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Want to become an air traffic controller? SU now offers ATC-101

Star staff report
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Tony LaRosa, Shenandoah University's director of aviation studies, uses the new air traffic control simulator. SU has launched an undergraduate certificate in air traffic control and recently became the first school in Virginia to be certified by the FAA to join its Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative.

Provided photo

An undergraduate certificate in air traffic control has been added to Shenandoah University's list of academic offerings to help fill a need for the profession nationwide.

Students began taking the initial class for ATC-101 this fall, and the university is anticipating the program's full launch in the spring, according to an SU media release.

“The air traffic controller shortage is real, and it’s serious,” said Shenandoah University Director of Aviation Studies Tony LaRosa, a former air traffic control specialist at the Federal Aviation Administration. “I’m proud that Shenandoah is stepping up to prepare students to meet the challenge. The new certificate program will be five courses over two years, and it will give students the credentials needed for the actual career of an air traffic controller.”

The FAA announced on Sept. 17 that Shenandoah has joined the FAA’s Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative (AT-CTI), which expedites students’ paths to becoming certified air traffic controllers. Students who complete the new air traffic control program can bypass the FAA Academy in Oklahoma City and move straight into on-site facility training in FAA air traffic control towers.

Shenandoah is the first school in Virginia — and the 13th in the country — to become an Enhanced AT-CTI certified program.

“I’m thrilled to congratulate Shenandoah University on becoming the latest school to join the Enhanced Air Traffic – Collegiate Training Initiative and to welcome this program to Virginia,” said U.S. Sen. Mark Warner (D-VA). “This federal initiative is helping build a strong pipeline of talented air traffic controllers, strengthen our nation’s aviation workforce, and most importantly, continue the vital work of keeping the traveling public safe. Educating the next generation of air traffic controllers is an important part of keeping our nation’s skies safe and reliable.”

To qualify for Enhanced AT-CTI certification, Shenandoah invested in a state-of-the-art simulator system from UFA, a U.S.-owned company that provides training solutions for air navigation service providers, military organizations, and top collegiate programs around the world. The new air traffic simulators will be used by instructors to help students practice skills in typical traffic as well as emergency scenarios that cannot be replicated without risk.

“The key to training future controllers is the simulators,” said LaRosa. “Our students need the most realistic simulation possible so they can ensure safety on day one. And in a profession like air traffic, which is fundamentally about communication, that means our students need hyper-realistic visuals and voice recognition.”

More info: su.edu.

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