

Training and Technology – How it ended

The Training and Technology (TAT) School history series has sure been a rewarding one. Lots of folks have contributed to the documentation of that uniquely historical endeavor. Several trainees, quite a few instructors, at least one administrator and several other staff members have all told their stories.

We even found a 1970's era movie about the program and digitized that for archive purposes. It has been playing in the entrance lobbies at Y-12's Jack Case and New Hope centers, has been shared with Oak Ridge Associated Universities and has been placed in Y-12's historical archives.

Each person has given their perspective on the experience in these "TAT Treasures," as Don McMurray dubbed the stories. To a person, the reflection back on TAT was one of high regard for what was accomplished and strong praise for the people who led the effort.

"This innovative program, a forerunner of other similar programs across the nation in later years, was best known just as 'TAT' or the 'TAT School' and was officially named *Training and Technology*. This unusual-for-its-time program was created and first funded by the Department of Labor's Research and Demonstration Program. The Manpower Development and Training Act of 1961 took over the funding after the initial demonstration proved highly successful.

"In 1974, when the Manpower and Development and Training Act ended, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act took over the funding. The CETA legislation, lasting from 1973 to 1982, provided support but was erratic and saw continuing struggles between local governments and others for control of the funds and training programs. TAT was on the cutting edge of skills training for all the years of its existence, but continual change in legislation governing such programs eventually caused TAT to close down in early 1984."

Mayme Crowell said:

"As an intake interviewer, I remember that the TAT entrance criteria changed over time from the original MDTA (Manpower Development and Training Act) to the JPTA (Joint Partnership Training Act) to the CETA (Comprehensive Education and Training Act).

"Initially TAT students were required to lack education and job skills, to be economically below the regional poverty level, and to evidence abilities for the job training to which they had applied. Later the criteria became so specific as to make us interviewers think that we were looking for one-footed, short-trunked pink elephants!

"These seemingly unreasonable student requirements, plus the mandate to find individuals in specific, numerous counties all across the U.S. when travel was both expensive and difficult, contributed to the demise of TAT. Also, some of the job skills areas TAT taught were no longer needed, for example, glassblowing.

"In addition, the Oak Ridge Associated Universities promoter of TAT, Wendell Russell died on the streets of Washington, D.C. Few TAT champions came forward afterward.

"As a research associate, I was able to help in proving that TAT was successful economically. We interviewed TAT graduates and were able to obtain their income tax records. We found that generally within a five-year period the TAT graduates were paying back to the U. S. Treasury the cost of their training."

Rac Cox of ORAU added:

"The CETA ended in 1982 when it was replaced by the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). This was Congress's answer to frustrations with the overall effectiveness of CETA outcomes and

goals. JTPA furthered the decentralization of federal job training from the state to local levels. Under CETA, state governments were given large block grants to administer so TAT was able to go to a central state agency, obtain contracts to train under employed and unemployed state residents in Oak Ridge and then place them anywhere in well paying technical jobs.

“When JTPA arrived, funding was dispersed to 18–19 local Private Industry Councils representing local industry and interests. They were focused on funding local training for local companies. TAT staff had to visit each council, apply for funding, convince them of the benefits of TAT and its success.

“Since TAT was placing graduates in nuclear and construction sites throughout the southeast, the local Private Industry Councils had little interest in spending their training funds in Oak Ridge and not have their residents return to their local area for jobs. Thus the major funding base for TAT evaporated, resulting in the business decision to have to close TAT in 1984.”

So, a highly successful training program ended because of the bureaucracy and politics of handling the money and short-sighted local groups who did not want to provide industrial training that might not directly and immediately benefit them. Too bad, for as some have said, we could sure use some of that “TAT School” right about now.

Speaking of training going on now, the Y-12 Apprentice Program is in many ways similar to the TAT School initiative. The skills taught are practical and fit the need that exists today for skilled craftsmen. I will make a fuller comparison with this program in a coming article.