 7th to 12th grade. Students, or “cadets,” stay at the Academy's dedicated 102,000 sq ft facility and can take the role of a naval aviator deployed on an aircraft carrier with a variety of missions. Cadets have access to several immersive flight simulators and learn critical science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) skills. As of 2019, more than 575,000 students from five states have participated in the one-, three-, or six-day camps. The National Flight Academy has also partnered with Women in Aviation International to host the Girls in Aviation Day to inspire young women to consider STEM careers. With similar events being held across Florida, the state is making strides to encourage students to launch into a career in aviation and support the future of the industry!

Overview

Florida's airport system and military aviation installations support educational institutions and testing sites by providing a wide range of facilities and services to match the incredible career diversity in the aviation industry. This balance encourages an influx of new aviation professionals in the near term and inspires prospective aviators for the future.