

Logistics program partners with Walmart on employee training project

Warehouse managers offered custom course to strengthen technical & leadership skills

BAYTOWN, TX — Daniel Rexford had been out of school for more than 20 years when he learned the Lee College Logistics Program was offering a training course specifically designed for him and his fellow managers at the Walmart Distribution Center in Baytown. The company would provide support to help established and up-and-coming leaders keep up with their full-time work while taking advantage of the new opportunity.

Within weeks of enrolling in the class, Rexford had more advanced knowledge of how rail, air, maritime, warehousing and e-commerce are used to meet key business objectives. He knew the importance of accounting for weather, vibration and other factors when getting a product from one point to another. He started looking at ways to optimize how freight was handled at the distribution center. He began to make plans to complete an Associate of Applied Science degree in logistics and supply chain technology at Lee College, and he persuaded his son to sign up for the training course and pursue a degree, too.

“You’re not just moving a box,” said Rexford, one of 17 Walmart warehouse managers who will be the first to graduate from the training program in December. “You’re learning how to move a box differently, in the face of different obstacles and to achieve different goals.”

It’s the primary lesson that Keith Coleman, director of the Lee College logistics program, intended to impart to his students when he designed and launched the Walmart training course: logistics encompasses a broad spectrum of transportation, storage and distribution activities that companies use to move products as cheaply and quickly as possible. With the development and implementation of new technologies, like drones and driverless vehicles, successful logistics professionals will need the vision and understanding to think beyond the traditional.

“In the military, the faster and more effectively you can move things, the more lives are saved. In the business world, money is saved — but industry executives are not trained logisticians,” said Coleman, a retired U.S. Marine Corps officer who has overseen steady growth of the logistics program at Lee College and will soon open a full-scale Logistics Training Center on campus.

“Logisticians see the whole picture,” Coleman said. “They create the game plan. They are the problem solvers. Being in this program allows these students to get hands-on and see a future for themselves. They’ll remember Lee College as the place where they got the training that made a difference.”

In addition to technical knowledge, the logistics training for Walmart managers also aims to help strengthen leadership and communication skills. Coleman frequently assigns role-playing exercises that simulate a wide range of on-the-job scenarios between supervisors and employees, as well as presentations that require students to dress professionally and practice public speaking. Many say their confidence and ability to guide and instruct others have improved as a result.

“When you come to work, you know who has been taking the training because you can see that we’re growing and learning,” said Jerry Duarte. “We’re using different terminology, thinking more quickly and being more creative.”

For Amanda Erne, getting back into the classroom for logistics training at Lee College made her realize that seeking additional education was long overdue. The encouragement from Walmart and camaraderie she and her colleagues in the program have built made returning to college less intimidating and more rewarding than she expected.

“We tend to have a more narrow view of our jobs; we know what we do, but we don’t know why we do it,” said Erne, who now aspires to a life-long career as a logistician — just like all the Baytown Distribution Center managers in the class. “This program has given us a wider perspective and deeper understanding of how logistics works.”