

MENTOR

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position Report

How Active Is Our CFI Community, Really?



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If we look at the data from the FAA’s Airmen Registry, we find that as of the end of 2010, there were 96,473 certificated flight instructors who have a “current” CFI certificate of one sort or another.

This means that at some point in history, they obtained a flight instructor certificate of some sort, and if it was more than two years ago, they did something to keep it current. This could include proving activity sufficient to renew the certificate, renewing through a couple of other ways with their local FSDO, or taking a flight instructor refresher clinic (FIRC) in the last two years. This doesn’t mean that they have instructed recently or at all; it just means they have an active certificate, and if they chose to do so, they could.

What makes a CFI active is a debatable point. Sure, instructing people while doing flight reviews, insurance checkouts, training for endorsements, or other simi-

lar activities is definitely a worthy endeavor, but let’s be honest, it doesn’t expand or refill our pilot pool. The only way to do that is to instruct people for new pilot certificates. We are all very concerned about our dwindling pilot numbers, and the only way to get more pilots is for CFIs to help more people reach the practical test.

NAFI took the time to look at how many CFIs actually do this, and the numbers are alarming. If we look at a trend over the past five years, we see that a small percentage of the CFIs are actually engaged in signing applicants off for practical tests. In fact, for each of the past few years this has represented roughly 14-15 percent of CFIs. Below are the actual numbers that represent this fact (see chart at the bottom of the page).

If we look at these numbers as a group over the past five years, we find that 32,562 flight instructors over the entire time period have signed someone off for

a practical test. This is still only 33 percent of instructors that can claim activities that include signing off at a minimum one candidate for a practical test in the last five years. There is strong evidence to support that a number of these instructors have transitioned in and out of the proverbial “stepping-stone position” to different jobs where their primary job function is flying, instead of instructing. These individuals now fall into the category of instructors who are not actively instructing candidates anymore. The reality is that our flight instructor group is at a minimum over a five-year period; at least 65 percent of our flight instructors over the past five years haven’t been active in a way that helps us build our pilot ranks.

There are lots of arguments that will come up with these points. Some will say that more instructors would be active if there were more students who needed them.

Others will say many instructors can’t make a living at the job, which is why they don’t do it actively, and that they have other jobs in order to afford a general living. Many instructors don’t actively instruct while they are doing other jobs, flying professionally as their career, since they can’t do both at the same time.

No matter what reasons we come up with, the reality is that a significant number in our instructor community do not do this job on a regular basis. This isn’t to say that instructors who aren’t signing students off for practical tests aren’t important. All of those who are doing currency or re-currency training are doing something vital; they are keeping current pilots active. As we think about expanding our pilot pool, we can’t forget to keep current pilots active along the way.

Our level of activity as CFIs is telling something about our position in the industry. You don’t need to be a statistician to see the effects here. We need to work to evaluate more deeply how CFI activity is measured and the relationship of the CFI to the overall aviation community. We need to do this with more data than the above basic statistics allow, but the inferences that can be made from them tell us we have much work to do.

Percentage of CFIs Who Actively Sign Applicants Each Year					
Year	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Total Number of CFI Certificates Held	96,473	94,863	93,202	92,175	91,343
CFIs Who Endorsed an Applicant for Practical Test	13,267	12,797	14,754	13,722	14,382
Percentage of Active CFIs	13.8%	13.5%	15.8%	14.9%	15.7%