



The UNIVERSITY of
WEST ALABAMA

For most people, a college education is considered an investment in the future. But how can you be sure that investment pays off?

Studying, attending classes, doing the homework... those are all ways to make sure you leave with the knowledge you came to earn. But translating that knowledge into gainful employment could be another challenge entirely. Fortunately, [the University of West Alabama \(UWA\)](#) is preparing its students to face that challenge every day.

“UWA is committed to preparing students for a successful future, particularly in careers that will be not only fulfilling, but also allow them to thrive in all aspects of life,” said Betsy Compton, UWA Director of Public Relations. “In-depth research on business and industry needs and career path trends allows UWA to provide a thorough approach to [preparing students for existing careers](#) as well as careers that do not exist now. Keeping pace with trends is no longer sufficient – we must now be steps ahead of a trend in our thinking, planning and preparing so students can earn degrees and remain relevant in their chosen fields for many years to come.”

Real World Experience before Graduation

One way UWA ensures its students are prepared to enter the workforce successfully is through the university’s many internship programs. According to UWA Director of Career Services Tammy White, [UWA’s College to Career](#) (C2C) program offers a comprehensive range of career prep activities, including “graduating senior career development boot camp, career development mentorship programs, standard career pathways planning courses, individual career staff assistance, and new software and tracking programs to enhance graduate employment tracking.”

The program, funded by Lilly Endowment, is designed to enhance current career placement activities and better prepare graduates to transition immediately into the workforce upon graduation. For example, criminal justice and sociology students have the opportunity to work inside jails booking prisoners and even work with probation officers. Pre-med students are frequently often positioned in internships at impressive locations like UAB, Harvard University, and Pennsylvania State University—highly regarded internships that can be beneficial when applying to medical school.

Similarly, the education program at UWA gives its fourth-year students the choice to do their internship/practicum in the school system near UWA or to return to a school system near their hometowns. Either way, students can familiarize themselves with potential future employers, establish valuable contacts, and in many cases, build friendships that will avoid awkward job interview” moment.

While some majors require clinical and/or internship experiences, the university is also exploring additional on-campus student employment by developing viable internships with specific learning objectives and creating additional internships in academic areas not traditionally associated with workforce development.

In every major, these [individual internships](#) are high-level and specific, designed to give students access and opportunities they won’t find elsewhere.



The UNIVERSITY of
WEST ALABAMA

Non-Traditional Options Thrive at UWA

UWA also prepares students who choose to pursue an associate's degree or two-year technical program, offering the same type of hands-on training available in the four-year degree programs. These [opportunities are unique to UWA](#), according to Dr. Tina Jones, Executive Director of Economic Development & Outreach.

"UWA saw a void that we could fill because of our strategic location in the Black Belt region of Alabama. All individuals deserve access to training to be productive employees, and better training equates to better jobs and a higher quality of life, changing the narrative about rural communities," Jones said. "Past and current models didn't necessarily fit to meet future workforce development needs. When this happens, we knew it was essential to be flexible and creative in developing new innovative models."

Located in Alabama's rural Black Belt, UWA set out to be the leader in economic and workforce development, offering certificate programs, non-traditional degrees and workforce training designed to meet the [needs of business and industry in the region](#).

UWA's technical associate and certificate programs in automotive engineering, technology, industrial maintenance, welding and others offer [hands-on training that immediately prepare students for the workforce](#).

"UWA is the only four-year university in Alabama that offers these technical training programs. UWA offers opportunities in technical areas that directly meet the needs of business and industry in the Black Belt region and across Alabama," according to Dr. Donnie Cobb, Director of the UWA Center for Workforce Development.

UWA Center for Workforce Development

While UWA's commitment to its students is clear, the university also remains a dedicated part of the town of Livingston, Sumter County, and the entire Black Belt region. Last November, UWA President Ken Tucker [welcomed a standing-room only crowd](#) to the grand opening of the UWA Center for Workforce Development at Hunt Annex.

"We want to create an education and training pipeline to help unemployed and underemployed individuals to increase their knowledge and abilities so they can get better jobs, pay raises, benefits, and other opportunities that will increase their standard of living," Tucker said. "Rather than being an island unto itself, UWA is working with local and regional leaders to make a positive difference in the lives of those we serve."

The Center is home to UWA's Division of Technology, the Small Business Development Center, and the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Development Council, in addition to automotive technology,



The UNIVERSITY of
WEST ALABAMA

industrial maintenance, welding, computer labs, robotics lab, pneumatics lab, and other resources designed to meet the needs of students and area employers alike.

The UWA Workforce Council is also part of a seamless, collaborative system to meet [workforce needs](#). It combines workforce initiatives, both internally and externally, across the region and the state, including the Region 3 Workforce Council, Alabama Industrial Development Training, Alabama Department of Labor, and the Alabama Career Center, among others.

Built for Success

In addition to the university's expansive programs designed to send well-prepared students into the workforce, UWA continues to retain its primary advantage as an institution of higher learning: It is a community of students, faculty, staff and administrators who believe everyone can "do something that matters."

Building on the personal relationships made possible in smaller class sizes, students are able to develop an ongoing dialogue with professors and establish a clear path from a subject of interest to a satisfying and rewarding career. And degree programs are supplemented by additional courses designed to make UWA graduates particularly appealing to future employers.

For example, in the last few years, employers have expressed an increasing concern over the lack of soft skills in the emerging workforce. Through programs like UWA 101, capstone courses, professional development programs, and even a campus-wide program called "I-Communicate," UWA is focusing on developing soft skills as a core component. UWA also engages area business, industry, and regional partners to ensure that curriculum requirements are current and relevant.

UWA President Ken Tucker is proud of the [quality of education offered by the university](#) and believes the accessibility to upward mobility facilitated by these unique initiatives is something that sets his school apart. "We care about our students here, and we care about each other. There's a unique symbiosis achieved in providing these hands-on approaches to learning and growing," says Tucker. "The students blossom once they're here—they gain confidence to go out into their chosen fields because they've experienced it in practice, not just in theory. Meanwhile, the surrounding community benefits immensely because these bright, enthusiastic students are working to improve the area industries by becoming part of them."

Johnnie Aycock, Special Assistant to the President, notes that service is a touchstone of UWA's philosophy as an institution. "We are positioning UWA as a premier university serving the vast economic, workforce and livability challenges that have faced the Black Belt for many years," he says. "The key is a viable, trainable, ready-to-work, skilled workforce. And this threads through the entire fabric of UWA."

In short, they are all "[doing something that matters](#)."

For more information about how *you* can do something that matters, visit uwa.edu today.