

## Heavy Metal: Students working Simulators to later work big equipment

The new Heavy Equipment Operation program at Dorchester County's career school may look as though students are playing on giant video games all day, but these students are actually preparing to operate giant pieces of equipment on construction sites.

The Dorchester County Career and Technology Center's Heavy Equipment Operation class has students operating off simulators designed to teach students how to operate a hydraulic excavator, a backhoe loader, a bulldozer and an articulated wheel loader (industry professionals may call these different terms).

The class is a result of a partnership with Banks Construction and Austin Construction. Students will train on the five simulators and then transition to operating actual heavy equipment, supplied by Banks Construction, in a 130-acre quarry provided by Austin Construction. Bob Behr, assistant director of the career school, said four students at a time will be accompanied by two Banks Construction employees and head to the quarry to work on the actual equipment.

"That's the real world experience, with real world operators," Behr said.

Behr said the two construction companies are looking for operators, and the partnership with the career school will save the companies money in training costs.

Upon completion of the program, students will be ready for a career in equipment operation with the construction companies and other related industries.

The students were already working on the simulators during the first week of school. Jimmy Austin, vice president of Austin Construction, tried one out as well. He said the partnership is good for recruiting future potential employees.

Austin said there are operators who make upwards of \$24 an hour.

Austin was impressed with the simulators – "I want one at home," he said.

First-year teacher Shelby Wayne leads the course and has a background in agricultural



A student practicing Hydraulic Excavator Operation on one of two Simlog Operator Chairs at Dorchester County Career and Technical Center.

education. She said the class is an agriculture course; along with the construction side of everything the students are also learning applications for these machines in the agriculture industry.

Wayne said she hopes the class will steer the students in the direction of potential employment.

“I hope that those who want who want to go out and work as soon as they graduate will have that opportunity, or that it will narrow what field of study they’re interested in if they do choose to go to college,” Wayne said. “Really just this is just an incredible opportunity for them in the first place because nowhere...else in South Carolina – and almost nowhere else in the United States – has this opportunity where you can take a 16-year-old high school student, put them on a simulator, and then second semester actually train on the real equipment.

“We’re gaining real-life employment skills and that’s ultimately the goal...my dream would be that every one of my students that seeks employment beyond this class will have no problem getting a job after school,” she said.

The students are currently working on five simulators in the classroom, with software for four pieces of equipment. The software is from a company called Simlog. The simulators were assembled by Simlog and Technical Training Aids, and the students use anywhere from one to four screens to operate on the simulators.

Wayne has a total of 22 students enrolled in the course.

She said the first semester the students will focus on learning the equipment on the

simulators and a zero-risk, zero-stress environment – “because in here, you turn a machine over, you’re not hurting yourself, you’re not hurting...the piece of equipment, you’re not hurting others, we just hit ‘restart,’” she said. “To be able to learn the fundamentals in this type of controlled environment is a really great opportunity that we have so that we prepare students for next semester, when Banks Construction will be donating their time and resources for us to...have our students on the actual pieces of equipment.”

Chase DuPree, a senior from Ashley Ridge High in the course, previously studied architectural design at the career school and is now enrolled in the Heavy Equipment Operations program. He said he hopes to possibly study construction science and management in college.

While the controllers on the simulators come with a lot of buttons the students had to learn the first week of school, DuPree said it was not hard to learn – “but...if I like it then I’m going to want to pick up on it fast,” he said. “

DuPree has worked on the hydraulic excavator and the wheel loader and said the first week of school the students were still getting to know the equipment on the simulators. He said he liked the excavator, calling it very realistic.

He said he is not nervous about getting on the real deal: “I’m ready,” he said.

Tarimez Brown, a senior from Woodland High is in his first year at the career school. He said he enrolled in the program because he likes construction and wants to learn more about it.

Brown’s favorite machine so far is the bull-

dozer.

A general consensus among the students seemed to be the simulators actually were not too hard to learn.

“Once you learn it, it’s easy,” Brown said.

Heavy Equipment Operation is one of two new programs that the center has added this year: the center also has a new Media Technology program, housed at Woodland High, which will offer students the opportunity to explore the field of communications with a focus on radio and television technology. Students will get hands-on experience using industry-standard equipment related to production techniques for audio, video and film. Upon completion of the program, students will be ready for a career in radio, television or print media.

The career center now has a total of 18 programs, designed to enable students to enter the workforce or pursue a college degree with the distinct advantage of hands-on training and certification.

**Simlog Inc**  
[www.simlog.com](http://www.simlog.com)

**Dorchester County Career and  
Technical Center**  
[www.dcctc.net](http://www.dcctc.net)



## Simlog's Personal Simulators used in the Dorchester County Career and Technical Center HEO Program

- ▶ Wheel Loader Personal Simulator
- ▶ Hydraulic Excavator Personal Simulator
- ▶ Bulldozer Personal Simulator
- ▶ Backhoe Loader Personal Simulator



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