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Contact: Mark Gunderman, Communications Specialist
Chippewa Valley Technical College
Desk: 715-831-7288
Cell: 715-210-4714
mgunderman1@cvtc.edu

Manufacturing Students Returning to Labs at CVTC

Precautions taken in programs like Industrial Mechanics, Welding

Eau Claire, WI – Joseph Kitzberger of Ellsworth saw some advantage when the Industrial Mechanics program at Chippewa Valley Technical College switched to an all-online format. But he is also very happy to be back in the program lab in Eau Claire this summer.

“I liked the online learning because I live an hour away, and I could complete the stuff at home without driving,” he said. “But you couldn’t touch what you were working on. Now we’re getting the chance to actually do the things we’ve been learning about online.”

The hands-on, job-focused learning that CVTC is known for has resumed this summer, setting the stage for a more significant return when the fall semester begins Aug. 24. Steps like limited numbers in labs, social distancing, face masks and ongoing sanitation of work areas have been taken to protect both students and faculty during the ongoing pandemic.

The difference can be immediately seen in the Industrial Mechanics lab, where 20 or more people commonly worked at a variety of stations, often in groups, especially since CVTC’s \$1.7 million share of a Department of Labor TechHire Partnership grant in 2016 allowed for expansion of the program. Now only 10 people, including the instructor, are allowed at a time.

“When they arrive, we have to verify that they didn’t answer ‘yes’ to any of the questions in a symptoms and risks survey and verify that they have a mask,” said Tim Tewalt, program director. “We make sure they use a hand sanitizer and advise them to wash their hands frequently.”

Tewalt added that although students working together frequently happened in the past, there is no need for students to be close to each other, so maintaining social distancing is not a big issue in the lab. Instructors also try to stay six feet away when answering questions.

Students say they feel safe in the environment.

“It’s as safe as it can get without not coming in,” said Tyler Kumferman of Eau Claire. “They’re giving us health questions, having us wear masks and keeping us apart.”

Welding students were moved farther apart, with first-year students moving to the West Annex building at the main Clairemont campus and students wear face shields.

“For me, I’ve always felt safe,” said Rachel Holm, a first-year welding student from Elk Mound. “But if you are worried about the pandemic, there’s nothing to worry about here. We all have to wear masks and face guards. We social distance. There’s less kids in class than before. We sanitizes everything. We’re following protocol.”

The weeks the students spent outside the labs was not ideal, but was productive nonetheless.

“We did multiple things for online learning,” Tewalt said. “We had built-in simulators in our instructional programming. The students would do simulations, then make a video of themselves doing the tasks while explaining what they were doing.”

Similar approaches were taken in Welding and Machine Tool classes.

“When we were off, students who had access to design software were able to do production sheets, so when we got back to the lab, we had a game plan,” said Wally Quaschnick, Welding program director.

“I was getting what I needed, and they made it as convenient as they could,” Kumferman said. “They had all the simulators set up online, but it’s not the same as being in the lab.”

“We were shut down for quite a bit,” said Nate Ebert, a second-year Welding student from Eau Claire. “But the school was able to find out the guidelines and got us back in the lab toward the end of last semester, and we were able to get in some of the missed hours. I got all the basics down, but what I missed was the extra practice time working on my own projects.”

“We really couldn’t be an online-only class, but we were able to do some things, like bid sheets and procedure sheets and send them to Wally,” said David Ziehr, a second-year Welding student from Menomonie. “About three weeks before the end of the semester, we were able to get back in the lab.”

“Our faculty really stepped up,” said Jeff Sullivan, dean of apprenticeships, engineering, manufacturing and IT. “Now getting back on campus can supplement what they learned online. The lab time is really critical.”

With over 155 programs offered both online and on-campus, Chippewa Valley Technical College delivers superior, progressive technical education which improves the lives of students, meets the workforce needs of the region, and strengthens the community. CVTC programs are designed with input of business and industry to prepare graduates for today’s jobs, with 95 percent employed within six months of graduation and associate degree graduates earning an average annual salary of \$46,816.

Cutlines:

Menomonie photo

David Ziehr, a second-year Welding student from Menomonie pulls a piece of sheet metal in the Welding lab at CVTC in Eau Claire recently. Manufacturing students returned to labs this summer, with some adjustments made due to the pandemic.

Elk Mound photo

Rachel Holm, a first-year welding student from Elk Mound, poses in a Welding lab at CVTC in Eau Claire recently. Manufacturing students returned to labs this summer, with some adjustments made due to the pandemic.

EC photo

Tyler Kumferman, an Industrial Mechanics student from Eau Claire works in the program lab at CVTC in Eau Claire recently. Manufacturing students returned to labs this summer, with some adjustments made due to the pandemic.

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