

Welding Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes – Fall 2025

November 4, 2025, 5:00 PM

Lower Columbia College – Don Talley Building, Room 201

I. Call to Order

Chair Don Shepard called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

II. Attendance

Don Shepard (Central Welding, Chair)
Andrew Gross (ITW)
Cameron Miller (Student Representative, LCC)
Seamus Horgan (Nucor Skyline Steel)
Brandon Thompson (Western Fab)
Rob Cameron (Central Welding)
Cody Jones (UA 26-JH Kelly)
Tyler Salvig (Randco)
LJ Kruckenberg (Castle Rock High School)
Steve Mahitka (Kelso School District)
Natasha Allen (LCC)
Tamra Gilchrist (LCC)
Josh Hanson (LCC)
Jenny Smith (LCC)
Recorder: Kalisha Harris (LCC)

III. Advisory Committee Overview

Gilchrist provided an overview of advisory committee requirements and expectations, noting the committee's role in guiding program direction, recommending equipment and materials, and preparing students for industry needs. The committee must maintain an approx 50/50 balance between employer and employee representation, as well as labor/union representation. An industry partner must be the chair. Members in education do not have a vote on advisory committees.

Members were encouraged to suggest potential committee candidates. The group agreed to continue holding meetings separately from the AIR/Industrial Trades advisory group.

IV. Career Launch: Program Builder Grant

Smith shared updates on the Career Launch and Program Builder Grants, which support workbased learning and include paid internships. Industry partnerships are being developed to provide placements, with a goal of 90 student placements across four degree programs. A meet-and-greet event will be planned for Spring 2026 to connect employers and students.

This internship initiative will provide paid opportunities for students to earn college credit while gaining hands-on experience to enhance their résumés. The program will operate similarly to the cooperative education model and is expected to open new pathways for funding and equipment improvements.

The project is currently in the development stage, with outreach to industry partners planned for January and February. Smith encouraged committee members to be prepared to provide feedback and share ideas when contacted.

Gilchrist added that approximately 17 colleges applied for nearly \$3 million in funding through this initiative. Having industry support for Career Launch will unlock future opportunities for LCC to apply for capital equipment which is a high priority and need for the welding program.

V. Action Items and Votes

1. Appointment of Student Representative

Motion: Gross moved to appoint Miller as Student Representative.

Jones seconded.

Motion carried unanimously.

2. Elimination of AAS-T Track –Allen and Gilchrist gave an overview of the proposed changes. The AAS-T degree track will be consolidated into the AAS to improve student flow into BAS programs and maintain funding eligibility. Gilchrist explained that the primary change involves the general education courses (English 110-101, Math 106-107, Natural Science-distribution list for transfer degrees). The new structure better supports transfer to OLTM designed for industry professionals who may be ready to move into supervisory and management positions requiring or preferring a bachelor degree.

Motion: Jones moved to approve the elimination of the AAS-T degree and update the AAS and related certificates (as part of the pathway) as presented.

Salvig seconded.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. Addition of Prerequisite to WELD 158 – Blueprint Reading for Welding, BLPT 160, will be added as a prerequisite to ensure students are properly prepared before course placement.

Motion: Gross moved to approve.

Thompson seconded.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Credit Adjustment for MFG 107 – The credit load for MFG 107 will change from 6 to 5 credits to resolve scheduling gaps and prevent excess cost in time and tuition to students.

Motion: Horgan moved to approve.

Jones seconded.

Motion carried unanimously.

VI. Program and Curriculum Updates

Allen reported that classes are at capacity with 30 students per section. Many are pursuing full degrees or retraining as apprentices. Students in Diesel, Machine, and Auto programs are required to complete welding courses.

Gilchrist noted that, due to limited space, options for additional sections may include weekend classes and asked that anyone interested in adjunct or substitute opportunities to provide additional classes reach out to either her or Allen.

Allen shared that currently, students are welding indoors, outdoors, in smaller spaces, and anywhere they can find safe places to work. The committee agrees that, while not ideal, the environment mirrors real-world work conditions and fosters teamwork. Shepard acknowledged the program's strong experiential learning approach.

VII. Equipment Review and Recommendations

Shepard stated that equipment needs remain fluid as the new building will not open for approximately two years. Cost estimates may increase by up to 25% by the time of completion.

Jones recommended adding TipTig technology for students who prefer single-hand processes. Allen supported this recommendation.

The committee discussed preferred vendor partnerships. Allen and Shepard confirmed that Miller equipment continues to be favored for educational discounts, support, and accessibility features. Hobart also provides strong discounts.

Automation and cobots were discussed extensively: Shepard and Allen emphasized the growing demand for automation due to workforce shortages. Gross noted the simplicity of cobot systems and suggested short training modules. Allen proposed rotating students through the system, similar to CNC training. Horgan highlighted increasing industry automation trends. The committee agreed to add cobots to the list of equipment for consideration.

VIII. Industry and Labor Updates

Members reported ongoing challenges in recruiting skilled welders as the number of retirements increases.

Allen emphasized hiring students nearing graduation to foster loyalty and retention. Horgan noted that AI is reducing the demand for desk-based roles, while demand for skilled trades remains high. Mahitka reported that most incoming freshmen have minimal hands-on experience but are eager to learn. Gilchrist encouraged employers to communicate desired skill adjustments that can be integrated into existing coursework. Shepard added the need for instruction on correct terminology for consumables and parts recognition.

Consensus: Incorporate identified skill gaps and technical terminology into the current curriculum.

IX. CTE and High School Partnerships

Updates included strong participation across programs: 20 students from machine trades expected to transition to welding in winter; 29 diesel students are actively enrolled; high school programs at CRHS and KSD are at capacity.

Kruckenbergh shared success stories, including that of a blind student who excelled with specialized Miller equipment. Horgan suggested exploring PPE designed specifically for women. Mahitka reported success in competitions and upcoming AWS certifications.

X. New CVTC Building Update

Gilchrist announced groundbreaking for the CVTC building, which will highlight trades programs. Construction is expected to last approximately 2 years, followed by a six-month setup phase. Updated equipment lists will be maintained for potential donor and foundation opportunities.

Follow-Up: Provide naming rights and foundation information for the new building.

Allen requested prize donations and industry participation for the upcoming Welding Competition to enhance student-industry connections.

XI. Old Business

Approval of Previous Minutes – Motion: Jones moved to approve. Gross seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Upcoming Events – The welding competition is scheduled for April 2026. Next Meeting tentatively planned for April 2026 (avoiding May–July due to scheduling conflicts).

Additional Updates – Gilchrist noted budget changes and staff transitions, including the departure of the Workforce Education representative and the removal of the CDL program. Ethics training reminders were shared; training is required every three years.

XII. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:22 PM.

Resources

Advisory Committee Webpage: <https://lowercolumbia.edu/advisory/>

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