MARITIME ADMINISTRATION
U.S. Department of Transportation
Center of Excellence (CoE) for Domestic Workforce Training and Education

Cape Fear Community College – Wilmington, North Carolina

The Secretary of Transportation redesignates Cape Fear Community College (CFCC) as a Center of Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education (CoE) for its 58-year history of experiential oceanographic instruction, specialized boatbuilding tracks, and robust coastal fleet assets. Operating from its waterfront campus on the Cape Fear River in Wilmington, North Carolina, CFCC delivers comprehensive afloat and ashore vocational training directly aligned with marine scientific research, hydrographic surveying, and regional boat manufacturing.

Operational Footprint & Assets

Instructional framework integrates hands-on underway training aboard working research vessels with composite manufacturing and traditional woodworking labs.

• **Afloat Marine Technology Track:** Conducts a 2-year Associate in Applied Science (AAS) in Marine Technology focused on oceanographic support. Students log 32 days underway at sea operating specialized seismic and hydrographic instrumentation, including multibeam echo sounders, side-scan sonar, sub-bottom profilers, and biological sampling gear.
• **Training Fleet Infrastructure:** Investing in a new 86-foot aluminum catamaran research vessel to replace the aging 135-foot *R/V Cape Hatteras*. The vessel is under construction and anticipated to arrive in Wilmington in January 2027. Capable of traveling approximately twice as fast as the *R/V Cape Hatteras*, it will expand access to offshore training and research opportunities while reducing maintenance and operating costs. CFCC also operates the 53-ft coastal research vessel *R/V MARTECH* and a fleet of six small boats under 30 ft for inshore navigation and seamanship instruction.
• **Stackable Ashore Boatbuilding Diplomas:** Delivers two 1-year stackable diploma programs in Wooden Boat Building and Boat Manufacture & Service, providing hands-on instruction in lofting, composite/fiberglass lamination, marine spray finishing, and boat electrical, plumbing, and mechanical system installation.

Workforce & Regional Impact

Serves as a primary talent pipeline for scientific, commercial, and defense sectors across the Atlantic seaboard and national maritime industries.

• **High Graduate Placement:** Achieves a 94% job placement rate for Marine Technology graduates, placing alumni into key roles with employers including Geodynamics LLC, TI Coastal Services, Weeks Marine, McKim & Creed, Fugro, US Army Corps of Engineers, and the NC Division of Marine Fisheries.
• **Enrollment & Completion Throughput:** Enrolled more than 330 students across all three pathways between Summer 2025 and Summer 2026, generating more than 50 graduates annually in Marine Technology, Boat Building, and Boat Manufacture.

• **Industry Partnerships and Boatbuilding Innovation:** Expanded hands-on workforce training through a 2026 partnership with Bayliss Boatworks, providing students with real-world boatbuilding experience. Additional training opportunities in outboard systems help students develop skills across both marine construction and mechanical service.
• **Strong Employer Engagement:** CFCC's Third Annual Marine Technology Career Expo in April 2026 brought together more than 100 attendees and 25 employers, approximately half of which were owned or led by CFCC alumni, demonstrating the program's longstanding industry connections and graduate impact.
• **Research & Fleet Operations Support:** Provided critical vessel charter support to the U.S. Navy for environmental mitigation during the shock trial of the aircraft carrier *USS Gerald R. Ford*, and regularly supports research projects for the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) and regional weather buoy maintenance.
• **K-12 STEM Partnerships:** Partnered with New Hanover County's Ashley High School Marine Science Academy through the College and Career Promise program, hosting annual hands-on training cruises and enabling high school seniors to complete up to a third of their college degree coursework before graduation.

Strategic Outlook

To meet emerging economic drivers such as the growth of the Atlantic Offshore Wind sector and coastal infrastructure expansion, CFCC continues to modernize its hydrographic survey suites and marine electronics labs. By combining high-level marine science, advanced data acquisition, and specialized boat construction, Cape Fear Community College maintains a vital pipeline of technically proficient professionals essential to sustaining America's blue economy and oceanographic research capabilities.