

Community college prepares students for future in technology

By Peg Lopata - January 18, 2022



QCC students Stephen Ory and John Martel learn how to program an industrial robot in the college's Advanced Technologies Lab.

WORCESTER – Think community colleges are just for kids straight out of high school? Think again. At [Quinsigamond Community College](#) (QCC) in Worcester, staff and instructors are doing everything they can to make older students feel welcome and get the best training possible for today's jobs.

Jobs for QCC graduates

QCC strives to ensure their graduates have the skills that are needed in today's work environments—so no need to panic if you feel you aren't ready for a high-tech workplace.

"I know that going back to school after a long time is scary," admitted Jacob Longacre, a professor of electronics engineering technology. "I did it to complete an MBA and later to teach. We're here to help."

But what about math and computers?

If an older student is concerned about their math or computer phobia, QCC programs all include basic math courses and basic computer skills.

Said Lee Duerden, associate professor of manufacturing technology and program coordinator, "Our classrooms are not the classrooms older students may remember from thirty years ago. For example, we teach math skills appropriate to specific problem-solving skills. We're teaching computers by virtue of working with computers. For the most part, it's fun and who doesn't like learning when it's fun?"

Making it work for the older student

Kathie Manning, dean of the college's Center for Workforce Development and Continuing Education, explained, "We have a customized learning pathway that's right for each student."

With courses offered during the day, at night, on weekends and online, at QCC you won't find it hard to fit classes into your schedule. Also, older students who already have significant knowledge and experience can get credit for what they know.

Real world ready



Mike Meagher, an adjunct faculty member in QCC's Electronics Engineering Technology program, works in the college's Fab Lab.

"The manufacturing technology department has a state-of-the-art lab with equipment that represents what's out there in the real world," explained Damian Kieran, an instructor of manufacturing technology.

This equipment includes such machines as 3D printers, precision measurement equipment, and laser cutting machines. The advanced technologies lab has four industrial robots and a fully automated manufacturing system.

"We are constantly investing in new equipment to ensure we keep up with industry trends," noted Kieran.

A modern learning environment is also found in the electronics department.

“Students are engaged—they might be fixing wiring systems, programming controllers to perform various tasks, programming robots, or troubleshooting electrical, electronic and mechanical problems,” said James Heffernan, professor of electronics engineering technology and program coordinator.

Jobs, jobs, jobs

Jobs in manufacturing technology and electronics can be well-paid and provide interesting work. But at fifty and older that means something different to someone much younger.

“Let’s face it,” said Duerden. “At fifty we’re planning for retirement.”

QCC’s instructors and staff are well aware that their students, especially those fifty or over, want a good return on their educational investment, even one that’s as reasonable to be found there.

So not only is QCC offering what’s up to date now, they are getting ready for what’s next by creating a \$25 million innovation center for advanced manufacturing and robotics.

Close to home

“I interact with employers so we can design programs that ensure employers have the talent they need to fill open positions,” explained Manning.

Added Heffernan, “We provide an advanced technical education that makes our students strong candidates for these jobs. In addition, older students in my program bring a wealth of life experience with them.”

In such fields as electronics and manufacturing, students needn't go far afield to find these positions.

QCC graduates in these fields are highly likely to find work here in Massachusetts, sometimes even before they've completed their training, according to Duerden.

"I don't know of a single graduate," said Duerden, "that hasn't either gotten a job or transferred to a four-year college after leaving QCC's manufacturing program."

Ready to enroll? Find out more here: www.qcc.edu.