

Another Alternative to College: Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics

by Valerie Eby

This month the spotlight is focused on the [Pittsburgh Institute of Aeronautics \(PIA\)](#), one of the premiere aeronautics schools in the country. PIA has consistently maintained its reputation for producing outstanding aviation maintenance and aviation electronics technicians. *Forbes Magazine* ranked PIA in 2018 as the #1 two-year trade school in the United States. The school has been in operation in Pittsburgh, PA, since 1929, but, because of the growing need for qualified aircraft mechanics and avionics technicians, PIA opened a branch at the Hagerstown airport in 2011, bringing this continuing education opportunity to our doorstep.

PIA offers two types of training programs: Aviation Maintenance Technicians (AMTs) and Aviation Electronics Technicians (AETs). Both the Pittsburgh and Hagerstown campuses offer the AMT program, but the AET program is only available in Pittsburgh.

If you have a student that leans toward fixing mechanical issues, he/she may want to look into becoming an AMT. These technicians are the mechanics of the aircraft industry; they diagnose mechanical issues, perform scheduled maintenance and repair aircraft. However, if your student enjoys working with computers or electronics, then he/she might want to consider becoming an AET. Avionics technicians repair issues with communications systems, navigation equipment, display screens and more.

While both the Pittsburgh and the Hagerstown campuses offer the same quality education in their AMT programs, there are some differences that you may want to consider when deciding which campus would be the best option for your student. The home campus in Pittsburgh, PA, offers a 21-month program (7 three-month terms) that includes an Associates Degree in Specialized Technology. In contrast, the local campus in Hagerstown, MD, is a shorter 16-month program (4 four-month semesters) that eliminates the Associates Degree and concentrates on preparing the student to be an aviation technician in the shortest amount of time allowed by the FAA. Another difference is that while federal financial aid is available at both campuses, only the Pittsburgh campus accepts PHEAA.

At both campuses, PIA will prepare students to successfully take the appropriate federal testing to achieve certification in the field they have chosen. Specifically, AMT students must pass the FAA oral, practical and written examinations in order to obtain their FAA Airframe and/or Powerplant certificate(s) to be eligible for employment. Likewise, AET students must pass the FCC General Radiotelephone Operator's License (GROL) exam in order to be licensed to work on aircraft radio and electrical systems.

PIA offers rolling admission, which means a Hagerstown student could begin their first semester in either April, August or January, and a Pittsburgh student could start in April, July, October or January. However, there are a limited number of openings each semester, so it's best to apply early in order to avoid waiting another semester for an opening.

Currently, the tuition for either the AMT or AET program in Pittsburgh is \$38,500, which breaks down to \$5,500 per quarter. In Hagerstown, the tuition for the AMT program is \$27,000 or \$6,750 per term. There is a required tool list for beginning students which will range anywhere from about \$2,500 to \$3,000 depending on the program and campus.

Another benefit that sets PIA apart from other trade schools is their superior career services support. Their proactive approach to helping their students secure employment includes on-campus recruiting, locating job opportunities, resume writing and interview skills.

If you are interested in finding out more about PIA and touring their state-of-the-art facilities, you can attend one of their open houses or arrange a private visit. In Hagerstown, the admissions contact person is Barbara Martin at 240-347-4805 Ext. 2356 or bmartin@pia.edu. Open houses are held four times a year: February, May, August and November. Check out their website at <https://pia.edu> for more details.

NOTE: As of February 2021, PIA has four campuses: Pittsburgh, PA; Hagerstown, MD; Youngstown, OH; and Myrtle Beach, SC.