



March 27, 2018

College of Aviation Flight Students,

I am writing to update you on the list of students waiting to receive a multi-engine instructor. I have heard from many of you, which is completely appropriate. As always, feel free to reach out to me to voice your concerns or ideas for handling this problem, or any other problem you are facing. I recognize that many of you are frustrated. You have my personal apology for the delay in your training. Here is what led to our current situation, what we are doing to solve the problem, and when we hope to see progress.

All facets of the aviation industry, including the United States Military, the airline industry, and collegiate flight programs are facing a significant pilot shortage. The United States Congress has acknowledged the problem and the airline industry is actively working to find a solution, including hiring more WMU graduates. As a collegiate flight program, we are losing flight instructors at an unprecedented rate. Last year we lost 39 out of 55 instructors. To make matters worse, many of these instructors are leaving us with little warning. The replacement process takes over a month because we refuse to compromise on the caliber of individual we hire or the quality of standardization training they receive.

In one sense, rapid airline hiring is a "good" problem because our graduates are moving to meaningful flying careers (and moving away from being multi-engine instructors). I recognize, however, that this explanation does little to lessen your concern. As many of you have expressed to me, this waitlist is causing you delays, increasing your anxiety to finish your schooling, and posing financial concerns. I have heard you. And at the end of last year, we implemented a strategy to help solve the problem. There are several steps in progress.

First, beginning in January, we selected seven instructors and offered to pay for them to obtain the certification to teach the multi-engine curriculum (MEI). This is something we have never had to contemplate in the past. We realize that the new reality of this pilot shortage requires new solutions. These new multi-engine instructors should have been online by now, but February and March brought terrible weather for training, which slowed that process. Currently, three of these instructors are online with the remaining four coming soon (all four are 2/3 or more complete with training and one has a check ride in the coming days).

Second, we continued our efforts to hire two full-time instructors to help this problem. These positions are hard to fill because, as a non-profit institution, we must keep tuition down for students like you, while trying to compete with airlines who offer significantly higher wages. I have personally interviewed five candidates for these positions. Unfortunately, it has been a struggle to find qualified, experienced multi-engine instructors who have not already opted for the financial gains of the airlines or who have

been turned down by airlines for reasons that also stop us from hiring them as your instructors. Nonetheless, we recently hired a former airline pilot and intended to place this individual directly into the multi-engine fleet. Unfortunately, this pilot faced a family issue that caused him to resign shortly after being hired. We remain focused on the mission, though, and are currently in the process of making an offer for a second applicant.

Third, we conducted a review of our curriculum and flight operations manual to eliminate any aspects that are not adding educational benefit or are unnecessarily restricting progress. We will be making several changes to those procedures that I am confident will increase efficiency for students progressing through the curriculum. These changes are aimed at giving productive students more resources, while quickly addressing students who are struggling, thus reducing remedial lessons that slow all students' progress. We are also evaluating multiple ways to increase instructor retention.

Fourth, I have written an open letter to a large airline pilot union asking all newly retired airline pilots to consider instructing you and other Bronco aviators.

Fifth, the Dean of our College is seeking funding for additional flight faculty. He has requested that the Provost of our University fund more faculty for our College. That request is pending.

Finally, we will work to keep the pipeline of initial instructors coming to us. To aid this, we have increased marketing of our part-time positions, which is making a difference. We recently hired a graduate from Purdue and are in talks with a graduate from Auburn. We will also continue to offer scholarship applications for any instructor applicant, including you, for the initial instructor certificate.

One other point worth considering: students are permitted to complete commercial training in our single-engine aircraft, the Piper Arrow. Those students then add on the multi-engine certificate. This may be a viable path to avoid the current waitlist for multi-engine instructors. But this path triggers other considerations that each student should consider because our College only has one Piper Arrow.

Again, I know you are frustrated. As a graduate of the program, I too am frustrated. We, as leaders of the flight department, have diagnosed the problem and put the above steps into practice. I am confident they will mitigate the problem. But these steps take time to implement, particularly the training of new multi-engine instructors. Moreover, the national pilot shortage is forecast to continue for several years. Despite our best efforts, we cannot solve that national problem. Indeed, many of you have confirmed to me that all collegiate flight programs are suffering through an instructor shortage, particularly with multi-engine instructors, except for a large school in Florida which has a tuition structure of over \$230,000. Our challenge is not unique to WMU.

I anticipate that our plans will reduce our waitlist, but due to the rapid and aggressive hiring practices by industry, I cannot definitively predict the exact reduction. Regardless, I remain optimistic that our initiatives will have a positive impact, and I continue to welcome your input on this issue.

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