

Industrial Advisory Board Responds to the State's Need for an Educated Workforce

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Dave Beaudry knows what a good education can mean. An engineering manager for an international lighting manufacturer with more than 15 years of experience, he graduated from the University of New Hampshire's Electrical Engineering Technology program (EET). Since he also works with the company's newest employees, he's seen firsthand how important it is to have the right education, one that specifically relates to the field.

"I wouldn't have gotten where I am without it," he said. "Nowadays, you can't be hired as an engineer without a degree and most companies want a technical degree. You couldn't do product or equipment design without it or manage people who do."

And where do they find these highly skilled people? Well, in Beaudry's office of 19 people, four of them come from the UNH system. The rest are mostly brought in from out of state.

Technology can be an exciting field in which to work -- it's fast-paced and constantly evolving. But this rapid progress can also bring unique challenges to a university program designed to train graduates for the electronics or manufacturing fields. Without the most current training, and access to cutting-edge equipment and systems, a course in engineering can get stale very quickly.

That's where the Industrial Advisory Board comes in. Made up of professionals from local corporations, the involvement of the IAB gives UNH Manchester graduates a step-up on the competition. When you've got local business leaders providing in-depth analyses of your program, with feedback on curriculum or recommendations on

innovative new technologies, you have a program designed to train graduates to step right into the workforce.

“We help align the program with the requirements that we see in the industry,” said Shawn Banker, plant manager for Velcro USA Inc., in Manchester.

Banker graduated from the UNH Manchester Mechanical Engineering Technology (MET) program in 1990 and has since worked his way up through the ranks at Velcro. As a program graduate, he knows both what they have to offer and what could be added to increase the program’s effectiveness.

“We give them feedback on things they need to include or on things that we realize we did not receive during our education that would be helpful to new hires, graduates, and students who do projects in the industry,” he said.

Meeting twice a year, the IAB members pour over each of the University’s courses, discussing curriculum, syllabi, and student projects. They look for ways to update the information and they talk about things they are looking for in new hires.

Their involvement in the program has shown itself in many ways. The board performs exit interviews with graduating seniors, getting their feedback on the program, and is called on to judge senior capstone projects. They also work with accreditation board recommendations to see where adjustments can be made. From slight changes in the way information is presented to the addition of techniques and equipment, the input from IAB members has been an immeasurable benefit.

With years of experience in their fields, the board members know where the field will be expanding. For instance, “lean manufacturing,” or cutting down on variations to increase productivity and consistency, is a catchphrase on everyone’s lips. Then there is the progress towards more automation and the need for training in this area.

“We are working towards adding a mechatronics or automation class,” said Beaudry. “Applying automation would be a part of the curriculum to go across both the EET and MET programs.”

For the board members, being involved is more than a way to train the future workforce, it’s also a way to make a difference for the next generation and for a school that helped them succeed.

“On a personal level, it’s important to give back to the community and to help provide support and structure to their educational goals,” said Keith McBrien, a project manager at GDS Associates, a utility consulting firm. “On a more selfish note, I enjoy being involved with the IAB and providing information for college graduates.”

McBrien graduated from the UNH Manchester Mechanical Engineering Technology program in 1995. He first started working in manufacturing where he saw exactly how his degree helped him be prepared.

“You need to wear lots of hats and hit the ground running,” he said. “The engineering technology degree

was extremely helpful.” “You need to wear lots of hats and hit the ground running,” he said. “The engineering technology degree was extremely helpful.” He since has switched fields to work with energy and energy conservation. It’s a field, he says, that is exploding and there is always need for well-trained graduates. His office has grown from six to 20 people in the past 5 years, even during a slow economy.

That’s not to say that manufacturing is a dead end profession. Just ask anyone which country ranks highest in manufacturing of goods. They will probably guess China but, while China’s output of approximately \$1.79 trillion is impressive, it’s edged out by the United States as the largest manufacturing nation.

Of course, China’s manufacturing is growing far more quickly than ours, but the fact is, manufacturing is still strong in the U.S. And right here in New Hampshire, manufacturing remains as one of the strongest parts of our economy. Almost 5% of New Hampshire businesses are involved in the fabrication of goods, more than our New England neighbors, and one in six NH jobs are in manufacturing.

While the manufacturing industry remains strong, more and more students turn away from the profession since they, and their parents, believe that manufacturing has left the country. This leaves local businesses with a smaller pool of college graduates from which to choose. Industry in New Hampshire needs trained employees and are working with schools to give direction on what they need.

“There are several companies in New Hampshire trying to get higher education more aware that manufacturing still exists in the US,” said Beaudry.

We hear about the closing of mills or the shuttering of factories over the years, but not as much about the increase of technical jobs within manufacturing. Over the past 15 years, we’ve take leaps and bounds towards high-tech manufacturing, producing computer components and advanced technology.

“Manufacturing in the US is starting to pick back up,” said McBrien. “It’s all in high value products.”

This type of work needs fewer workers than the old-school factory line worker, but they also need to be far better trained. Nationally, according to a study by the Manufacturing Institute, there are about 600,000 unfilled factory jobs - because they require the kind of skilled training you can get only from a qualified program...the type of program that the IAB is ensuring is available at UNH Manchester.

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