

Ogden-Weber Tech College Fills Jobs with Employer and Technology-Driven Approach



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Back in 2004, responding to local employer need for a strong pipeline of manufacturing workers, Ogden-Weber Tech College in Ogden, Utah, placed a bold bet on technology. That year, the school introduced online training through Tooling U-SME as part of a blended learning approach. More than a decade later, that forward thinking has helped establish Ogden-Weber Tech College as a sought-after educator both with local students and those as far away as Hawaii and South Carolina.

“Back in 2004, there was no T-1 connection – it was all dial up so you couldn’t use Tooling U-SME classes outside the classroom,” said Bret Holmes, machinist coordinator and instructor, Ogden-Weber Tech College. “Now students are taking classes at home, on their smartphones, and on their tablets.”

Being ahead of the technology curve has paid off. Today, the school, located in northern Utah surrounded by the scenic Wasatch Mountains, serves 6,000 students annually. It offers 300 technical-skills courses in more than 40 employment categories, such as machining, welding and industrial automation, and boasts a job placement rate of 94 percent.

Holmes, who has been an instructor at the college for nearly 20 years, said their successful program is tied to strong relationships with local manufacturers, sister schools within the Utah College of Applied Technology (UCAT) system, Northern Utah Chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association, and partners like Tooling U-SME.

“The state of Utah faces the same challenges as other areas of the country when it comes to manufacturing,” said

Ogden-Weber Tech College was an early adopter of online training, beginning more than a decade ago, according to Bret Holmes, machinist coordinator and instructor.





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Holmes. “While employers may be able to find replacement workers, a lack of skilled labor is impacting local companies’ ability to grow.”

To combat this, Ogden-Weber Tech College works closely with manufacturers to understand their needs. Employer Advisory Teams provide valuable input to ensure programs are employer-ready.

The school’s open entry/open exit approach means that students can start at any time, whether integrating classes during high school, pursuing a certificate program or completing individualized courses designed by a local business to boost specific skills.

“Everything we do is driven by employers, for employers,” said Holmes, adding that they also partner with the Northern Utah Chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association on campus events.

Additionally, Ogden-Weber Tech College is involved with a new state-funded machinist apprenticeship program launched with JD Machine, a local high-tech precision

machining and fabricating company creating components for aircraft, defense and medical systems.

Completion time for the Machinist Apprentice Certificate is 720 hours of classroom/online training and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training.

To recognize the school’s success, in 2012, Tooling U-SME designated Ogden-Weber Tech College a Tooling U-SME Platinum Education Center (TUPEC). This elite designation is presented to model educational facilities that have developed an outstanding learning culture and demonstrate exceptional commitment to preparing students for a successful career in the manufacturing industry.

A BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH

The conversation nationally is moving to competency-based learning, but the concept is not new at Ogden-Weber Tech College, which has been using



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this approach for years. The school's competency-based program consists of about 25 percent theory and 75 percent hands-on training. A blended learning approach includes textbook, video, hands-on and computer-based learning.

Holmes said that since 2004, more than 44,000 Tooling U-SME courses have been completed. Now six UCAT schools have integrated the online courses.

"We tell students that what they are seeing on the screen is what is going on in industry right now," Holmes said. "Everything you see on that screen is like opening a brand new book every time you turn it on."

According to Holmes, instructors like Tooling U-SME because they don't have to rewrite the curriculum, which is continually updated based on the latest technological advances in the industry.

"With curriculum, testing and assessments built in, we don't have to recreate the wheel," Holmes said. "Even if I had a staff of curriculum writers there is no way I could keep up with Tooling U-SME."

Even without checking, Holmes said he can tell immediately if a student has completed the required Tooling U-SME coursework before moving into the shop.

"Students who have done their Tooling U-SME training don't have that panicked feeling standing at the machine," said Holmes. "They've seen the controls and they know what buttons to push. It's all right there for them."

This confidence and proficiency is evident as graduates move into their careers.

"We know we are offering a quality education when manufacturers say our students are well prepared and trainable within three days of starting," said Holmes.