

Oakland Community College: Moving at the Speed of Technology

OCC committed to keeping pace with technological change in the region

Oakland Community College (OCC) is poised and ready to meet the demands of a changing economy in southeastern Michigan. Equipped with new strategic partnerships, revamped programs, and refurbished labs, OCC is responding to the demands of industry, whose needs are different than they were just a few years ago.

OCC is located in Oakland County, where 64 of the Global 100 Automotive OEMs have operations (<https://www.oakgov.com>). This concentration of industry and the ever-changing technological advancements of the automotive industry created the skills gap that has led OCC to adopt a different strategy.

“The industry in Southeastern Michigan is in the midst of change and OCC is changing with it,” says Donald Hutchison, the Dean of Engineering, Manufacturing and Industrial Technologies (EMIT) at OCC. “There is a significant skills gap in this region relative to technicians in advanced manufacturing and auto-related fields. We realized a few years ago that we weren’t adequately responding to the need.” He continues, “We needed to adapt to the changing industrial landscape around us to better empower our students.”

OCC began by strengthening existing industry partnerships and aggressively pursuing new ones to foster win-win scenarios. For example, the Machine Tool Technology department partnered with HURCO to provide the latest in CNC machine tools on a rotating basis and at no cost to the college. The college, in turn, allows the lab to be used as a showroom for potential HURCO customers. The Automotive Servicing department is working with FCA’s MOPAR CAP Local to seamlessly integrate its curriculum into existing programs,



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allowing students the opportunity to earn several credentials needed for careers as auto technicians. In late 2018, OCC also signed a memorandum of understanding with 3D imaging mega-company Autodesk to become one of just a few community colleges in the nation designated as a strategic partner school. This relationship allows for specialized training opportunities that allow faculty and staff to upgrade their skills and gear up new curriculum. The EMIT department, as a whole, engaged with NC3, the National Coalition of Certification Centers, who consulted on the layout of new labs and assisted in embedding 3rd-party certs into multiple programs.

The college then strengthened its relationship with Oakland Schools Technical Centers, the secondary education career and technical education campuses that cater to students pursuing technical career paths through an Early College model. This partnership produced several articulation agreements, resulting in an increasing pipeline of students flowing from high school to college. “The partnership with OSTC has several benefits we refer to as the ‘Three P’s,’” says Laura Thero, Program Manager of Operations in the EMIT department. “Students from OSTC pay on time, they have predictable schedules and they persist in greater numbers than the general population. Everyone wins!”

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Oakland Community College also allocated significant funding to upgrade and outfit various technical labs. The welding program, for example, now has a completely renovated lab complete with brand new welders, plasma cutter, shear, press brake, and extensive fabrication equipment to provide a well-rounded curriculum for students. The new spaces are starting to bear fruit as technical programs are growing in enrollment and a positive reputation is spreading. "The new facilities are state of the art!" says Chris Hand, a student in the welding department. "I've already recommended the program to a friend who has already enrolled."

Oakland Community College is committed to keeping pace with the constant state of technological change in the region. "We are proud of the work accomplished over the past few years," say Joe Petrosky, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. "We must remain agile and flexible to keep pace with industry and best prepare our students with the skills they need to succeed."

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