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**Constructing victory: UW-Platteville team nails top five finish in national contest, emphasizing high-impact program**

Written by Christine Bellport

The University of Wisconsin-Platteville ABC Construction Management Competition Team showcased their exceptional talent by placing fourth overall in a national competition in Las Vegas that mirrors the challenges of real-world construction management. The four-person team put their leadership and project management skills to the test on a complex, multi-phase construction project.

“The team had to develop a comprehensive project management plan for a real 27-acre development in Oceanside, California, including a 27,000-square-foot medical facility,” said UW-Platteville alumna Gretchen Bockenhauer, program coordinator and assistant professor of construction management and construction safety management. “It included an organization chart, who’s involved in the project, schedule and estimate, quality control plan and a safety plan. It’s so relatable to what they’re going to be doing when they leave here.”

 The [ABC National Student Chapter Network](https://www.abc.org/Education-Training/National-Student-Chapter-Network) links local ABC chapters with colleges and universities offering construction management programs. It plays a vital role in building the construction industry’s talent pipeline. Industry professionals observed the teams as they competed.

 “It provides an incredibly accurate representation of what it is like to prepare Request for Proposal (RFP) response in the construction industry,” explained Logan Niesen from Belleville, Wisconsin, who is graduating this May with a major in construction management and a minor in business administration. “The most valuable part for me was the network I built—those connections will support my career in the industry for years to come.”

Niesen also served as an ambassador for the construction management program and already has a job lined up after graduation as an Assistant Project Manager at J.F. Ahern Company. He found great value in being part of the team and competing throughout his time at UW-Platteville.

“I chose to stay on the team all four years because each year brought new experiences that deepened my knowledge,” said Niesen.

To be a member of the team, students must go through an interview process and earn the opportunity to participate. Candidates are selected based on their knowledge and skills, with interviews for the next team beginning this fall.

“Being part of the construction management competition is an honor in itself,” boasted junior Abigail Spilde from Cottage Grove, Wisconsin, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in construction management with an emphasis in construction safety management and minoring in architecture and business. “Being chosen as one of just six or seven students from the entire department to compete at the national level is something to be proud of. The networking is incredible; judges and industry professionals hand out business cards, get to know you personally and help you make connections that could lead to future job opportunities.”

Though business cards were exchanged, [UW-Platteville’s Construction Management program](https://www.uwplatt.edu/program/construction-management) consistently produces industry-ready professionals, and this team was no exception. Even though they impressed recruiters during the competition, each team member had already accepted full-time job offers—further proof that the students don’t just compete; they lead.

“All of the construction management faculty have worked in the industry for a significant amount of time,” said UW-Platteville alumna Gina Blasen, P.E., assistant professor of construction management. “They understand the construction industry and love taking students on field trips to construction jobsites and having guest speakers into classes. We also provide a fully immersive environment on campus.”

A key advantage few other universities in the country offer: UW-Platteville’s high-impact program provides unique access to active construction and roadway sites on campus, where students gain real-world experience managing live projects. Each semester, students build—and then dismantle—a two-story commercial structure using the same equipment found on professional job sites. They also pour concrete, install electrical and HVAC systems, lay storm sewer and water lines and construct a full roadway. The entire process is completed in just one semester as four weeks are dedicated to the building, and four weeks to the road. This isn’t just a program—it’s a proving ground.

“Our program is great because it combines the skills to manage a project and people with the technical aspects of construction,” said Blasen. “Our industry is booming and there are many opportunities for all our graduates.”

This unique, project-based approach means that graduates of UW-Platteville's construction management program don't just leave with a degree, they leave with a resume full of experience, ready to lead on day one.

“UW-Platteville was the perfect place for my education,” said alumna Allison Gitter, project manager at WDS Construction in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. “In construction, classroom learning only goes so far; practical exposure truly prepares you. Beyond great courses and hands-on labs, the real-world experiences like jobsite visits and mock bids were invaluable. I'm incredibly grateful I chose UW-Platteville.”

Gitter had multiple job offers prior to graduation.

“The department is deeply committed to delivering an education that thoroughly prepares students for the industry,” Gitter reflects. “They consistently advocate for their students and work tirelessly to secure industry support, enhancing the program to ensure their success."

Alumni agree that their success begins long before graduation.

“UW-Platteville helped me land my first job by being a member of the Construction Management Competition team,” said alumnus Zach Wynstra, project superintendent with Greystone Construction. “I was in San Antonio, Texas, for the National ABC Competition, where I met my current employer through networking.”

The construction industry is the largest single industry in the United States, and UW-Platteville equips students with the confidence, skills and industry-specific knowledge needed to thrive within it.

“We are not expecting our students to be operators or laborers, but if they can see what it takes to build something and do it with their hands, they are going to become better managers, better estimators and better schedulers,” said Bockenhauer.

Graduates of UW-Platteville take this preparation with them into the real world, shaping the future of construction and highlighting the drive and commitment students carry as they enter the workforce.

“I am dedicated to representing UW-Platteville with my passion for the flourishing industry,” exclaimed Spilde.