

Western
Technical College

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AGRIBUSINESS SCIENCE
TECHNOLOGY

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ANNUAL REPORT | 2025

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CAPTURING INVISIBLE STORIES:

Western Students Honor Veterans Through Photography

Western Technical College Digital Media students recently applied their classroom learning in a real-world context. They used their photography skills to support and document the stories of local women veterans. As part of the national veterans' campaign, I Am Not Invisible (IANI), students collaborated with the La Crosse County Veterans Service Office to create a local version of the national portrait campaign, which aims to honor and give a voice to women veterans.

The driving force behind the local event is Jane Brannan, La Crosse County Veteran Service Officer. After seeing an IANI exhibit at another Wisconsin college, she realized La Crosse had its own untold stories. "Women veterans are often overlooked, and many of their accomplishments go unrecognized or are diminished," Brannan said. "This event was a way to showcase their strength and remind our community of the value of their service." The project is part of Western's Experiential Learning initiative, where students "learn by doing," applying classroom concepts to meaningful community-based projects. Under the guidance of instructor Mike Lieurance, students moved beyond textbook scenarios into real-world tasks that encouraged them to reflect, problem-solve creatively, and develop professional skills through active, purposeful engagement involvement.

The students assisted Brannan with this project by planning and executing the photography sessions and working directly with the veterans to capture black-and-white portraits that conveyed both strength and individuality. Some students managed logistics, while others focused on lighting, composition, and ensuring that the veterans felt at ease. Several students, including Taylor Baker and Suki Vue, helped with interview preparation and provided support on the day of the shoot. Their roles challenged them to be flexible, focused, and ready to respond in the moment—just like they would in a professional shoot.

"It taught me how important it is to create a positive and supportive environment during a shoot," said Taylor. Suki agreed: "It felt rushed at times, but that's just part of a real-world shoot. I had to stay calm and professional—and I'm grateful for the experience."

Beyond technical skills, the project encouraged students to delve deeper into the power of storytelling. "Learning photography isn't just about lighting or camera settings," Lieurance explained. "It's about capturing the essence of a person—and sharing their story with others." This deeper understanding of narrative and representation lies at the heart of experiential learning—helping students grow not only in their craft but also in their ability to connect with others through meaningful work.



Learning in Action: Taylor Baker

Taylor assisted with photo session preparations and worked directly with veterans, helping them feel comfortable and supported. She learned firsthand how essential it is to build trust and positivity during a shoot. "It wasn't just about taking pictures," she said. "Listening closely to the veterans made the portraits more meaningful and made me a better communicator."



Learning in Action: Suki Vue

Suki supported logistics and assisted during the photo sessions, learning how to handle the pace and pressure of a professional shoot. He gained new insight into how powerful photography can be. "The project showed me that visual storytelling isn't only about technical details—it's about honoring people's experiences," he said. "It changed how I think about my own photography."

Participants brought personal items—uniforms, medals, and keepsakes—that provided visual and emotional context to their portraits. One walk-in participant, Cynthia Hubbard, was the first female pilot of a bomber aircraft in the Air Force. “She broke a glass ceiling for women who came after her, how awesome is that?” said Brannan.

Among the veterans photographed was Chelsey Willms, a Western alum, Army veteran, and current instructor. Her story brought the project full circle. “I never imagined my path would lead me back here,” Willms said. “But this project reminded me that our stories—our service, our struggles—matter. Sharing that with students made it even more meaningful.”

The portraits were unveiled at a well-attended public reception in La Crosse. For many veterans, it was the first time they had been formally recognized for their service. For the students, the event showcased the powerful impact their work could have.

“This project allows students to see the intersection of their skills with community needs,” Lieurance said. “It’s a type of learning that remains with them long after the assignment is complete.”

Western’s Experiential Learning projects continue to create opportunities like this—where students develop confidence and professionalism through impactful real-world work. For the community, these collaborations foster deeper connections with the work and yield meaningful outcomes. For students, they pave the way to the future by demonstrating that their skills can make a difference now.

How The Lineup Is Helping Students Get Career-Ready

Students come to Western Technical College to build skills—and to put those skills to work. But finding the right opportunity at the right time isn’t always easy. Between part-time jobs, class schedules, and the overwhelming volume of job boards, students can miss valuable connections.

That’s where The Lineup comes in

Created by Western’s Career Services Specialist, Lizzie Tesar, The Lineup is a biweekly email series that curates job and career information tailored to each academic program. Each edition pulls together recent job and internship postings from Handshake—a career network platform used by colleges across the country—as well as “employer collections,” which are personalized job recommendations based on a student’s Handshake profile and program of study. The email also includes upcoming career events, making it a one-stop resource to help students find the right opportunity at the right time.

Tesar dedicated a significant portion of the project to researching best practices, collaborating with staff and faculty, and designing a scalable system that directly supports student career readiness. Her work exemplifies the elimination of unnecessary barriers for students as they seek internships, part-time, and full-time employment.

It’s already working

Just ask Ella Greene, a Digital Marketing graduate who used The Lineup to land a social media internship. “It’s a great way to showcase your skills to employers who are looking for someone like you,” Greene says. “I suggest everyone open those emails—especially if you’re hoping to land a job or internship while you’re still in school.”

Greene had been watching for marketing experience when one of The Lineup emails



landed in her inbox. Within minutes, she spotted a social media internship that felt like a perfect match and applied the same day. “I honestly don’t think I would’ve seen that posting otherwise,” she says. “It made it so easy to take that next step.”

Greene’s internship helped her build a strong resume, sharpen her content and design skills, and solidify her path in digital marketing. Now, she wants more students to take advantage of the resource that launched her own journey. Greene’s story is just one example of how The Lineup bridges the gap between the classroom and the career world. It’s not just a smart communications project—it’s a communications project that leads to experiential learning opportunities: connecting local employers with talented students.

The results speak for themselves. With an average open rate above 53%, The Lineup regularly outperforms industry benchmarks. Each edition reaches hundreds of students, with some editions featuring more than 100 job and internship opportunities. Employers benefit, too. Their postings land directly in the inboxes of students preparing for careers in their industries. It’s targeted, efficient, and another way Western builds meaningful workforce connections.

With over 400 emails sent across 22 editions of The Lineup during the 2024–25 academic year and a total of 1,970 job postings, The Lineup has evolved into more than just a newsletter. It serves as a model of how student-created, career-connected learning can produce tangible results for students, employers, and the Western community.

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Experiential Learning Annual Report

Western Technical College embeds **CBL AND WBL EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING** into every one of our degree programs. The college is proud of its hands-on education—a proven powerful learning method. Experiential learning increases student success by adding work-based and community-based experiences that bring learning to life.

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.



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