

LMC enters transfer pact to help students in manufacturing

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — Manufacturing program students who've taken classes elsewhere won't have to retrace their steps, thanks to an agreement signed by Lake Michigan College.

LMC officials signed the agreement Thursday at Lansing Community College, as part of the Michigan Coalition for Advanced Manufacturing, which includes Bay College, Grand Rapids, Kellogg, Lansing, Macomb, Mott and Schoolcraft community colleges.

Thursday's agreement marks the first one signed for manufacturing programs — including CNC/machining, mechatronics, production operations and welding — that M-CAM member colleges offer, said Ken Flowers, LMC's dean of career and work force development.

The agreement should ease the transfer process for students who've gotten certifications through other entities like the American Welding Society, he said.

“Basically, what it creates is an avenue for students that have passed third-party assessments — whether it be welding, mechatronics, machine tool or production — to transfer those credits, or third-party certificates, to these eight separate schools,” Flowers said. “And each school will recognize them for college credit.”

Formed in 2014, M-CAM works to equip students with “the necessary

certifications, industry credentials and employer connections to create careers in the rapidly growing advanced manufacturing industry in Michigan,” LMC stated, in its news release announcing the agreement.

M-CAM itself is funded through a \$24.9 million Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCTT) grant that the Department of Labor approved in October 2013, Flowers said.

The grant runs through Sept. 30, 2017, and helps community colleges to train unemployed, under-skilled and current workers seeking advanced skills for in-demand careers, Flowers said.

Thursday's announcement means that students need not worry about going backwards, TAACCCTT Project Manager Lynn Wolf said.

“Individuals not only can gain credentials — while they're in training — they can come in with that particular certificate, and earn credentials, too, so it's like a closed-loop system, of ‘earning and learning’ at the same time,” she said.

Wolf worked on the grant with Flowers and Susan A. Lupo, a senior policy associate from the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, and Donna Petras, Macomb Community College's dean of university relations.

Thursday's announcement reflects another long-standing principle at LMC — stripping barriers that

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prevent students from getting an education, Flowers said.

“We looked at the best way, so that people don’t have to go backwards – if they have a skill set, we honor the certificate they have, and it allows them to move forward to get college credits that could lead to getting a degree,” Flowers said.

So far, M-CAM has exceeded its original enrollment goals, recording more than 2,800 participants since it began, LMC’s news release stated.

As of April 2016, more than two-thirds of those students who have completed an M-CAM program have found a job, “and the majority received a wage increase over their previous earnings,” the release said.

Whether those numbers continue to rise depends on the student’s own educational path, Flowers said.

“It’s fantastic engagement for all the community colleges,” Flowers said. “We may not see a huge amount (of

students), in terms of moving from school to school, but we’ll hopefully see some that come in, that have the AWS certificate – South Bend has lots of welders. Hopefully, this’ll draw them in, and they can say, ‘I can get college credits.’”

That’s why the skills certificates play such a key role, and needed to be covered under the agreement, Wolf said.

“It’s important, too, for employers to recognize those skill sets – these are all competency-based, so the employer knows that that individual has the proficiency to hit the ground running,” she said.

LMC has already applied for funds to continue beyond 2017 because it sees the transfer agreement as one piece of a much larger job training picture, Flowers said.

“For example, the continuation grant actually has a central focus on apprenticeships. That’s the next piece. For example, if you get a student that comes in with a machining third-party certificate, I can say, ‘You’ve got four or five classes toward an

apprenticeship credential already,’ and it works out well for them.”

College officials should know if it’s successful by month’s end.

“That’s part of the conversation we’re continuing to have. The whole point of the grant is to develop projects and processes that are sustainable to each college,” Flowers said. “Our college developed new programming – the welding program’s new, the mechatronic program’s new.”

