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Are We Through Dancing Around the Tree or What?

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ARE WE THROUGH DANCING AROUND THE TREE OR WHAT?

A great number of *The Journal of Aviation/Aerospace Education and Research* readers have some interest in pilot training, which brings several issues to mind. One issue, that of whether there is or is not a pilot shortage, seems to come up year after year, particularly in collegiate aviation circles. If a dearth of pilots does exist, the key question must then be where will tomorrow's flight deck crewmember come from and what will be his or her qualifications?

The matter of qualification and preparation of future pilots is of great importance to colleges and universities since academe is fast becoming more important in such training. While some elements within the industry stand firm and vehemently deny that a pilot shortage exists, others beg the question by stating the sole issue is that there exists a lack of *qualified* flight deck candidates. Confusing the issue even more is another segment which continues to believe that this nation's air transportation system will continue to grow, prosper, and consequently need more pilots every year. The

conundrum is that everyone continues to "dance around the tree" and no one is willing to get on with business.

This last year has not been among the best of times for the defense and aerospace industry. Few would have dreamed that an easing of East-West relations was possible much less would become a reality. Consequently, many of today's aspiring military aviators, quite often tomorrow's air carrier pilots, will not get into the pilot supply pipeline. There may be some temporary relief for the aviation industry in that many pilots now on active duty may elect to leave the military. However, the supply and demand issue has become more complicated in the past few months since several airlines have put a temporary freeze on new pilot hiring. In addition, the industry is reeling under increased fuel prices.

The day is long past, if it ever existed, when the collegiate academic community could look to the certificated air carriers, the professional flight training community, or the government for assistance

much less guidance in solving the pilot shortage problem. Although several "partnerships" were formed between some institutions of higher learning and certain airlines, these alliances have not been totally successful. Attempts to establish relationships with the professional flight training community have created a new awareness which is encouraging. The government, perhaps the one entity with the clout and the money to make a difference, has been slow if not lethargic in its efforts to assist in remedying the pilot shortage. Who can blame any of these entities for their lack of response when most of them are interested in surviving today, and not looking to the future. Where does all this posturing leave academe? Unfortunately, holding the bag. But wait a minute, maybe things aren't so bad after all. After the shock of realizing that academe will probably have to go it alone wears off, the picture becomes clearer. The bulk of tomorrow's pilots, whether they will be military, air carrier, corporate, air-taxi, or whatever, will get their initial flight training at this nation's colleges and universities. Academe will have the major, if not singular,

responsibility, which is not all that surprising when you consider that for many years the University Aviation Association (UAA) and the National Intercollegiate Flying Association (NIFA) have functioned quite well with little, if any, support outside of the collegiate community. True, the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) and several of its members have been extremely supportive in improving flight training efforts, but there have been few dollars to pass around.

The best solution to the problem of preparing tomorrow's jack or jill-of-all-trades for the air carrier or for the professional flight deck, rests where it always has--with academe. Robert Paul Wolfe in *The Ideal of the University* offers four models of the university, one of which is ". . . a training camp for the professions." We already know the answer to the problem, or as a famous cartoon character's words might be paraphrased, "We have seen the solution, and it is us."

HRL