

College Connections

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Giving 'Credit' Where Credit is Due

Tiffany longs to return to college and ultimately find a better-paying job to help support her children, but wonders how she can fit school into her already busy schedule.

John considers how his life would change for the better with a college degree, but assumes that the credits he earned several years ago have expired. And he doesn't have the financial resources to start over.

These are fictional scenarios, but their stories represent the more than 700,000 Hoosiers who have earned some college credit, but no degree. In Northeast Indiana alone, there are more than 140,000 people in that category.

A new degree completion program – General Studies Advantage – launched by Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) in the fall helps returning adult students balance personal and academic responsibilities. (Many colleges and universities throughout the state are also focused on such students).

"Basically, what the program does is provide guidance to students who may have stepped in and out of the education world over the years," explains Angela Williams, assistant director of online and credit programs.

"We focus on certificate programs (such as advanced manufacturing, supervisory leadership and small business management) and minors (communication, psychology, sociology and others). Students can complete the certificate along the way as they go toward the bachelor's completion."

A hybrid approach (blending online and classroom learning) means that students only have to attend classes on campus one evening each week.

The Advantage program is open to individuals with between 50 and 70 previously earned credit hours from accredited postsecondary learning institutions. A generous transfer credit policy also applies to military service, prior learning assessment and approved training programs through the American Council on Education.

"Not only can they tailor (their program) based on their academic interests, but also on their schedules – and that's a huge plus," Williams emphasizes.

Certificate programs are offered entirely online or via the hybrid format. IPFW holds classes during the day, evening and on the weekends. Recently, an Advantage student shared with Williams how the program was making an impact on his life.

"Not only is he on the way to finishing his degree," she recalls, "but he was doing organizational leadership with the small business development certificate and was very enthusiastic that, 'I'm able to implement what I'm using at work.'"



Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne's new general studies program provides working adults with flexible scheduling options.

RESOURCE: Angela Williams, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, at www.ipfw.edu/advantage

Building Talent in Class and On the Job

There's no substitute for experience. Just ask Vanessa Smurawski, a graduate of ArcelorMittal's Steelworker for the Future® program, which provides hands-on training for high-paying careers.

Smurawski participated three years ago and is now an electrical maintenance technician at one of the Illinois operations of the leading global steel company. Offered through a partnership with local community colleges, the associate's degree program (typically 2.5 years) blends classroom learning and two eight-week optional, paid internships at ArcelorMittal.



ArcelorMittal's Steelworker for the Future® program trains students for manufacturing careers. Intern Joseph Dent (right) completes a bench check of an audio amplifier.

"I definitely learned the basics in the classroom, but as far as out on the field, it's high-tech and you're learning a lot more," she asserts.

First introduced in Indiana and the Chicago area in 2008, Steelworker for the Future has grown to encompass five states: Indiana (at Ivy Tech Community College's Valparaiso, East Chicago and Gary campuses and at Purdue University North Central in Westville), Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

Graduates become mechanical or electrical maintenance technicians.

"It's our company's solution to a skills gap that exists in the country," comments Gary Norgren, Steelworker for the Future project leader at ArcelorMittal's East Chicago plant. "Students who go in this field of study are going to have choices, and for those who choose to take this path, they'll have a successful start to their work career."

"The big benefit for us is the employees have a full two years of education to build upon before they come in. They have a stronger foundation that we as a company can build upon."

Since the program's inception, ArcelorMittal has hired more than 20 graduates (as of the first quarter of

College Mentors for Kids provides on-campus mentoring opportunities to at-risk youth. "It helps them (college mentors) with their self-confidence and leadership skills. They develop a passion for service," says chief executive officer Tracy Elliott.



Mentors Lead the Way

It's a crisp fall afternoon as a group of first graders skip, walk and jump through the red and orange leaves blanketing Butler University's sidewalks. They are on a mission – a scavenger hunt taking them to Holcomb Observatory and Planetarium, Jordan College of the Arts and other sites. Each stop features fun tidbits about the destination and a new clue.

The Butler students alongside them are on a mission of sorts as well – make a positive difference in children's lives by volunteering.

"We harness the compassion and energy of college students to provide at-risk youngsters what I call a ladder out of poverty by giving them a vision for their life early on that includes education, career and community," shares Tracy Elliott, chief executive officer of College Mentors for Kids.

The Indianapolis-based organization connects college students with first- through sixth-graders for one-on-one mentoring opportunities. It serves 1,700 children and has 1,900-plus student volunteers across 23 college and university campuses in Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, New York and Ohio.

Here's how it works: Mentors spend two hours each week on campus with their "Little Buddies" participating in activities that emphasize college and career, community service, culture and diversity, and financial literacy. Examples include selling lemonade, visiting science labs and learning how to save money.

A typical afternoon begins as Little Buddies step off the bus and greet their mentors with high-fives and hugs. Next is a snack, book of

the week, guest speaker and hands-on activity. The excitement wraps up as children reflect on their day during journal time.

Each chapter is student-run and helps prepare the collegians for the business world.

"Let's take the Purdue chapter. It has 240 (mentor/Little Buddy) matches, so that's 240 student mentors and a leadership staff of 40 to manage them," Elliott declares. "The president of the Purdue chapter has 280 employees and has every problem I have running a business: personnel issues, recruitment issues, financial issues ..."

A survey of Little Buddies revealed that 84% learned about different jobs; 90% report working hard at school; and 93% want to go to college.

The impact on mentors is just as significant.

"It helps them get jobs and then be skilled in those jobs," Elliott asserts. "It helps them with their self-confidence and leadership skills. They develop a passion for service."

Abby Udelhofen, a Butler freshman majoring in elementary education, shares why she values the program and the time she spends with her Little Buddy, a first-grader named Gerardo.

"I've always liked volunteering and being with kids, and thought it would be an awesome opportunity," she reflects. "It's great training (for my career), not only with Gerardo, but with all of the age levels to see how they interact with each other and the conversations you can have with each one."

RESOURCE: Tracy Elliott, College Mentors for Kids, at www.collegementors.org

Building Talent

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2013) and hosted 97 interns. The average annual income of an hourly steelworker at the company is approximately \$90,000, plus benefits.

To be eligible, individuals must have a high school diploma or equivalent, pass a community college entrance exam and drug screen, and earn 15 core credits while maintaining a 2.8 grade point average or higher. Participants continue to hone their skills after graduation.

"Once they're hired, they go into a one-year internal training

program," Norgren explains. "At the completion of that one year, they get an increase in pay and that's when they would be assigned a permanent position within one of our operating units."

Smurawski enjoys the flexibility of her job, which challenges her with different projects every day.

"I would say definitely go for it," she declares. "The pay is great and the benefits are awesome. It's a great experience."

RESOURCES: Gary Norgren and Vanessa Smurawski, ArcelorMittal, at www.steelworkerforthefuture.com