

## ACRP and Higher Education: Building the Next Generation of Airport Professionals

**W**hile studying at Kansas State Polytechnic (KSP) University in Salina, Kansas, recent graduate Elizabeth Nelson worked as an intern at the Salina Regional Airport. Now with the Wichita Airport Authority at the Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport, Elizabeth acknowledges the critical role ACRP research products played in her academic and professional growth.

“I can’t say enough about how ACRP reports helped me in school and now in the ‘real world.’ ACRP reports made me feel part of the airport industry,” said Nelson. “My familiarity with ACRP research was a huge advantage during the interview process. I’m convinced my ACRP experience was a key reason I was hired here at Wichita.”

Michael Parker, another KSP graduate, is a self-characterized “analytical guy” which is one reason he appreciates

ACRP research reports. “I’ve reviewed and read over 20 ACRP reports during my academic career at KSP and the data-based findings evident in each of these reports added significant value to my understanding of the key issues confronting today’s airport professionals,” noted Parker.

Both Nelson and Parker are products of KSP’s groundbreaking Airport Management program. Each attributes the integration of ACRP research reports and ACRP webinars into the curriculum as critical to the success of the program and to their own personal and professional success. Housed in the College of Technology and Aviation at KSP, the program is spearheaded by Dr. Tara Harl. As she describes why the KSP program is unique, Harl states that ACRP research products are crucial to the program’s success.

“We fully integrate ACRP research products into our program. Our instructors do not rely on traditional textbooks; they rely on ACRP research reports to serve the role of textbooks.”

— Dr. Tara Harl, Associate Professor  
Airport Management Program  
Kansas State Polytechnic University

“We fully integrate ACRP research products into our program,” noted Harl. “Our instructors do not rely on traditional textbooks; they rely on ACRP research reports to serve the role of textbooks. I realize we are not the only institution of higher learning that utilizes ACRP reports in the classroom but I am confident we are the only institution that integrates ACRP so robustly within the larger degree program,” she emphasized.

The KSP program incorporates imbedded labs into its academic courses. For example, in the spring 2016 semester KSP offered AVT 560, an online Airport Master Planning and Design course. The challenge was how to provide imbedded labs to the online students and allow them to experience the practical side of airport issues. Dr. Dave Byers was the instructor for AVT 560.



Above: Salina Regional Airport manager Tim Rogers (center left) instructing Kansas State Polytechnic (KSP) University students on Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) recertification during the ARFF Lab while crews practice drills in the background. KSP’s Airport Management program integrates ACRP research products into its curriculum of classroom and lab instruction. Photo courtesy of KSP.

Since 2006, an industry-driven, applied research program that develops near-term, practical solutions to problems faced by airport operators.

## ACRP and Higher Education: The Next Generation—continued

“One lab that we used successfully in AVT 560 involved students being given an assignment to review the list of recorded webinars offered by ACRP and choose one for viewing using the ACRP research report as a reference,” noted Byers. “Students were instructed to provide a summary of the webinar and to report on their greatest take-away from the session. The basic idea was that by completing the assignment, they would become somewhat of a subject matter expert on the topic for a potential employer and could cite the webinar as a continuing education experience,” he said.

Without any prompting or suggestion, the 11 students selected 8 separate webinar topics including:

- Managing Small Airports;
- New Energy Technologies at Airports;
- Identifying and Developing New Sources of Airport Revenue;
- Factors That Influence Air Service Development;
- Environmental Planning for Winter Operations;
- Airport Wildlife Mitigation;

- Air Service Strategies for Small, Medium, and Non-Hub Airports in Today’s Competitive Environment; and
- Planning for Climate Change Adaptation at Airports.

“I am total convinced that the diversity of topics chosen by those 11 students is a strong indication of their curiosity about contemporary airport issues,” said Byers.

Another major benefit of the assignment, suggested Byers, was the students’ exposure to a vast array of topics available from ACRP as they reviewed the list of webinars. Byers does not doubt this will serve as a resource for those who enter the airport workforce. His point is supported by the experiences of airport professionals in Kansas.

Michelle “Shelli” Swanson is director of finance and administration at the Salina Airport Authority. Salina Regional Airport’s 20 year relationship with KSP, Swanson noted, has recently been formalized through a student internship program.

“Each semester we recruit interns from KSP who work for us for 6 months. We tailor the internship responsibilities to the needs and aspirations of the students. Like Dr. Harl, we utilize ACRP research reports to help better acclimate students to real-world airport issues and solutions,” noted Swanson.

For example, Swanson utilized *ACRP Report 47: Guidebook for Developing and Leasing Airport Property* as part of the internship curriculum. “I gave the students weekly reading assignments that we reviewed together and made the connection to real-world airport management. We also use the ACRP airport management guide as new intern orientation material,” said Swanson.

The incorporation of ACRP reports in the KSP curriculum not only benefits the students, but it also benefits educators like Jesse Romo, director of the Manhattan Regional Airport and an adjunct faculty member at KSP. This past semester Romo taught an Airport Management and Planning class in which he utilized *ACRP Reports 16, 18, 38, and 140*. “I have been teaching at the collegiate level for the past eight or nine years and I subscribe to the concept that if you want to learn about a subject you teach the subject,” said Romo. “My teaching the airport management class at KSP and my use of ACRP reports in the classroom has made me a better director at Manhattan,” he noted.

Students, educators, and airport directors benefit from the incorporation of ACRP research products into the airport management program at Kansas State Polytechnic as they build on their experience to help create the next generation of airport leaders.



Above: Airport consultant Ryan Lorton (left, kneeling) with the firm Jviation of Kansas City, Missouri, and Salina Regional Airport director of operations Kenny Bieker (far right), instructing Kansas State Polytechnic (KSP) University students on taxiway resurfacing during the Construction Project Lab. KSP’s Airport Management program integrates ACRP research products into its curriculum of classroom and lab instruction. Photo courtesy of KSP.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SPONSORSHIP:** This work was sponsored by the Federal Aviation Administration and was conducted in the Airport Cooperative Research Program, which is administered by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

**DISCLAIMER:** The opinions and conclusions expressed or implied in ACRP publications are those of the research agencies. They are not necessarily those of the Transportation Research Board or the program sponsors.