

POTENTIAL PILOT SHORTAGE MEANS OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

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Some economic indicators have aviation industry experts nervous that a **pilot shortage** is on the way. But representatives of major airlines like Delta say they still see a strong flow of applicants despite fears from some regional affiliates concerned about the future of filling pilot seats.

According to a report issued last year by the Regional Airline Association, the major airlines will need to replace 18,000 pilots within the next seven years who reach the mandatory retirement age of 65. The report also says there is a diminishing of new air transport pilot licenses, the highest certification given by the Federal Aviation Administration, which certifies pilots to fly commercial freight and passenger planes.

The major airlines get the benefit of ex-military pilots as well as pilots with seniority at regional airlines to fill empty cockpit seats. But regional lines rely on new pilot school graduates to fill in voids from departing pilots.

With relatively low starting pay, an increase in hours required for certifications, and the cost of college and flight school, the numbers of students completing programs is low and drawing concern, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The average cost of a four-year degree and flight training is \$50,000 per year. But average starting wages for new pilots with the regional airlines has remained stagnant in the mid-\$20,000s.

“It takes a certain stamina to hang in there. The ones that do are going to be great,” said Jim Green, retired airline pilot and associate professor with Utah Valley University’s School of Aviation Science. Green said the school attrition rate assures that the quality of the **students** moving on is high with good job prospects.

Utah Valley University is unique because total estimated cost for the university tuition and flight training expenses totals about \$18,700 per year, making it one of the least expensive in the nation.

Still, the cost tops Utah's average annual tuition for public universities, \$12,354, according to The College Board's Annual Survey of Colleges.

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, the oldest and largest aeronautics college in the country, with campuses in Daytona Beach, Florida and Prescott, Arizona, costs more than that average. Annual costs are about \$32,000 per year for tuition and fees, in addition to \$33,000 for the first two years and about \$10,000 for the last two years of flight training.

But neither program has exemplary graduation rates. UVU's Aviation Science Department only graduates 7 percent of the average 300-350 students entering the program within four or five years of their start date. That jumps to 13.4 percent completing the program within 7 years.

From 2004 to 2013, Embry-Riddle's graduation rate was 2.3 percent of aeronautical science majors in the advertised three years. About 21 percent graduated after four years and 30 percent finished the program after six years.

Boeing projects that the global industry will need 558,000 new pilots in the next 20 years to meet demand, 95,000 new pilots in the U.S. alone. Not meeting the demand could mean diminished service from regional airliners, higher fare prices and a weakened national infrastructure, Green said

But that also means there is an opportunity for young people entering the program, if they stick it out.

“The supply-demand curve is shifting in their favor,” Green said. “There has never been a better opportunity and there is no better job than being an airline pilot.”

Roger Cohen, former president of the Regional Airline Association, said earlier this year that American Airlines will lose 61 percent of its pilots. Delta, with a hub in Salt Lake City, will lose 47 percent, with Southwest Airlines losing 40 percent.

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