

THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

MENTOR

The NAFI logo is a red shield with the letters 'NAFI' in white, flanked by blue wings. A small 'TM' trademark symbol is located below the shield.

October 2011

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 10

Consider the Wind

Working As a Check Airman

Digital Pilotage

Tools Within Hands' Reach



position Report

Instructor Shortage

Coming soon to your flight-training operation

Over the past couple months I have talked with many flight-training providers who have lamented the need for hiring flight instructors. The past year has seen forecasts of pilot shortages. A significant amount of hiring is being done by regional airlines and corporate operators — who are scooping up experienced flight instructors. As these instructors get hired, from what has by many in the industry been seen as a steppingstone job, the pool of active instructors is depleted. Each day our NAFI office is getting calls from training providers asking for help finding instructors. Flight instructors who are interested in working as a flight instructor are becoming scarce.

This is especially true in large training-program environments where companies looking for pilots know they can go to get quantities of pilots from the instructor pool. While many instructors are not in direct contact with what they might refer to as “pilot mills,” these locations conduct a great deal of flight training. Many of these programs are putting out big portions of the pilot supply for commercial pilot careers. If their instructor

base begins to falter, so will their ability to provide pilots to fill the next generation of commercial flight pilot seats.

The fact that the FAA lists more than 97,000 CFIs who have current certificates in its database is not representative at all of the number of instructors who are “actively instructing.” While many CFIs will tell you they are “active” because they conduct a couple flight reviews or instrument proficiency checks each year for friends, the reality is that this is not the type of active instruction that is refilling our pilot pool. The CFIs who are signing students off for ratings and/or certificates are the ones that are doing this. With some recent help from the FAA, we found that of the 97,000 CFIs, just more than 32,000 of them had signed a student off for a rating or certificate since 2006. This means that in the last five years, less than one-third of our instructors used their certificate to help a student get a pilot certificate or an advanced rating. While we at NAFI are digging further into these statistics, some anecdotal analysis would hint at the fact that even of these roughly 32,000 CFIs who signed off a student, many of them have moved

on in their careers (and we know that in 2007 and 2008 an airline hiring boom took significant numbers of CFIs and moved them into airline careers) from that point even in the last five years to a professional pilot slot and are no longer actively instructing candidates for ratings or certificates.

A variety of aviation organizations have noted the number of flight instructors that are certificated, but what is not measured is the ability or willingness of these instructors to actively provide their services. Many flight instructors keep their certificates active while working professionally as pilots in airlines, corporate flight departments, or charter flight providers. These instructors are not providing instruction on a regular basis, and while they may continue to be certified to provide instruction, their other job duties keep them from being able to provide services regularly. Other instructors also don't get to provide their services in quantity because they have outside careers and flight instruct on the side as a hobby, keep their certificate active but have realistically retired, or simply just have the certificate active and don't even provide



Jason Blair, MCFI
Executive Director

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instruction. The reality is that these groupings encompass a large number (it would seem maybe more than two-thirds) of the certificated flight instructors in the system. This leaves a very few number of instructors who are either professional instructors or are full-time instructors.

I wish I had a real number to pass along, but I anticipate it is a much smaller number than many of us would like to admit. Couple this with the fact that there are fewer instructors being certificated each year, and we are heading toward a period when flight-instructor services are going to be in demand or the supply of pilots is going to go down. Our industry needs to understand these changing dynamics and work to make our training efforts effective, efficient and professional. If we don't, the aviation industry isn't going to meet the demand for pilot supply.