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Davis Auto Group partners with Career Bridge for new co-op program, pledges \$125,000 in scholarship support

The most valuable employees are those who know a business from the ground up — so when the University of Lethbridge and Davis Auto Group began constructing a new co-operative education experience for students, they took a talent strategy system approach. As the first cohort of students concludes its term at Davis, the approach appears to be a resounding success.

“We worked closely with the University’s Career Bridge/Co-op Office in building out a forward-thinking 12-month co-op program designed to give students a well-rounded understanding of all facets of our automotive business,” says Lisa Reid (BMgt ’19, Davis Auto group human resources consultant, noting students get a chance to experience everything from sales and finance to materials management, accounting and more. “Students rotate into a new department every four months which allows them to see a unique cross-section of our business and see the big picture and learn that we are certainly more than just selling and fixing cars.”



Stacey Gaudette-Sharp, assistant dean for Career Bridge, says the approach is meant to align with the holistic educational experience that ULethbridge designs for its students.

“We want our students to think about the theories they’re learning in the classroom, but also the skills they’re building in those courses, and how they are articulated and applied in the real world,” she says. “Only then can students start making decisions about who they are, what fills their cup, what they value, and how these values are

represented in their work. Students should leverage every opportunity to try stuff out — to figure out what makes them curious and passionate.”

Davis Auto Group Gift and Awards

The relationship between ULeithbridge and the Davis Auto Group goes beyond the co-op opportunities and includes a trio of scholarship awards established by the Davis family with a \$125,000 donation. The gift is matched by the Board of Governors matching program, thereby doubling the impact of the scholarship support. These awards include the following:

- Davis Auto Group Student Employee Award — Ranked on academic achievement, any entering or continuing undergraduate student employed with any company of the Davis Auto Group is eligible.
- Davis Auto Group Community Service Award — Recognizing students who have made significant contributions to their community through either campus and/or general community involvement, any entering or continuing undergraduate student is eligible.
- Davis Auto Group Employee Family Award — Ranked on academic achievement, this award is for any entering or continuing undergraduate students who are children, grandchildren or dependents of current or retired employees of Davis Auto Group of Companies.

A trio of students made up the first Davis Auto Group cohort, and after a year of working their way through the company, their co-op has been extended another four months through the summer. Tim, Mike and Luke Davis, who are all active in the Lethbridge business, were excited to launch the program and the potential it held for both Davis Auto Group and ULeithbridge students.

“We were hopeful we could provide some value to the students who chose to work with our company during their school term, and from what we’ve seen in the first year, we’re really encouraged by the start,” says Mike Davis. “It’s exciting to see some real promise in our first group of ULeithbridge students and we can really see them as long-term members of our team.”

For the students, the learning curve has been steep and rewarding.

“What surprised me the most about the auto industry and dealerships is how many different departments and people behind the scenes it takes to successfully run a dealership and auto group. I experienced every single role/department, whether it was on the sales floor, parts, service lane or accounting,” says Andon Van Dyk, who is heading into his fourth year as an accounting major. “Doing co-op, I am actually able to

make the connection from the classroom to the workforce, where as before, it was all just theory.”

Third-year management student DJ Tonin says his confidence grew as the experience progressed and he unearthed previously unknown skills.

“I discovered how much I enjoy learning about the different parts of a dealership and how they work together. It’s helped me realize that I’m adaptable, open to new experiences, and capable of picking up new skills quickly,” says Tonin. “As a student, I’ve grown by developing a stronger work ethic, better time management and more confidence in professional settings. This experience pushed me to step out of my comfort zone and apply what I’ve learned in school to real-world situations.”

National data has shown that students who participate in work-integrated learning or co-op experiences realize an uptick in their GPAs when they return to class, having seen the context of their studies beyond the classroom.

“One of the most rewarding parts of my role is seeing the transformation that takes place in students throughout their work term,” says Sheridan Macaulay, an instructor with Career Bridge. “When I first visited them on-site, they were understandably shy and still finding their footing. Now, I see confident, capable individuals who have grown not only in technical skills but also in communication, leadership and self-awareness. They’ve learned how to ask thoughtful questions, mentor others and work effectively within a team. Davis Auto Group has been an incredible employer partner in this journey. They genuinely care about their people, and our students have seen how strong, values-based leadership builds a supportive workplace culture where everyone can thrive.”

Reid says the Davis Auto Group is excited about continuing to work with Career Bridge in further shaping co-op opportunities.

“The partnerships between industry and post-secondary institutions are invaluable as they benefit both employers and students,” she says. “We understand that students may not end up choosing the automotive industry after graduation, however a program such as this allows them to gain exposure and create a foundation of understanding business operations and building skillsets they can take with them wherever they choose to start their careers.”

Students can apply for Davis Auto Group Awards up until June 15, 2025, by visiting ULethbridge’s [scholarship application page](#).

DJ Tonin

“The greatest takeaway from my experience is how important teamwork and communication are in keeping a dealership running smoothly. No matter the department, success comes from people working together and supporting each other toward a common goal.”

Ethan Van Dyk

“While classroom time and school are important, there is no better way of learning than hands-on in the real world. I absolutely recommend other students take the co-op route as I think it is the best way to gain experience as well as make connections — and who doesn't like to make money while doing all that?”

Andon Van Dyk

“My greatest takeaway from this experience is the connections and friends I made while working here — those are invaluable. I would 100 per cent recommend students pursue their own WIL experience. Even if it doesn't particularly align with your major, you're still gaining valuable experience that employers are looking for.”

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/davis-auto-group-partners-career-bridge-new-co-op-program-pledges-125000-scholarship-support>

PHOTO (L to R): Chris Broad (General Manager), Mike Davis (Dealer Principal), Lisa Reid (HR), Andon Van Dyk (Student), Ethan Van Dyk (Student).

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Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.