

EXPANDING OUR ENGAGEMENT

Western Technical College set the goal of embedding community-based learning and work-based learning in 100% of our associate and technical diploma programs by 2025. In the spirit of collaboration, we have decided to expand the Community Engagement report to incorporate work-based learning initiatives. Our goal is to highlight our progress in reaching the strategic goal and provide a snapshot of our engagement with employers and community partners.

IN THIS REPORT, YOU WILL FIND:

- Overview of CBL & WBL initiatives that took place during COVID-19.
- Updated reporting of Western's progress toward our 2025 goal.
- A look at our apprenticeship training center.
- Creative ways programs are using Handshake.

In partnership,



Grace & Julie



TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Western uses the term **EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING** to explain the process of learning by doing. By engaging Western students in community-based learning and work-based learning experiences and reflection activities, they are better prepared to accomplish their career goals and be active community members.

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING (CBL) is a fluid and purposeful approach to engagement designed to immerse Western students and faculty in an experience that develops skills, enhances learning, and strengthens the communities they serve.

WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) allows Western students to apply the technical and employability skills learned in the classroom to the industry that corresponds with their program.

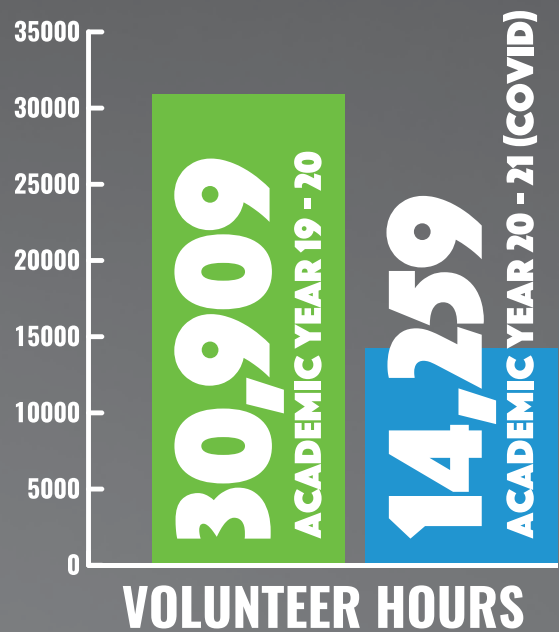
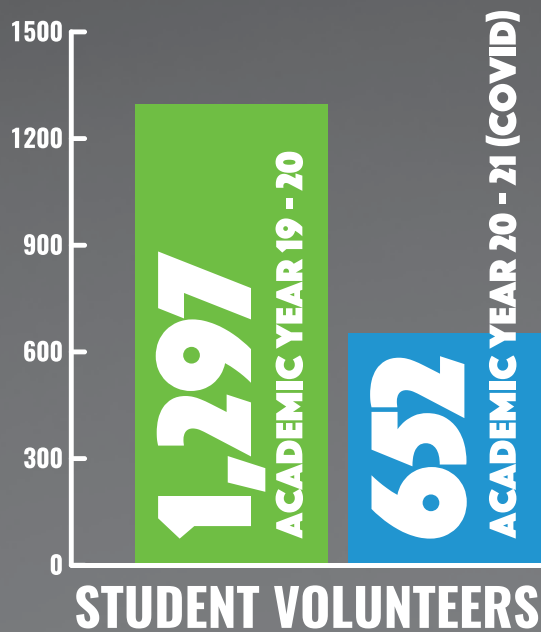
Western Technical College

Western Technical College is in full compliance with state and federal equal opportunity and affirmative action laws and regulations including Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1992, Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991, and Section 38.23 of the Wisconsin Statutes. It is the policy of the Board of the Western Technical College District not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, age, disability, arrest or conviction record, political affiliation, union or non-union affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation, family or medical leave, or membership of the National Guard, state defense force or any other reserve component of the military forces of the United States or Wisconsin, in employment, education programs, admissions and activities. Services, financial aid and other benefits of this College and those originating from the Wisconsin Technical College System Board are provided on a nondiscriminatory basis. Western is committed to the elimination of sex-role stereotyping. Coordination of Title IX and Section 504 have been assigned to the Employment Benefits and EEO Manager at Western Technical College, 400 7th Street North, Post Office Box C-0908, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54602-0908; telephone 608.785.9274.

THE COMMUNITY *IMPACT*

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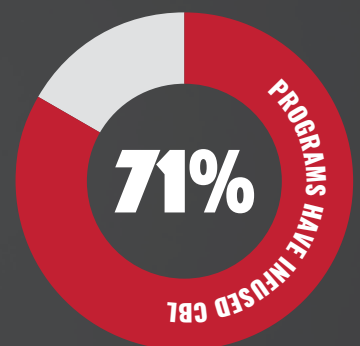
ECONOMIC VALUE OF STUDENT SERVICE HOURS SINCE 2013

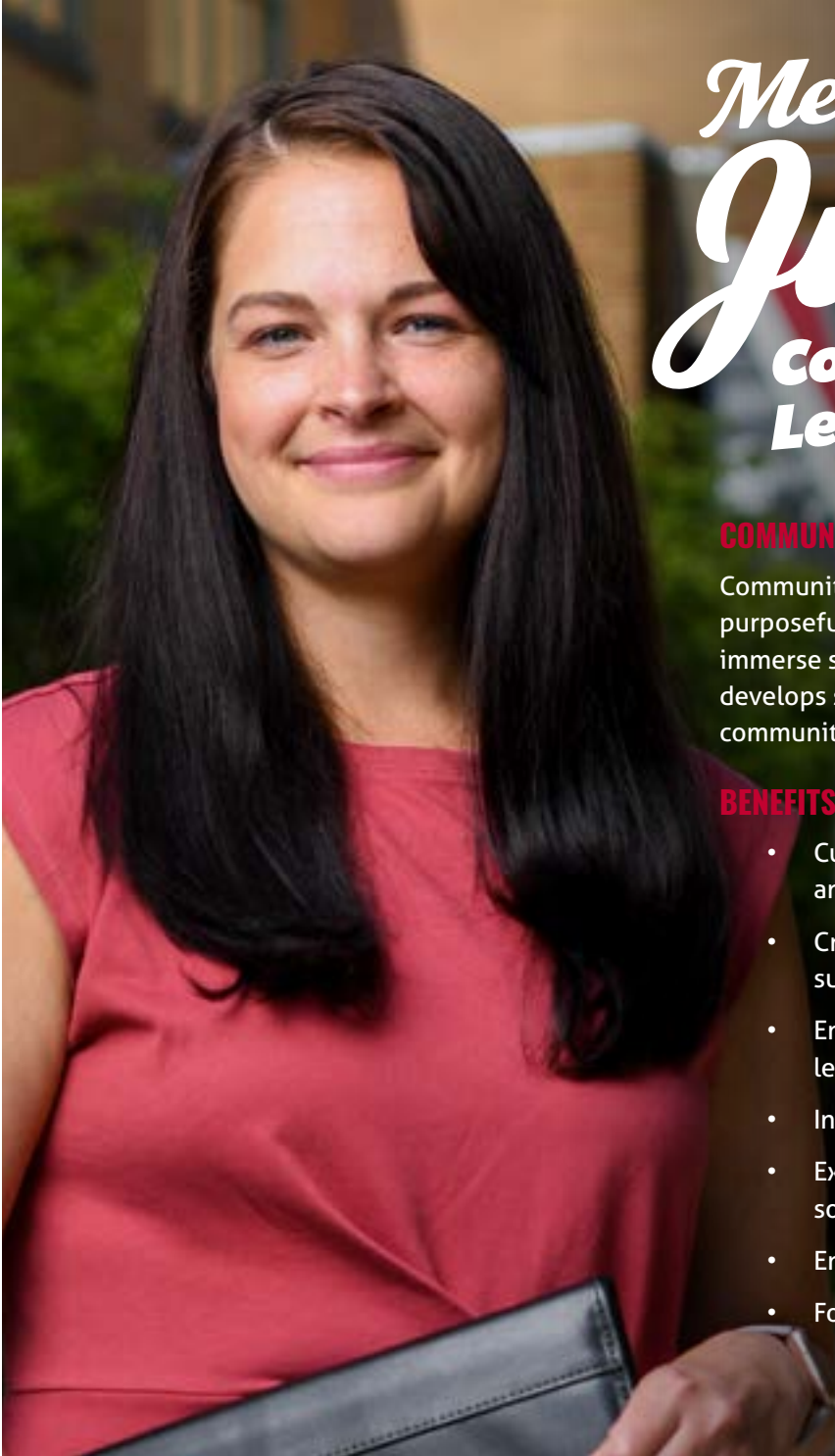


100% PROGRAMS by 2025

2025 STRATEGIC GOAL:

INFUSE WORK-BASED LEARNING AND COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING IN 100% OF ASSOCIATE DEGREE AND TECHNICAL DIPLOMA PROGRAMS BY 2025.





Meet
Julie
Community-Based Learning Specialist

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING DEFINED:

Community-Based Learning (CBL) is a fluid and purposeful approach to engagement designed to immerse students and faculty in an experience that develops skills, enhances learning, and strengthens communities.

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING:

- Cultivate passion through hands-on learning and self-reflection.
- Create a deeper understanding of subject matter.
- Empower students as learners, teachers, leaders, and advocates.
- Increase self-awareness of personal strengths.
- Expand awareness of community and social issues.
- Enhance civic attitudes, skills, and behaviors.
- Foster social justice and equity.



JULIE CHRISTENSEN

Community-Based Learning Specialist

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“**The service-learning experience I did in college is a big part of why I strongly believe in community-based learning. You get to use the skills you’re learning in the classroom which brings with it self-awareness and confidence. I enjoy connecting students with opportunities where they can build on their skills and strengths and give back at the same time.**”

- Julie Christensen

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING EXAMPLES:

Are project-based for students: solve a problem, create a product, plan an event for a community partner that addresses a social issue. Students are assigned service hours and work in tandem with a community partner.

PARTNERING WITH FACULTY:

With a solid commitment to servant leadership and civic engagement, Julie is eager to partner with faculty to incorporate community-based learning into the curriculum. Faculty can invite Julie into their classroom to discuss the importance of community-based learning and how students can find volunteer, civic engagement and community-based learning opportunities. Julie is involved with new and existing community-based learning projects, including Suits for Success, E-Waste Recycling, and the Cavalier Cupboard.

HELPING STUDENTS:

Julie helps Western students find volunteer opportunities on UGetConnected and at nonprofits and agencies throughout the area. She then helps students reflect on their community-based learning experience in order to articulate those experiences on a resume and in job interviews. Her goal is to expand awareness of community and social issues and to empower students as leaders and advocates.

CONNECTING COMMUNITY:

Through her active involvement with community partner agencies and nonprofits throughout the region, Julie is aware of the needs within the community and how students can utilize their skills to help their community thrive. As Western’s UGetConnected specialist, she can answer questions for organizations looking to recruit volunteers to help for one-time and ongoing projects.





Meet Grace

Work-Based Learning Specialist

WORK-BASED LEARNING DEFINED:

A work-based learning (WBL) experience is a chance for Western students to apply the technical and employability skills learned in the classroom with real-world experience.

BENEFITS OF WORK-BASED LEARNING:

- Get immersed in your field with practical work experience, and build confidence in your ability to apply what you are learning in the classroom.
- Gain skills that are valued by employers. These include working as part of a team, being proactive, and time management skills.
- Meet with experienced professionals in your industry, grow your network, gain professional references, and expand your opportunities.
- Cultivate examples for your resume, LinkedIn and Handshake profile, and interviewing that give you an advantage in the job market.
- Deepen awareness of your natural talents and be prepared to discuss your strengths in a job interview.



GRACE JANSSEN

Work-Based Learning Specialist

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“ Work-based learning experiences are definitely interwoven with my entire career. I had opportunities in the peace corps to try new things and discover what I liked and what I didn’t, and to reflect on what’s important in a career. It has taken me a while to find the perfect fit, but I found it at Western. I am fortunate to help students find their perfect fit. ”

- Grace Janssen

WORK-BASED LEARNING EXAMPLES:

Company tours, industry speakers and conferences, field trips, job shadows, career fairs, internships, clinicals, practicums, field experiences.

PARTNERING WITH FACULTY:

As a work-based learning specialist, Grace works with faculty to add work-based learning components into both existing and new programs at Western. She helps faculty arrange virtual networking opportunities, job fairs, company tours, and classroom presentations by employers and industry experts. Grace takes the lead in facilitating connections with employers, so faculty can do what they do best—teach. She regularly comes into classrooms to talk about the advantages of work-based learning experiences and introduce students to job search tools, such as Handshake, and the services available through the Career Services department.

HELPING STUDENTS:

Through work-based learning, students build valuable work experience and begin to build a network within their industry. It’s not uncommon for students to get hired permanently after their internship. Grace works with students to prepare for workplace experiences and then helps them to strategically incorporate those experiences into their resume.

ENGAGING EMPLOYERS:

Grace is the main point of contact for employers interested in creating internship opportunities for Western students. Connecting employers to Western students through participation in internships, job shadows or other workplace learning experiences gives employers an advantage when competing for skilled talent. Grace frequently interacts with employers in various industries helping them to understand the benefits of participating in work-based learning activities.



Handshake

ENGAGING THE CLASSROOM

with the right tools



WELCOME TO HANDSHAKE

Handshake was founded in 2014 by three Midwestern college students with the noble aspiration of democratizing opportunity. Once a tiny startup, Handshake is now the country's largest online job search platform, partnering with over 1,100 higher learning institutions. Western's Career Services Department transitioned from Wisconsin TechConnect to Handshake in the fall of 2020 during peak pandemic. Fortuitously, the new career services platform has timely and valuable features to keep college students moving forward as effectively as possible, even during pandemic restrictions. Handshake also offers seamless connections between students, employers, and Western.

Grace Janssen, Western's Work-Based Learning Specialist, embraced the new platform and its robust capabilities. The Handshake app is free for students and alumni and is intuitive to use. It's easy to review the curated job board, peruse available internships, follow companies of interest, and establish helpful connections and networking opportunities. Students are encouraged to complete their profile on Handshake, which increases the chances that employers will find them and reach out about job opportunities. Career Services staff can help students set up their profile and explore the many features of Handshake as they prepare for their immediate future.

USING WORK-BASED LEARNING SERVICES

Connecting Western students to employers and preparing them for employment is critical to Western's mission of advancing student success.

Western's intent is to implement Work-Based Learning into every program by 2025. This goal will provide multiple opportunities for Western students to connect with Career Services and employers during their program. Depending on the program, work-based learning ranges from job shadows to resume reviews to embedded internships.

Air Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration (HVACR) instructor Mike Stewart enlisted Grace's help in spring 2021. Mike facilitates a one-credit job shadow class for his program students. His class is a combination of guest speakers, resume writing, and purposeful networking to establish three job shadow opportunities followed by a written reflection about the work experience. Mike wondered how best to proceed under COVID restrictions; he worried about proposing a lesser version of the class or even canceling it. Associate Dean Mike Poellinger connected him with Grace. With a virtual spring term a certainty, Mike and Grace met to brainstorm for maximum student-career engagement amidst unprecedented health precautions. Under Grace's guidance, Mike and his classroom pivoted together to make the virtual career fair an event that works for students and employers alike! Mike took full advantage of Grace's classroom services and acumen: he is now a vigorous proponent of both.



“ Our work-based learning specialist can make any instructor’s life easier while ensuring Western students are poised and prepared for life after college. ”

THE EASE OF WBL CLASSROOM INTEGRATION

A networking and relationship-building app like Handshake is a natural fit for virtual needs. The company unveiled easy-to-use virtual event capabilities that are much appreciated by its education partners.

Grace did the legwork of setting up the HVAC career fair on Handshake so Mike could focus on teaching. Nine area employers attended the session, along with 20 students. Grace and the Career Services team provided resume and cover letter writing assistance to each student along with several follow-ups to ensure readiness on career fair day. Students prepared for the fair by identifying employers of interest and formulating insightful questions to ask.

With no booths or lines; meeting with employers on the fly also works. Students sign up for employer-sponsored group sessions and one-on-one breakouts with recruiters. Employers can see career profiles and resumes and speak with students virtually and through a chat feature. Personal connections and setting up job shadows are easily made between employer and student before, during, and after the fair. Students had positive things to say about the

virtual fair. They appreciated the fair as a helpful blend of employer face-to-face time balanced with opportunities for casual talk and space for mental preparation, resulting in an added level of confidence and assuredness. One student even accepted a job offer as a result of the fair!

The benefits of this required class are immeasurable—far outweighing the initial intimidation and frustration of turning a blank page into a perfectly crafted resume, and organizing several real-world opportunities to present it with a well-conceived cover letter. These are difficult paths best traveled together with an abundance of peer and instructor support.

All instructors and classes can—and should—use the remarkable service Career Services provides! Our resident work-based learning specialist can make instructor’s and employers lives easier while ensuring Western students are poised and prepared for life after college.

Celebrating Success

E-WASTE DISPOSAL STA

2018 (TWO-WEEK EVENT): 7,10

2019 (ONE-WEEK EVENT): 5,04

2020 (THREE-DAY EVENT): 3,39

2021 (ONE-DAY EVENT)

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Connecting Community TO FREE TECH SERVICES

Western Computer Support Specialist students plan an annual community-based learning project: the Student-Run Help Desk. The past COVID-focused year was no different. Students organize, staff, and operate a professional-level help desk providing free computer tech services consisting of computer software training,

“ We get paid in experience. It gives us a taste of what we’ll be doing in our profession. ”

**Grant Butler,
Help Desk Manager**

software upgrades, networking issues, troubleshooting, problem-solving, and much more. This year’s help desk was again a virtual event, a natural fit for this project. Clients could call in, email, or use a portal to initiate a service appointment. The help desk is a wonderful project to promote the development of students through the realistic lens of a possible career. The goal is to learn and practice customer service interactions while gaining confidence in both people and technical skills. It’s a valuable benefit for the community and the students involved.

In addition to the help desk, these students organize a community e-waste drop-off location. Dynamic Lifecycle Innovations partners with Western on an annual basis for the e-waste disposal service. This year the e-waste event coincided with the Suits for Success clothing drive as single-day events. Both donation drives enjoyed unprecedented success with the shorter time frame!



WESTERN STUDENTS ARE MAKING IT MAKE SENSE!

THE STUDENT-RUN HELP DESK ASSISTS WITH:

- Questions on all applications or devices.
- Software upgrades and training.
- Troubleshooting hardware: laptops, desktops, tablets, or smartphones.
- Security and virus issues.
- Special projects like database development, spreadsheets, etc.
- Wireless networking issues.
- Other questions.



“ This program is not only helping the students learn, but it also helps the public. It also teaches our students how to become leaders in our community. ”

- Cindy Prindle, Western Instructor

SUITS FOR Success

A COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING PROJECT FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

The Suits for Success community-based learning project is a large portion of the Professional Profile Development course, the essential capstone of Western's Business Management program. Students collaborate with local businesses and non-profit organizations to collect clothing donations and set up a store where community members and students can access free professional clothing along with job search tips and strategies.

This class, one of the last before graduation, requires a hands-on demonstration of knowledge and skills learned in the classroom and throughout the program. The business students plan and organize all aspects of the event. In week one, they organize the event structure and staffing. They nominate classmates for coordinator positions, then interview, and together decide who to hire. Next, committees are formed to efficiently handle all aspects of the project—marketing and advertising, networking, clothing donation drives, inventory management, customer service, soft skills, value-added features, and staffing requirements from set up to take down.

Mutually beneficial needs are met: one student cohort gets valuable work experience by employing every facet of their education. Reciprocally, the other group receives assistance in all aspects of professionalism and preparation for life's next exciting phase. The event is free and open to the public!



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DONATIONS AND DISTRIBUTION 2021 COVID-STYLE

In the midst of a pandemic, the 2021 event looked quite different from past events. Students needed additional planning and problem solving to maintain COVID protocols while retaining the event's original intent and purpose.

Clothing typically collected from 20 to 30 community donation drop sites, was collected through a one-day drive-up-and-drop-off donation event held in an empty Western parking lot. The clothing drop-off event was held simultaneously with the annual E-waste recycling collection facilitated by students in the Computer Support Specialist program. The day was a stunning success, having collected nearly **3,000** clothing items and **18,280** pounds of electronic waste – the most clothing and electronic waste in Western's history!



It was awesome to see individuals just starting out who needed professional attire come in and select items they need. Maybe all they needed was a couple articles of clothing for interviews. Looking professional may help them get that job and change everything.”

Grant Martin

Distribution also changed dramatically in 2021. After cleaning, sorting, and organizing donated clothing, students typically distribute the items at a one-day pop-up store at the Lunda Center where soon-to-be grads and community members access free business attire, style consultation, resume assistance, networking advice, Handshake and LinkedIn profile tips, even professional headshots.

Since a few hundred people in an indoor space was not an option, a curbside drive-thru event was the solution. Prior to the event, students and community members completed an online style form. Based on that form's information, students prepared a precisely curated style package of multiple outfits for each individual, along with a packet that included interview strategies, professional style tips, and a resume handbook.

Recipients loved the ease and quality of the personal, prepared style boxes: another brilliant COVID-inspired idea that will stay in place.

SUITS FOR SUCCESS AT-A-GLANCE

A STORE CREATED BY STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS

- **curated business attire for recent and soon-to-be grads**
- **quality donations make up the inventory**
- **business casual, dresses, suits, shoes, and accessories**

VALUE-ADDED SERVICES

- **how to tie a tie**
- **style consulting**
- **professional headshots**
- **Handshake/LinkedIn profile tips**
- **résumé assistance**
- **effective network strategies**

Apprenticeship:

THE HEIGHT OF WORK-BASED, HANDS-ON LEARNING



“ I use the knowledge I gained through my apprenticeship and Western program every single day. Western instructors contradict the saying, “Those who cannot do, teach.” Instead, they educate with passion and drive in their chosen fields. Not only do they impart their vast experience and knowledge, but they also inspire a passion for the trades through their excellence. ”

Mark Clough, Apprenticeship graduate and master electrician





WESTERN IS A GREAT PLACE TO COMPLETE AN APPRENTICESHIP

The recently upgraded Apprenticeship and Industry Training Center is training a new workforce with state-of-the-art equipment and experienced instruction to match. A boon to the region, the apprenticeship facility is a brilliant vision with a nod to the future but rooted in a practical reality currently unfolding. The programs offered and the apprentices learning these valuable skills provide the foundation of our functioning community and local economy.

College faculty and deans, advisory committees, and area industry came together to ensure a worthwhile community investment in Western's apprenticeship center, consisting of high-tech equipment, living labs, computers, new green technology, and student and faculty spaces. The expanded center increased student capacity while providing more hands-on learning opportunities. Gratifying for our instructors to witness, Western graduates completed much of the construction, proudly showcasing their well-practiced and refined skills, punctuating the quality of the education.



Teaching and passing on specific skill sets is a viable system used since the Middle Ages. Hundreds of years ago and much like today, the trades were essential to daily life and the community's welfare. Those who had a particular skill or artisan talent acquired through apprenticeship made a higher and steady income. Through apprenticeship training, employers invest in their employees by paying for their education and providing structured on-the-job training.

WORLD-CLASS WORK-BASED LEARNING AND TRAINING FOR SKILLED TRADES

The facility is smart, practical, and beautiful; the design intends to surpass one-dimensional classroom instruction by mimicking real-world training scenarios under a qualified tradesperson's guidance. The education piece is dynamic and two-fold: specifically designed living labs deepen the classroom learning with immediately available hands-on applications—the equipment and teaching strategy increases understanding and retention.

The theory of study and hands-on classroom applications are engaging students, instructors, and employers in new ways. The community collaboration involved in the curriculum design is crucial to Western's relevant education, student success and confidence, and on-the-job training. Area businesses directly benefit from our world-class teaching and systems.



THE FUTURE OF APPRENTICESHIP AT WESTERN AND BEYOND

Apprenticeship jobs are highly skilled and technical; they are a great way to jump-start a career and earning potential. Work and learn simultaneously—receive an industry-recognized portable credential, an associate degree with little to no debt, or even transfer to a four-year college as your employer invests in you. A wave of highly skilled and experienced retirees will soon be here, and there is already a skills gap in young people. Job opportunities are plentiful in this region and come with enviable salaries.

The curriculum and the center are parts of a strategy to build an attractive environment for students while creating a career path they want to enter. Western has defined paths leading to traditional associate degree programs and beyond. Always working with local employers to identify needs and trends, Western currently offers programs in construction, industrial, and service trades.

- **CONSTRUCTION ELECTRICIAN**
- **INDUSTRIAL ELECTRICIAN**
- **MAINTENANCE MECHANIC**
- **MILLWRIGHT**
- **PLUMBING**
- **STEAM FITTING**
- **SHEET METAL**





THE TECHNOLOGY INSIDE THE CENTER

The most exciting aspect of the new building is the technologically advanced living lab learning system. Because of these labs, Western stands out in its successful efforts to offer even more hands-on application opportunities for comprehensive skills training. For more on the center and living labs, visit www.westerntc.edu/apprenticeship.





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