

INSPRA Distinguished Service Award nomination 2020
Project Hire-Ed and the Addison Workforce Development Committee
Category: Team

The statistics and data are hard to ignore – students are leaving college with a crushing amount of debt, and many aren't completing their degrees. Yet more and more companies, particularly in manufacturing, are struggling to fill job positions and maintain a quality workforce.

In 2015, Village of Addison Mayor Richard Veenstra brought together 11 local businesses and education organizations (including DuPage High School District 88) to discuss this concern. The Addison Workforce Development Committee was formed soon after, with a focus on collaborating to provide opportunities to train students and adults for jobs available in the area, as well as offering programs such as internships and job shadowing. The committee has hosted 10 Job Expos, where participants have the opportunity to meet with local employers and submit their résumé. The group also has implemented a mentor program, where students from District 88 visit businesses in Addison and shadow various departments to gain hands-on experience.

One of the capstones of the Addison Workforce Development Committee has been a partnership with College of DuPage during the creation of the Project Hire-Ed Apprenticeship Program. Project Hire-Ed was started in 2018 with the intent to build a bridge between workforce needs and education to help employers find the right talent for their organizations and to teach students the skills employers are seeking. In this apprenticeship model, Addison employers pay apprentices full-time employment wages and pay for their tuition to attend College of DuPage to develop job skills through work-based learning.

College of DuPage worked with business leaders for 18 months to better understand what employers are looking for in skills gaps of some recent graduates and current workforce needs. Project Hire-Ed's curriculum was formed based on employer needs and incorporates the Illinois Community College Board's Illinois Essential Employability Skills Framework. Students in Project Hire-Ed must complete:

- A seminar that introduces program options, career pathways, career readiness skills, development services and participating employers
- Four courses that focus on foundational skills: Industrial Safety, Customer Service, Technical Writing and Microsoft Office software
- Six technical skills classes, depending on the specific job track (tracks include Manufacturing Machining, Welding, Manufacturing CNC, Industrial Maintenance, Facility Maintenance, HVACR Service and Electro-Mechanical/Mechatronics)

Project Hire-Ed is open to individuals 18 years old and older who are current College of DuPage students, career changers, veterans, unemployed, under-employed, recent high school or GED graduates or current high school students. There's even an opportunity for high school students

to earn dual-credit through the program. High-schoolers can take the seminar class, as well as two technical courses, to get started before they graduate.

Project Hire-Ed is a four-year program – two years to complete the coursework and two additional years working with the employer. Participants are provided with on-the-job training and a College of DuPage certificate in applied technology, which is stackable, and industry credentials. To date, 24 students have enrolled in the seminar course, and seven have been employed in apprenticeships with three Addison companies. Businesses receive training and materials to support the students and are able to set standards/expectations for the apprenticeship.

Future goals for Project Hire-Ed include offering more dual-credit options, expanding the number of employers involved from throughout DuPage County and scaling the program to other fields such as health care and IT/cybersecurity.

Project Hire-Ed is an example of what can be accomplished when business owners, education leaders and village officials come together for the betterment of the community. The Addison Workforce Development Committee is taking a hands-on approach to improve the village's workforce through providing educational opportunities, and in turn enhancing the quality of life for residents.