

Western
Technical College

IMPACT

A magazine for community members, friends, and alumni of Western Technical College.



Haley Lemke, Western Respiratory Therapy graduate

SPRING 2024

Welcome to IMPACT



Friends and Neighbors,

It is with great pride that I address you through the pages of Western Technical College's annual magazine, *IMPACT*. As the president of Western, I am honored to share the stories of our students, graduates, and co-workers that convey the important role our college plays in western Wisconsin.

The mission of our institution is not just about the academic excellence we pursue but also the communities we build and nurture. This edition of our magazine is a testament to the vibrant

life that exists within our campus walls and the impact we make beyond them. We celebrate the achievements of our students and staff, whose dedication and talent continue to elevate our college's reputation.

This year, we have embarked on several initiatives to enhance the educational experience for our students. One of the most impactful changes is the transition from a 15-week course schedule to a 7-week schedule beginning with our Summer 2024 term. With the change, each academic year will include six 7-week sessions: two in fall term, two in spring term, and two in summer term. Students will remain enrolled in the same number of credits in each term but will take fewer classes at one time.

We chose this approach after reviewing national, state, and our own data, which showed that shorter course periods help students remain on the path to academic success. Part-time students can focus on one to two courses at a time while earning more credits each term. Full-time students can spread out their workload more evenly throughout a term. I encourage you to learn more about this exciting initiative on page 11 or by visiting www.westerntc.edu/7-weeks.

As we look forward, our focus remains on preparing our students to thrive in their fields and become engaged in their communities. We continue to expand our partnerships with local businesses and four-year higher education institutions to offer our students new opportunities for learning and growth.

To our alumni, supporters, and the wider community, your support and belief in our mission fuels our progress. We are grateful for the partnerships we have built and look forward to fostering even stronger connections in the years to come.

Warmest Regards,

Roger Stanford
President, Western Technical College

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Western Technical College is one of 16 technical colleges that make up the Wisconsin Technical College System. Western is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Western is also a member of the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), and the Wisconsin Association for Career and Technical Education (WACTE). Several of Western's programs are also accredited through national professional organizations.

Western is an Equal Opportunity/Access/Employer and Educator.

MISSION STATEMENT: Western Technical College provides relevant, high quality education in a collaborative and sustainable environment that changes the lives of students and grows our communities.

**Western
Technical College**



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Western NEWS

Western, UW-Platteville sign new transfer agreements

Western and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville formally signed a number of transfer agreements for UW-Platteville's engineering programs at a signing ceremony last December.

The agreement allows students enrolled in Western's Associate of Science (AS) program to transfer into UW-Platteville's Electrical, Mechanical, and Industrial and Systems Engineering bachelor's degree programs who have filled their general education requirements. Students must meet the minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) score of 2.0 and complete at least 32 credits of upper-level coursework at UW-Platteville.

"Our regional workforce continues to demand highly skilled workers, including engineers of all kinds," said Western President Roger Stanford. "Once again, we continue to work on these agreements to expand access for students of all backgrounds and reduce financial barriers to so many in our region. This is an exciting day for Western."

The planning and development of new educational pathways has been funded in part by the State of Wisconsin's System to System grant which supports university transfer and degree attainment. The agreement takes effect immediately.



Officials from Western Technical College and UW-Platteville signed a series of transfer agreements this past December.

New IT program launching this fall

A new IT-Data and Analytic Specialist program will be available for Western students beginning with the Fall 2024 term. The new program focuses on building proficiency in statistical tools and problem-solving to unveil data insights, build databases, and craft reports. The curriculum places emphasis on cultivating software skills, spanning data-specific programming languages, artificial intelligence, and Big Data. The program will be offered in a face-to-face, online, or hybrid format, depending on a student's need.

"Businesses and organizations continue to collect and amass large amounts of data, and they are asking for more employees who can manage it all," said Josh Gamer, dean of the Integrated Technology Division at Western. "The

demand for these positions is growing, and Western is at the forefront to providing the appropriate training."

When considering new programs, the college conducts a deep analysis process called Developing a Curriculum, or DACUM. The process brings local employers together to determine major duties and related tasks of the occupation, look at trends in job opportunities and living wages, and develop curriculum to create successful programs.

Other factors include labor specific market data, student interest, and the college's resources and personnel. Following this process, the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) must approve the new program.



Western cuts the ribbon on new Urban Green Space

Western celebrated the opening of the new Urban Green Space at a ribbon cutting ceremony last fall.

The Western Urban Green Space is dedicated to public service workers, including police officers, firefighters, civil servants, and teachers. The green space is



From left to right: Western President Roger Stanford, District Board Chair Ken Peterson, Student Body President Tessa Thurin, Integrated Technology Division Associate Dean Mike Poellinger, Viterbo University Professor Tom Thibodeau, and Horticulture Instructor David Lein cutting the ribbon on Western's new Urban Green Space in September.

located on Western's campus at the corner of 6th and Vine Streets in La Crosse, and includes a variety of plants, shrubs, and trees, as well as seating and shade. The space is open to the public.

The celebration in September included speeches from President Roger Stanford,

Student Body President Tessa Thurin, and Viterbo University Professor Tom Thibodeau, who spoke on the importance of service to our community.

A special thank you to the donors who made this project possible!

Western, Gundersen partner to address paramedic needs in community



Western and Gundersen Health System celebrated a big milestone by graduating the first cohort of Paramedic Trainees in a ceremony last December. The collaboration is specifically designed to address paramedic shortages in the region.

The Paramedic Trainee program is a new venture between Western and Gundersen Health System, where current EMT employees at Gundersen Tri-State Ambulance were paid to attend a program through Western's Business and Industry Services. While the traditional Paramedic program remains available to the community, this condensed format allows for additional flexibility for EMT employees of Gundersen.



Meet Western's *Student Ambassador* Courtney Chambers

By Eric Jacobson

Courtney Chambers, of La Crosse, has been selected as the 2024-25 Western Technical College Student Ambassador, an official spokesperson for Western and the Wisconsin Technical college System (WTCS).

As Student Ambassador, Courtney will have opportunities to speak to potential students, community leaders and groups, and will spotlight the important role of technical and occupational education to the economy and society. In addition, she will represent Western at the state level by working with other student ambassadors throughout the WTCS.

Courtney is a Human Services student who is set to graduate this December. She chose Western because of the various support systems in place to help all students succeed. She believes the support she received at Western has set her up to achieve her dreams and support herself and her family.

"I feel comfortable asking questions when I need help. I have a great support system at Western through PALS (personalized applied learning strategies), Access Services, the SPACE, and the Human Services instructors," said Courtney. "This proves to me that my hard work and efforts are being noticed, and I am thankful to Western for this opportunity."

In her spare time, Courtney continues to give back to the community. She works with Western's on-campus food pantry, the Cavalier Cupboard, distributing snacks to various areas on campus. She also works at The Bridge, a program for middle and high school students at United Methodist Church in La Crescent. She also serves as a member of the Black History Committee at Western, as well as vice president for the Human Services Club.

"A personal value of mine is respect," adds Chambers. "I was raised to respect all people. It doesn't matter where you came from or what your background or nationality is."

"Courtney is Western," said AJ Clauss, Equity and Inclusion Leader at Western. "She has overcome so many obstacles in her life and has the most positive belief in herself and in humanity. She will call out injustice and still call-in people to the conversation. This opportunity allows Courtney the intentional chance to shine. The world needs to witness her light."

Courtney plans to enter the workforce upon graduation. In her spare time, she enjoys working as a volunteer at the Onalaska Church of Christ, working with youth ministry.



A best kept *secret*

If you look around closely enough, you will no doubt come across a product made in part from DuraTech Industries. The La Crosse-based company, which began in 1977, has been making labels on various devices for nearly 50 years, and is one of only a handful in the world to do this specific work. If it's a medical device or a cover of a washer and dryer, it most likely came from DuraTech.

"It's everywhere," Christine Wehrle, Vice President of Human Resources and Quality Assurance, says with a smile.

Like nearly every other industry, a lot has changed over the years. Wehrle, who has been with DuraTech for 38 years, has seen automation and advanced manufacturing largely replace the work that was done back in the 1980s. In addition, DuraTech has nearly tripled its workforce in the La Crosse region, going from a little over 100 employees when she began, to over 300 now in 2024.

With that growth, combined with a workforce that is always changing, comes a demand for customized training. That's where Western's Business and Industry Services (BIS for short) comes in. BIS is a division within Western that provides customized training, workplace assessments, and professional development to a variety of businesses throughout the region.

"When people think of educational opportunities from Western, often the associate degree and technical diploma programs are the first things that come to mind," says Angie

Martin, Director of Business & Industry Services at Western.

Employers like Duratech have discovered that by working with Western BIS, they can leverage the power of our local technical college for employee training.

"From an employee development perspective, I believe that Western BIS is one of the best kept secrets in our region," Martin added. "With many business sectors facing unprecedented workforce shortages, employers are looking for alternative ways to upskill their existing workforce."

By partnering with Western BIS, companies can tap into the resources available at the college and build training programs that get their employees the skills they need fast: "We really can be a one-stop full-service provider for employee training and development," Martin added.

More specifically, Western's relationship with DuraTech stretches back to 2011 with the company's first Workforce Advanced Training (WAT) grant via the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS). These grants help offset customized training costs with funding from the state. Since then, DuraTech has completed several more WAT grants to continue upscaling its workforce. Whether or not a WAT grant is used, BIS works directly with DuraTech and others to provide custom training to each of its clients.

In DuraTech's case, they use a wide variety of customized training – not just for technical training. Courses they take involve safety, electrical, computer programming, leadership development, and Microsoft Excel, to name a few.

"Whenever we need something, I pick up the phone and say 'Hey, what can we do with this? This is what we need. Do you have anything?' says Wehrle. "They come back with, 'Let me see what we can do.' Ultimately, they always come back with a solution. It's great."

Since COVID, business for BIS has grown as companies continue to find creative ways to recruit new workers. When bringing in a less experienced workforce, the demand for workforce training has increased. At DuraTech, that trend continues, as leaders begin to retire, and new employees are brought in.

"We just need you to come in here with a great attitude and great attendance and wanting to learn," said Wehrle. "We will teach you the rest."

And BIS is a big part of that teaching. In addition to the work BIS does with DuraTech, several Western graduates can be found in a variety of departments,

including graphic design, maintenance and IT. DuraTech has also been a proud sponsor of BIS' Manufacturing Luncheon, which celebrates the role of advanced manufacturing in the region, every October. Because the event involves middle school students, DuraTech has also expanded its relationship with area school districts, allowing educators an inside look at manufacturing in the region.

"It's great. It's been a fantastic relationship," said Wehrle. "(Western) has made it so easy for us. There have been times we don't know what we need, and they come back with a solution."

And while BIS may be a best kept secret for now, DuraTech doesn't feel it will be for very long.

"People just don't realize the jewel they have at Western that can really make things easier for businesses," said Wehrle. "It's just so easy."



Top photo: Western BIS instructor Roxanne Smothers teaching a group of DuraTech students in a Conflict Resolution class put on by Western's BIS.

Above: Western BIS instructor Terrelle Wilson teaching a project management class put on by Western's BIS.

She believed she could, so she did

Haley Lemke's journey to her dream job

Despite the financial constraints of higher education, Haley remained undeterred. She skillfully balanced four career-related jobs while attending school, all fueled by her serious commitment to contribute something positive to the world.

During her time at Western, Haley found a supportive community that fostered her growth and development as a healthcare professional. The respiratory therapy students, all 14 of them, became a close-knit cohort and supported each other along the way. The intimate class sizes and personalized attention from instructors gave her the tools to thrive. Engaging in hands-on learning experiences during clinical rotations at prestigious institutions like Mayo Clinic and Gundersen Health System, Haley gained invaluable skills and knowledge that helped prepare her for the challenges of her future career.

Haley secured her internship at Children's Minnesota her last year at Western. She knew she wanted to work with kids, so she applied accordingly. Children's Minnesota is the only health system in the state dedicated exclusively to children, and the only Level I Trauma Center in Minnesota that provides comprehensive care from prenatal to young adulthood. In other words, a great place to learn and grow.

After eight months of working 12-hour alternating weekend dayshifts as an intern, she graduated from Western. Haley took three national board exams; CRT (certified respiratory therapist), RRT (registered respiratory therapist), and NPS (neonate pediatric specialty). Then Haley transitioned

to a full-time registered respiratory therapist working straight 12-hour night shifts.

Immersed in the fast-paced environment of a level one trauma center, she gained firsthand experience throughout the hospital: all ICU and ER floors, CVICU (cardiovascular intensive care unit), and PICU (pediatric care unit) solidifying her passion for working with children. Now, she primarily works in NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) where she attends deliveries, gestations ranging from 22 weeks to 41 weeks, and provides critical care to infants and children with respiratory ailments. Haley embraces every opportunity to help her young patients and their loved ones. Families stay at the hospital for anywhere from a handful of days to a year.



Haley's relationship building strengths are a needed source of comfort for families; she lets them know that their child is in the best place they can be.

Haley is excited about the opportunities for growth and advancement in her career. Currently undergoing training for the neonatal transport team, she embraces new challenges with enthusiasm. This coveted opportunity requires her to venture beyond hospital walls to provide crucial assistance to babies in need alongside a travelling team



of a nurse practitioner and two paramedics. Their missions take them to various locations as far west as the Dakotas, as far north as International Falls and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. They also support the local Twin Cities hospitals as well as hospitals in Hudson and Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and travel using different modes of transportation, including ambulances, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft.

The transport team assignments vary greatly, from routine consultations to urgent cases involving critically ill infants. As the respiratory therapist on the team, Haley handles tasks typically performed by nurses, such as assisting with intubation, chest tube and umbilical line placement. Haley also handles medication dosage calculation and administration, and patient ventilation care. The training for the team is extensive and thorough: Haley had been on countless ride-alongs with a seasoned respiratory therapist, experienced months of simulations, and learned all the support skills and equipment used during transport. This immersive learning experience equips her with the confidence and expertise needed to navigate high-stress situations effectively.

Maintaining mental health in an emotionally demanding career is crucial and another important part of job preparation; Haley emphasizes the importance of coping strategies. Stress levels vary day-to-day, and

the unpredictability of the job can be tricky. To stay grounded, she takes the hospital's recommendation of seeking support from colleagues and allow for open discussions about shared challenges, happy times, and sad stories. Talking about emotions and experience processing is essential for mental well-being. Haley sees a therapist regularly as part of her self-care routine. She acknowledges that it's normal to feel overwhelmed and encourages others to express their emotions rather than suppress them. Despite the intense nature of her work, or perhaps because of it, Haley remains compassionate and committed to patient care while prioritizing her own mental health.

Working in a level 1 trauma hospital has undoubtedly changed Haley as a person. Starting this career at 22 and now at 27, she reflects on her growth. Witnessing the traumatic incidents and the fragility of life in the hospital has been eye-opening. Haley emphasizes the importance of cherishing loved ones and living each day to the fullest. Haley's outlook on life has shifted, she possesses a deep appreciation for the preciousness of life, making it her biggest personal transformation. Her best piece of advice is to always remain teachable, no matter how far into your career you are.

Haley's journey at Children's Minnesota has been marked by growth, learning, and

"Haley is an excellent representation of what the Respiratory Therapy profession can provide."

Franz Schuttenhelm
Instructor, Respiratory Therapy

a meaningful impact for the community. Celebrating her fifth anniversary with the hospital in January 2024, Haley reflects on the milestones she's achieved and the lives she's touched so far.

Haley's story is an inspiration to aspiring healthcare professionals—a demonstration of the power of purpose, passion, and the relentless pursuit of excellence. From the initial spark of interest in healthcare to saving tiny lives at Children's Minnesota, Haley shows us the power of education and finding your place in the world. If it's emotional and hard, but still feels right and brings you joy every day, that's perfection. You are in the right place, doing the right things.

Children's
MINNESOTA

Children's Minnesota is a leading pediatric health system: it comprises two hospitals, nine primary care clinics, seven rehabilitation, and nine specialty care sites. Since its inception in 1924, it has remained an independent, not-for-profit organization advocating for the well-being of children.

Haley balances work life with her fiancé, Wade, and her two cats, Jasper and Apollo.

By Lauri Hoff

Haley Lemke's journey from a student at Western Technical College to a trusted respiratory therapist at Children's Minnesota reflects her hard work, dedication to a good plan, and genuine passion for helping others. Graduating from Western's Respiratory Therapy program in 2019, Haley embarked on a transformative path that would shape her career and positively impact countless vulnerable young lives.

Growing up in Holmen, Wisconsin, Haley knew she wanted something in healthcare, but did not think nursing was for her. Her high school guidance counselor suggested exploring other areas, for example respiratory therapy, or x-ray or ultrasound technician programs. Haley agreed a great place to start would be Western since it's so close to home. The first and last program she explored was Respiratory Therapy—she immediately found her area of interest! A tour of Western opened her eyes to the possibilities within the field, and a classroom shadowing experience solidified her decision to pursue this path.

Submitted photos

Western PROGRAMS

Areas of Interest

Western categorizes its programs into Areas of Interest to better show how they are connected to career areas. Below are the 10 Areas of Interest and the associate degree and technical diploma programs within each area. Visit www.westernnc.edu to see the full list, including certificates.

Advanced Manufacturing

- Welding and Fabrication
- Welding Technician

Agriculture & Natural Resources

- Agri-Business Science Technology
- Farm Business Production Management
- Landscape Horticulture

Business & Professional Services

- Accounting
- Accounting Assistant
- Business Management
- Business Specialist
- Digital Marketing
- Digital Marketing Specialist
- Digital Media Production
- Foundations of Leadership
- Graphic Design
- Health Office Professional
- Human Resource Management
- IT – Data & Analytics Specialist
- Leadership Development
- Leadership & Supervision Professional
- Legal Studies/Paralegal
- Legal Studies/Paralegal Post Baccalaureate
- Medical Administrative Professional
- Sales Management
- Sales Representative

Design & Construction Technology

- Air Conditioning, Heating, & Refrigeration
- Architectural Technology
- Building Construction & Cabinet Making
- Building Science and Energy Management
- Interior Design
- Refrigeration, Air Conditioning, & Heating Service Technician

Education and Human Services

- Early Childhood Education
- Educational Assistant
- Foundations of Teacher Education
- Human Services Associate

Health Sciences

- Dental Assistant
- Health Information Technology
- Medical Assistant
- Medical Coding Specialist
- Medical Lab Technician
- Nursing - Associate Degree
- Nursing Assistant
- Occupational Therapy Assistant
- Physical Therapist Assistant
- Radiography
- Respiratory Therapy
- Surgical Technology

University Transfer – Liberal Arts

- Associate of Arts
- Associate of Science

Public Safety

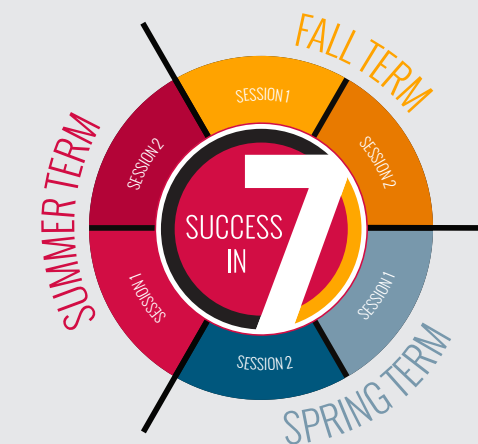
- Criminal Justice
- Criminal Justice – Law Enforcement 720 Academy
- Emergency Medical Technician – Advanced
- Emergency Medical Technician – Basic
- Emergency Medical Technician – Paramedic
- Fire Protection Technician
- Paramedic Technician

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

- Computer Aided Design (CAD) Technician
- Electromechanical Maintenance Technician
- Electromechanical Technology
- Electronic & Computer Engineering Technology – CET
- Industrial Machine Controls
- Internet of Things (IoT) Integration Specialist
- IT – Computer Support Specialist
- IT – Computer Support Technician
- IT – Cybersecurity & Network Administration
- IT – Network Technician
- IT – Web & Software Developer
- Mechanical Design Technology
- Mechatronic and Robotic Engineering Technology

Transportation

- Automotive Maintenance & Light Repair Technician – Level 1
- Automotive Service Technician – Level 2
- Automotive Technician
- Diesel & Heavy Equipment Technician
- Diesel & Heavy Equipment Technician Assistant



7-WEEK SESSIONS

This summer, Western is offering the majority of our courses in 7-week Sessions. The academic calendar will still be in 15-week Spring, Summer, and Fall terms, but students will take fewer classes at a time! The goal is for students to find success earlier and reach their goals more quickly.

Each academic year includes six 7-week sessions: two in fall, two in spring, and two in summer. There are short breaks between each of the six 7-week sessions. Start dates may vary by program.

For more information, visit www.westernnc.edu/7-weeks



2024-2025 session start and end dates:

- Summer Term Session 1:** May 6 – June 21, 2024
- Summer Term Session 2:** July 1 – August 16, 2024
- Fall Term Session 1:** September 3 – October 18, 2024
- Fall Term Session 2:** October 28 – December 13, 2024
- Spring Term Session 1:** January 6 – February 21, 2025
- Spring Term Session 2:** March 3 – April 18, 2025

IMPORTANT REGISTRATION DATES:



- April 2** Summer 2024 Registration Begins
- May 6** Summer Term Begins
- June 4** Fall 2024 Registration Begins
- September 3** Fall Term Begins
- November 13** Spring 2025 Registration Begins
- January 6** Spring Term Begins



UNIVERSITY TRANSFER

With a variety of transfer options, you can start at Western and earn credits toward a bachelor's degree from many four-year universities... and save thousands.

Associate of Arts and Science Programs The AA program is designed for those interested in humanities, business, and social sciences, while the AS program serves students who are interested in natural, physical, material, or medical sciences.

Transfer Agreements by Program Several of Western's associate degree programs transfer directly into specific bachelor's degree programs.

Transfer Any Associate Degree Western has agreements with the following universities that provide graduates from any of our associate degree programs with junior status: Milwaukee School of Engineering (MSOE), Viterbo University, and Bellevue University.



For detailed information about programs and offerings: www.westernnc.edu

The developing *wisdom* of discernment



By Lauri Hoff

David Gonzalez is graduating this spring with a degree in Digital Media Production. His freshly traversed path to graduation is a testament to resilience, hard work, and focused diligence. Western Technical College is an expert education and career guide, but a symbiotic partnership between Western and determined students like David will pave the way for success.

Originally trained as a welder, David had just been hired at Trane Company. But his



career path took a frustrating turn when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted his Trane welding plans. Laid off before things even began and derailed but undeterred—David seized the opportunity to organize and pursue a completely new idea.

Having lived in La Crosse for nearly a decade after immigrating from Mexico, David is thoroughly rooted in this community. This phase of young adulthood is weighty, marked by transitions that feel precarious and profoundly significant. It's a stark realization that one's responsibilities extend beyond oneself, encompassing the needs of loved ones and dependents. A devoted husband, father of three, and loving pet dad, he is driven by a desire to provide a secure and stable future for his family, while also seeking personal fulfillment—much like the air steward's instruction to unselfishly put on your own oxygen mask first.

This motivating force of responsibility and trusted self-worth directed him back to school, despite the challenges posed by balancing work, family, and education. Navigating the educational landscape as an adult was an advantage for David, who is not afraid to ask questions to get what he needs. And as slightly older and a bit wiser than your average student, David set out to make his fleeting time at Western the best it could be. He joined student government to make friends and participate, he volunteered, and worked in Western's Marketing Department

A great thing about Western, folks don't recognize the little things that make you self-conscious, they treat you like an equal, and that's true for everybody here."

Western Graduate, David Gonzalez

as a video production intern. David noticed that the culture at Western is welcoming to everybody, no matter your background or your age—these things don't matter or stand out at all. David emphasizes, "At Western, you just be yourself and get involved. It's very welcoming here! It is a great place to make connections, which is more important than you think."

Initially drawn to linguistics, David was disappointed to find that the local university did not offer it as a major. However, during a conversation, a Western advisor noticed that David's interests aligned with the Digital Media Production program. David always liked communicating, performing, and

elevating the creativity within his work. Years ago in Mexico, David was employed as a clown at his church. Over the past two years, Western's community noticed Cal the Cavalier having a particular zesty spring in his step, fluid dance moves, and a magnetic physicality to his being. Indeed, David has been sharing his generous spirit with us by dressing as Cal.

Western's practical, hands-on approach appealed to David, and he rapidly found himself immersed in coursework that stirred his passion for photography and the technical side of media production. As he delved deeper into his studies, David found himself thriving in the supportive environment of the college. David appreciated the flexibility and accessibility of Western. With personalized support from instructors and a curriculum tailored to his interests, he felt empowered to pursue his dreams, fueled by practical needs, personal growth, and an uncovering of interests and talents. David warns not to discount comfortable relationships and supportive friendships; they buoy and inspire without explicit purpose, a true testament to the power of relationships. He was awarded two scholarships during his Western tenure, including a sizable sum sponsored by Altra Federal Credit Union.

David says education makes for a more enjoyable life; the more you know, the more interesting things become, and the more there is to appreciate. In line with his video production acumen, David loves watching movies with a critical lens and

an appreciative eye. This is noticed as he systematically breaks down a creative scene from a movie he just watched. He also enjoys family time, and he loves cooking; he and his partner rotate family cooking duties. The family is working together to carve out their own traditions by blending their Mexican heritage with the culture of Wisconsin, from the formal ceremonial rites of Quinceañeras to the warmth and coziness of a traditional Christmas eve dinner.

With graduation on the horizon, David reflects on the challenges he has overcome and the opportunities that lie ahead. He plans to focus on freelancing and starting his own company; he remains grateful for the solid foundation he created for himself, along with Western Technical College. The skills and knowledge he acquired already serve him well in his endeavors, whether in the field of digital media production or beyond.

David sums his life philosophy as, "One can learn anything from anyone at any time: be perceptive and receptive! My goal and the source of my internal motivation is to be the best version of myself I can. For example, I can be a better student; I can be a better father, and be more mindful of what I'm saying. Be yourself. Be honest and true while living your best version of yourself. But—and this is key, do not concentrate on the stuff that does not matter. It's a needless distraction." For David, the developing wisdom of discernment becomes easier with every passing year!

Looking back on his days so far, David is filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment. From his beginnings in Mexico to the threshold of graduation in Wisconsin, he is a living example of determination, thoughtfulness, and perseverance in making good things happen. As he prepares to embark on the next cycle of his life, he does so with optimism and gratitude for the opportunities that lie ahead.



Hear more about David's story here!

Akinola's journey to Western



By Eric Jacobson

Electrical Engineer Technician instructor Akinola Babatunde's journey to Western spans four decades, three continents, and three academic degrees. And for his family of three, settling into the La Crosse region in Wisconsin has been a tremendous and rewarding decision so far.

Akinola grew up in Nigeria—the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous in the world. His mother died when he was just three years old. When he was eight, his father died. At nine, he moved in with an aunt, Maria Folayan—a person whom he refers to as his mother, father, and “everything else he needed in one.” At first, Akinola struggled in high school—particularly mathematics. He often felt it was his teacher's fault. But at one point, he had an epiphany, one that shaped his life forever.

“I said to myself: my teachers are not solely responsible for my success,” he said. “Their duty is to teach me. My job is to learn.”

With a change in perspective, Akinola began doing great things. He went to college in Nigeria, graduating with an Electrical Engineering degree at Unilorin. Later, he took several positions at two banks. But in the end, he knew he wanted to give back to the next generation. He knew he wanted to be a teacher.

Akinola eventually found himself in Cyprus, an island just south of Turkey in the Mediterranean Sea. There, he completed his master's degree and PhD in Energy Systems Engineering at CIU, with first class results and quality research publications. He also went on to work in three universities in Europe for ten years.

Later, Akinola began searching for teaching positions in the United States. That's when he found an Electrical Engineering Technician instructor position at Western, or as he says, “Western found me.”

“The rest is history,” he said with a smile.

Although the Wisconsin winter may chase others away, Akinola and his family embraced it, finding the natural scenery of the Driftless Region as “beautiful.” But after one of the mildest winters on record, Akinola simply strikes his first winter in the region up to luck.

“The weather is...(pause) what I've seen is not beyond what I can handle,” he says with a smirk. “What I tell people is that I brought the warmth to La Crosse.”

Akinola is a firm believer in God. As such, he believes that everyone can be successful, no matter what. He often speaks to individuals he knows from around the world with this message. A change in mindset can help individuals reach their full potential, he believes. Responsibility to yourself and others is key.

“Do your best. Don't leave the rest. Stick with your best and make sure it is good enough,” is a motto he shares regularly.

Throughout this life, Akinola has had a passion for speaking to inspire. In his free time, he can be found speaking to groups from Nigeria, Cyprus, United States, Africa, and Asian countries, empowering young minds and teaching the next generation. It's these trademarks that make Akinola a unique gift to Western's campus community.

Akinola and his wife have put down roots in the region. His wife, Abisola, also works at Western. They live together in the La Crosse region with their son.



Viroqua campus embraces sustainability with new EV charging stations



Western's regional location in Viroqua is gearing up for an eco-friendly transformation with the upcoming installation of a new electric vehicle (EV) charging station. This initiative marks a significant step toward sustainability and reflects Western's commitment to green energy solutions.

The installation will feature a Level 2 ChargePoint station, mirroring those at Western's La Crosse campus. The Viroqua location will have 2 units capable of charging two cars each, accommodating up to four vehicles simultaneously. In a move to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles, charging will be initially offered free of charge. This could significantly lower the barrier for EV use among students, staff, and the broader community.

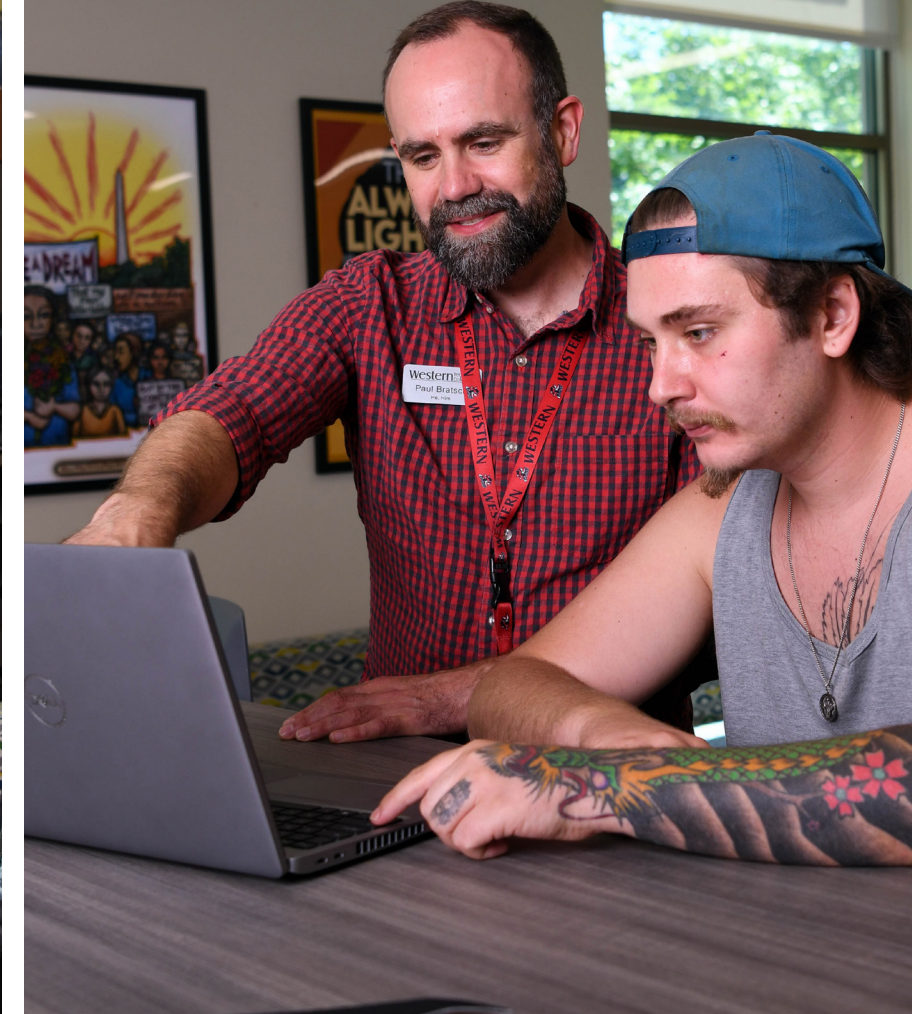
The charging stations will be accessible to Western students and employees during usual business hours. The availability for the general public outside these hours is currently being evaluated, with finalized details expected soon.

Installation of the stations will take place this spring and will be completed by Xcel Energy, a major utility company known for its commitment to sustainable energy.

Casey Meehan, Western's director of sustainability and resilience, underscores the importance of this development, stating, "By integrating these charging stations at our Viroqua campus, we're not only facilitating a more sustainable mode of transportation for our community but also signaling our commitment to the future of our planet. This is a clear reflection of our dedication to sustainability and resilience in all aspects of our operations."

This initiative aligns with a broader vision to reduce carbon emissions and foster environmental stewardship. By providing free access to these charging stations, Western is actively promoting cleaner, more sustainable transportation methods. This approach is in alignment with global trends toward electrification and environmental responsibility.

"This is more than just a practical solution for charging electric vehicles," said Meehan. "It represents a significant stride toward sustainable living and the role educational institutions play in this journey."



Forge your future

At Western, we believe in the power of connection: connecting knowledge with application, students with careers, and employers with emerging talent.

Our Career Services department stands at the heart of this mission, offering support and opportunities for both students and employers alike.

How Western connects students and employers

For Students: A Pathway to Success

The Career Services team is committed to guiding students from classroom learning to career achievement. Through personalized career coaching, they assist in navigating the job and internship landscape with ease. Their approach is tailored to fit each student's unique journey, focusing on crafting compelling resumes, cover letters, and portfolios. Students aren't just prepared to enter the job market; they are prepared to stand out.

Embedded in their program coursework, Western students engage in Work-based Learning (WBL) experience, designed to provide students with the opportunity to apply the skills learned in the classroom to their industry through professional learning activities. With three distinct levels—prepare, discover, and engage—each step is a building block toward individual career goals. From researching potential employers and honing interview skills to participating in career fairs and securing internships, this structured approach ensures students gain the confidence and skills needed for their professional future.

For Employers: Cultivating Tomorrow's Talent

Employers play a crucial role in shaping the next generation of professionals. Western offers diverse avenues for engagement through our WBL programs. Whether mentoring students as they embark on their career paths, showcasing a company at career fairs, or providing invaluable internships, employer involvement helps cultivate a workforce ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Partnership and Possibilities

Western's commitment goes beyond education; we aim to bridge the gap between learning and doing, theory and practice. By fostering strong partnerships between students and employers, we create a symbiotic environment where preparation meets opportunity, and engagement leads to success.

Employers in our region are encouraged to join us in this endeavor and get connected to our talented students. We understand many local businesses are struggling to find skilled workers to fill open positions. Western's Career Services area is ready to help. Contact us to explore opportunities for success, growth, and mutual benefit.



Hear from students how Career Services prepares them for success.

Career Services

Student Success Center

Room 222

400 7th St. N | La Crosse

PHONE: 608-785-9440

EMAIL:

CareerServices@westerntc.edu
www.westerntc.edu/career-services



Western unveils new athletic offerings

By Eric Jacobson

Western recently unveiled two new athletic offerings for students this upcoming Fall Term. The new programs were selected after months of research and allow for increased flexibility for our student-athletes. These sports will be led by a head coach and allow students, whether full-time or part-time, to compete.

Clay Target: Individuals in this sport will play in the USA-Clay Target League. Students can participate by being enrolled either full or part-time. Participation includes one day per week that they shoot and record their scores for competition purposes. On the remaining days of the week, students will have the opportunity to practice on their own time or as a team. Competitive season will be held in the fall of each year.

Powerlifting: Individuals in this sport will play in the USA-Powerlifting League as a form of competitive weightlifting. Students can participate from any location while being enrolled either full-time or part-time. This sport will have a coach that guides training routines in preparation for competitions throughout the year. Participants on the powerlifting team can choose to formally compete or not.

Baseball, volleyball, and Esports remain varsity sports that compete in the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA). These sports still maintain full-time and 2.0 GPA eligibility status for those competing. In addition, Western continues to offer several intramural sports for students of all abilities and time commitments.

More information can be found on our athletics website, www.westerncavaliers.com



After Western: Sally Emerson

Sally Emerson's career at Western spanned almost 15 years. She served with dedication in the Alumni and Foundation Department: first as the alumni relations coordinator and then the alumni relations manager. Sally's presence on campus extended beyond the typical role, she spearheaded alumni events and fundraising initiatives. She was pivotal in initiating, planning, and executing programs and projects aimed at engaging alumni to enhance community and college relationships. Sally retired four years ago; let's chat about her life after Western.

How do you maintain a sense of fun and fulfillment in your retired life?

I keep busy doing things I deem worthwhile. I help people through volunteering, I explore new places via off-the-beaten path road trips, and I spend relaxed time with grandkids.

Since retiring in 2020, can you share some highlights from your adventures?

Since the COVID event happened just a month into my retirement, it didn't start out as I had envisioned. However, I found great ways to spend my abundance of free time:

- I finally updated my house.
- Purchased—and used—a state park pass! I renew it every year—there's a discount for seniors! I

thoroughly explored 39 of the 49 parks so far.

- Volunteer for RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program), so I get to sew and crochet all kinds of needed items for hospitals, nursing homes, and other nonprofits. This is in addition to participating in their telephone reassurance program, which consists of calling and conversing with two older adults each week.

- Give tours of the chapel at St. Rose Convent and meet lots of interesting people while doing so.

- Joined the local chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, an organization that promotes the professional and personal growth of women educators and excellence in education, one of my life's passions.

What is the absolute best way I get to spend my free time? I get to visit my grandchildren much more often. I watch a lot of plays and concerts and attend sporting events. And I am finally able to attend Grandparents Day!

Have you discovered any new hobbies or interests since retiring? How have these contributed to your overall well-being?

My health is an important emphasis in my current lifestyle. I aim to maintain independence and pursue activities like hiking. I think about how working was focused on getting through one day and on to the next, and retirement is about making the most of the time I have left, so being healthy and mobile is critical for that.

I did a lot of reading related to my profession, but now I read purely for pleasure. I've read more books in the past year than I have read in my entire adult life! I'm especially enjoying historical fiction and nonfiction to keep my mind active and nimble. Since I love to create, I crochet and sew many items to donate that I had not made before—from mittens to catheter bags! I have greatly advanced my crocheting skills by making baby sweaters, which I didn't have time for in the past. I've also taken some creative classes.

Are there specific lessons or insights from your professional career that you find particularly valuable in your personal life or retirement?

I've learned much from the students I had the privilege to work with during my 30-

plus years in alumni relations; they have always influenced me in all I do. Fundraising experiences with benefactors and the recipients of those contributions have taught me to do great things with my own philanthropy. The sincere selflessness of donors is truly inspiring.

Reflecting on your time as the alumni & foundation manager, what achievements are you most proud of?

I am proud of the efforts by our department and volunteers to identify and connect with alumni. The resulting dialogue allows us to share the impressive stories and accomplishments of Western's amazing alumni. Because I believe strongly in Western's mission, organizing fundraising efforts while seeing alumni jump in with financial support for current students fills me with joy. Graduates are honored to be called Western Alumni.

How has your role at Western Technical College influenced or shaped your post-retirement life?

Volunteers were always vital to my work, so I make sure to continue volunteering and maintain my generosity. Learning about the ambitious and adventurous lives of our alumni encourages me to never stop growing in my own life.

If applicable, in what ways have you stayed connected with the Western Technical College community and your former colleagues since retirement?

Many alumni and co-workers have become life-long friends. I treasure staying connected on social media and planning many lunches and happy hours!

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently in your career, or any advice you wish you had received when you were starting out?

Just be confident with your choices by making sure you are always doing the right thing for the right reason. Always doing the best you can so you can be proud of who you are and what you do.

Also, don't worry. When I was laid off, prior to Western, I didn't know what the future held or how I would take care of my family. Even though I was making less money and working more hours, new doors opened—doors that led to great experiences, new skills, and new people.

BACHELOR'S DEGREES (AND CAREERS) START AT WESTERN!

Is your goal to attend a university? Or maybe you're undecided about a career path?

Western's University Transfer options can help! Take your general studies courses with us to earn the same credits for a fraction of the cost.



Our Top Four Transfer Colleges

Viterbo University
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Winona State University
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



westerntc.edu/university-transfer

