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For the sixth consecutive year, Manpower Group reported skilled trades such as electricians, welders and mechanics to be the hardest roles to fill. More difficult than engineers, technical staff, or even IT professionals.

Today's shortage represents a 12-year high, and these unfilled roles threaten productivity, efficiency and future growth. The top driver of that gap is that employers are unable to find qualified applicants.

Another driver, at least in the U.S., is our aging workforce. In 2012, 53 percent of skilled-trade workers in the U.S. were [45 years and older](#), compared to just 44 percent of workers overall. As those workers quickly approach retirement age, the shortage is likely to continue increasing.

### **Training the Workforce of Tomorrow**

[The University of West Alabama's Center for Workforce Development](#) was established specifically to address this and other employment issues by producing a competitive workforce, connecting business and industry constituents with a qualified workforce.

The latest addition to the center's programs – which include leadership training, community development training, and literacy training – is its [non-degree welding certificate](#).

Director Dr. Donnie Cobb says that welding was a logical addition given its critical role in ship building and construction, both of which are key industries in the Southeast. In addition, the average welder in the U.S. is 50 years old and likely considering retirement within the next 5 years. The continuing reduction in skilled welders will likely mean great opportunities for those who chose to pursue this career and the school's [non-degree certificate in welding](#) is designed to help students do exactly that.

“At the [University of West Alabama](#), our goal to prepare students for the future, no matter what that brings,” said Cobb. “Our non-degree certificate in welding is just one of our programs designed to help UWA students prepare for the huge shortage of skilled workers.”

### **Preparing for Work... Now**

The program is two full semesters, requiring 24 credit hours or 320 clock hours, and is offered entirely at night. “This allows our students to continue working a full-time job if they choose, but if the demand is there, we do plan to extend our offerings to day classes,” Cobb said.

Without a non-degree certificate like this one, aspiring welders would likely rely on an apprenticeship. But, as Cobb was quick to point out, “apprenticeships can be difficult to find in a job market like this. Most companies don't have time to provide on-the-job training; they need skilled workers who are ready to hit the ground running.”

Classes are held on the [UWA campus in Livingston](#), in its brand new facility complete with the latest equipment. According to Cobb, “Students learn on the top brands and newest machines, so they are fully prepared to work in any environment.” The facility includes a complete welding system for each student, limiting the number of participants to twelve each semester.

### **Establishing a Workforce Pipeline**



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Cobb is confident the program is [providing the knowledge and expertise employers](#) demand. “We recently had representatives from a Mississippi ship building company visit our classes to recruit for open welding positions,” Cobb said. “They tested our students, and 75 percent of the class passed their test.” The company ultimately offered a job to every qualified student, though the majority of them opted to continue their studies to earn an Interdisciplinary Studies degree.

That company was on the hunt for 2,200 new welders this year and expects to need as many as 4,200 in the near future.

“At UWA, we recognize that different students have different skills, goals, and aspirations,” Cobb said. “We are seeing first-hand that there is a growing need for skilled workers in Alabama and throughout the Southeast, and I’m proud that this welding certificate offers the skills and hands-on experience our students need to take advantage of those opportunities.”

This same philosophy permeates the entire [Center for Workforce Development](#), with its goal of creating an education and training pipeline to help unemployed and underemployed individuals increase their knowledge and abilities. UWA works closely with local and regional leaders to build and strengthen a qualified workforce, which is vital to the state’s economy.

### **Education with a Purpose**

The University of West Alabama provides a wide range of educational opportunities for those seeking the traditional path toward a 4-year degree. But as Dr. Cobb can attest, the additional training available through the university’s non-degree welding certificate and other programs available through the Center for [Workforce Development](#), UWA is helping to develop the diverse workforce that will be critical to economic development and success, both in Alabama and the United States as a whole.

“Our mission at UWA is to help our students ‘do something that matters’, to go out and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves,” Cobb said. “The CWD and our welding certificate give them the tools to do just that.”

To discover your path, visit [uwa.edu](http://uwa.edu) and explore the [vast course and certification offerings](#) today.