

Western  
Technical College



EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ANNUAL REPORT | 2024

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## THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF PARTNERSHIP

### Community-based learning in the classroom

Last spring, Westby EMS sought a new logo, presenting an opportunity for students to apply their design expertise for a real client with authentic needs. Instructor James Bushman explains this as a perfect opportunity and example of community-based learning (CBL): students get valuable real-world experience, while local nonprofits and small businesses can leverage the savings elsewhere. Western Health and Public Safety Dean and Westby EMS Chief Kevin Dean says, "Our volunteer force relies on community support, so it felt fitting to collaborate with students."

Emma Moseley, a student in Bushman's Digital Media Production program, was one of two who took on the logo competition. Superior design is about excellent communication sprinkled with intuition. After exploratory conversations with Westby EMS, Moseley explored several designs that captured the essence of Westby EMS. The final changes were then incorporated with more guidance from Bushman and classroom discussions. "It was surreal to see the logo I designed showcased on their cars and patches! I have worked on many class projects, but never actually worked with a client," explains Moseley.

For Moseley and her peers, this project provided hands-on experience in client communication, project management, the design refinement process, and lastly, providing the client with professional files that are useable in every format. Through expansive client research and productive discussions, she developed a logo that now adorns EMS uniforms, shirts, and vehicles.



At the end of a CBL project, the reflection piece of community-based learning is essential. Reflecting on the experiences allows students to deepen their understanding of the project's impact on themselves and in the community. Bushman says, "Think about the meaning, value, and what we can do for each other. People see Western as a partner in making this community the best it can be." Bushman's classes have worked with other community partners including the YWCA, The Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, The Nature Place, the La Crosse Library, and many more.

Bushman highlights the confidence boost students gain from seeing their work valued. "It's a win-win," he notes. "Students apply their skills and get great experience while the community benefits from their developing professional skills." The Westby EMS project exemplifies the symbiotic relationship between education and community. It is not just about designing a logo; it is about bridging the overlap of classroom learning with community needs, enriching both students and the organizations we support. Projects like these lay the groundwork for students to

understand the broader impact of their work, blending education with a deeper sense of community responsibility.

**"As the chief of my EMS team, a fully volunteer service, we rely on community support. In return, I see it as a way we can support students with their career goals. It was nice to work with the students where they could create various design options, but without the extra client pressure and having the space to make mistakes during the learning process."**

*—Western Health and Public Safety Dean and Westby EMS Chief Kevin Dean*

# CONNECTING STRENGTHS TO CAREERS—

## Work-based learning in the classroom

*Gallup CliftonStrengths* is a transformative book and program designed for self-discovery. This Work-based learning (WBL) initiative aims to identify and use the unique talents and strengths of our students to help them achieve professional success. Based on the idea that focusing on strengths leads to greater fulfillment and productivity than trying to fix weaknesses, CliftonStrengths guides students through an assessment to identify their top strengths out of 34 possible themes. By understanding and developing these identified strengths, individuals can improve their performance, relationships, and overall well-being. The CliftonStrengths program provides actionable insights and strategies for harnessing these strengths in various aspects of life, and empowering individuals to thrive by maximizing their inherent abilities.

Leveraging the expertise of Certified Strengths Coaches, Jai Mather integrates CliftonStrengths into the Construction Industry Basics course. This offers students insights into the relevance of future career paths and peer interactions. Through this implementation, students gain a deeper understanding of themselves and learn how to apply their strengths in real-world scenarios.

At the beginning of the semester, students undergo the CliftonStrengths assessment, which serves as the foundation for self-reflection and exploration throughout the course. Mather, with the help of Career Services staff, guide students in exploring how their strengths align with their career aspirations and provide them with a clear path toward their professional identity and possible career paths. At points in



the semester, students integrate their strengths into learning experiences, culminating in the application of their strengths to solve work-related scenarios on the last day of class. Group activities facilitated by Career Services staff further reinforce the importance of collaboration and problem-solving skills, empowering students to leverage their strengths in team environments as well.

Mather emphasizes the value of incorporating Gallup CliftonStrengths into his curriculum, recognizing it as a beneficial tool for student development and career readiness. Also, it couldn't be easier for Mather, or any instructor interested in doing so: Career Services comes to the classroom and does most of the work! By embracing this approach, Mather's students not only gain valuable self-awareness but also acquire essential skills for success in the construction industry and beyond. Through the integration of Gallup CliftonStrengths, Mather provides a dynamic and enriching learning experience that prepares students for the challenges and opportunities ahead in their careers.

The incorporation of Gallup CliftonStrengths into the curriculum is made possible by a leadership grant obtained by the college, and highlights Western's commitment to student development and career readiness. Through Certified Strengths Coaches support and instructor guidance, students across various programs at Western, including Digital Media Production, Interior Design, and Building Construction, benefit from the strengths-based framework, fostering a sense of belonging and equipping students with essential skills for success in their careers.







# 2024

## 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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