



Student Insights into CBE

April 2023

Student insights were gathered over the course of several weeks from small focus groups of participants in the CBE Welding Program at Lewis and Clark Community College, conducted by Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University as part of the Community College CBE Pilot Project. Funding for this project was provided through a grant agreement from the Illinois Community College Board, utilizing Perkins Leadership funding.



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Key Takeaways

Students value CBE's scheduling flexibility and the freedom to work at their own pace.

"CBE has done nothing but benefit me because I'm working 40-hour weeks and I can just show up when I need to. I get to work at my own pace now. I get to come in right after work. That's perfect for me."

"If you knock out a class earlier than another student, instead of sitting around waiting you can take the final and move on to the next class."

"It's kind of a shock. I didn't realize CBE could help me as much. It is possible to work a full-time job and still make your grades."

It is crucial to have someone for students to connect with who understands the program and how financial aid works.

"The coordinator of the program was really helpful in telling me which courses I needed to complete and which were elective. I could talk to him and felt more comfortable talking face-to-face than through email."

"There's a learning curve with the financial aid aspect of things."

"Since students can enroll and complete at different points in the semester, financial aid communication isn't as consistent and streamlined. You need a financial aid advisor who understands the program."

To be successful, students have to be motivated and responsible.

"Knowing me at 18 years old, I would have looked at it differently than at 25. I would have not shown up. But now I want to get as much as I possibly can out of it."

"I'm sure there would be students that this would not fit with. If they're not very self-motivated or have a goal in sight, it might not be a good fit for them. But for those who want to come in and get done, it works very well."



Meet the Students*

Early-Career Changers



Ethan is in his mid-twenties and in between careers. He went to a technical college for Industrial Technology and worked in maintenance, but wanted to get into the welding industry. He was told by an advisor he could get through the traditional welding program in one year, but that meant only fulfilling the minimum requirements. Ethan wanted to learn as much as he could. He heard about the CBE program from the Welding Program Coordinator and it was a great fit since it allowed him to finish quickly and still learn as much as possible. “The thing I like about the CBE program is the speed in which you can get through the courses, because I’m not fresh out of high school. I’m twenty-six years old, and I’m in between careers right now. So the faster I get back out there and on my feet again the better for me. CBE has really helped me achieve that.”



Allen has been to school for mechanics and was in the military. Now he works a full-time job with a schedule that rotates between nights and weekends. He’s enrolled in traditional as well as CBE welding courses, and has found that CBE provides benefits in addition to the scheduling flexibility he needs for work. Most importantly, he’s able to progress at his own pace. In one of his traditional courses he was several weeks ahead of his classmates and had to slow down to wait for the others before moving on. In his CBE courses he can move as quickly as he likes and even finish early. Another benefit is that he can be in the lab when he’s most able to learn well. In his traditional courses there were days that he was so drained from work that by the time he got to class he wasn’t gaining much and just ended up frustrated. In his CBE courses, when he finds himself too tired he can adjust. “I mean there were days where I was completely frustrated, but I feel like it was because I was so tired. I was already so drained that it just wasn’t working. But with CBE, if I could have come in for two hours or not at all that day and it would have benefited me.”

Mid-Career Changer



Jay is in his early 50’s, finishing an associate degree in welding. He didn’t have much previous post-secondary education, just some distance learning in production field operations related to the oil and gas industry. It had been a long time since he had been in school. Jay entered a traditional community college program - enrolling in only one course at a time - to accommodate a full-time job that requires significant travel across the country without a set schedule and with last-minute trips. Switching to the CBE program allowed him to enroll part time and to complete his degree much more quickly. He says, “CBE worked with my hectic schedule. It worked out really well.”

Recent High School Graduates



Sam is a recent high school graduate and working on his family farm. This is his first experience in college and the CBE program is working well for him. Since the farm work requires a lot of time but doesn’t have a set schedule, he can go to the lab for a long day and get a lot done. “I didn’t expect to be as far as I am so quickly. It’s surprising how quick it goes.”

Chris is just a few years out of high school. He enrolled in the traditional welding program as soon as he graduated and then got a job. His company pays for schooling but he had to work a year to qualify so he dropped out. Now he’s back and enrolled in the CBE program because it allows him to continue to work and he can progress as quickly as he wants. “It’s just benefited me tremendously, really. And I think it’s a great little program.”

** Names have been changed to protect privacy.*