



## Scholars Preparing to Join Workforce

Avenue Scholars (AS) has a clear mission. That mission is to ensure careers for committed students of hope and need through education/training and supportive relationships. Furthermore, AS aspires for each student it serves to complete our program having satisfied the following guarantees: education/training, work experience, work-ready skills, attendance, and financial and personal wellbeing.

We define work ready habits and skills in a committed Avenue Scholar as an ability to demonstrate responsibility, work ethic, communication, positive attitude, professionalism, teamwork and problem solving. Sometimes, these skills are called 'soft' skills in the workplace, in contrast to the 'hard' skills of experience, education, and training.

Why is it important to be able to demonstrate this readiness for work? Employers have long touted the importance of soft skill development in hiring. According to P. Loretto (2019) at [balancecareers.com](http://balancecareers.com), "Employers value these types of skills because they demonstrate the internal thought processes of a person and how effective they will be in the organization." In fact, according to J. Bauer-Wolf (2019), writing for [inside-highered.com](http://inside-highered.com), "...employers emphasized leadership and ability to work in a team as the most desirable attributes when recruiting ... ahead of analytical and quantitative skills."

High school is a perfect place to develop and hone these work ready skills. The Nebraska Department of Education created the Nebraska's Standards of Career Readiness (adopted in 2011), available online at this site, which guide our work with students. <https://www.education.ne.gov/nce/careerreadinessstandards/>.

The Avenue Scholars program builds work-ready skill development into its curriculum and activities from day one. One example is the use of a text, called *Bring Your A Game to Work*, by E. Chester (2012). It involves activities and discussions around developing a work ethic that focus on attitude, attendance, appearance, ambition, accountability, acceptance, and appreciation. Our curriculum engages students in problem solving and critical thinking about appropriate work behaviors, coaches students on employability, and monitors and supports growth in transferable job skills. The first measure of demonstration of developing work ready skills is completion of the Avenue Scholars' career ready curriculum.

The second measure used to monitor and support growth in students' work ready skill development is through the experience of part-time work and employer feedback. All Avenue Scholars complete part-time work during their junior and senior years, a perfect training ground for practicing those work ready skills. To build a successful work history, Avenue Scholars' coaches assist students in finding those part-time jobs, monitor work hours, complete employee feedback forms, and facilitate student self-evaluation and progress evaluations. Students are expected to meet or exceed standards on the employer feedback form.

The Employee Feedback Form that we use in the program represents what employers value in work ready skills. Employers rate students in a variety of categories as proficient, progressing or not progressing. In the area of responsibility and work ethic, we look at reliability and dependability. Communication includes both oral and written communication and timeliness. Positive attitude is

reflected as respect for others, confidence, and environmental awareness. Professionalism is measured as carrying oneself with confidence in one's behaviors and attitudes. Teamwork looks at working collaboratively with others. Problem solving includes decision-making, adaptability, initiative, and conflict resolution. Coaches then support

the student in the application of strengths and development of weaknesses in these areas.

We know that employers strive to find workers with valuable work readiness skills. They believe those skills are likely to influence retention and satisfaction on the job. According to B. Bean-Mellinger (2019) at [smallbusiness-chron.com](http://smallbusiness-chron.com), "Candidates with workplace skills are employable because they make sound decisions, have the capacity to acquire new knowledge and easily adapt to various work situations."

What can parents do to help their students? The development of work-ready skills are mirrored in the behaviors and attitudes you expect of your teens at home. Help your student with etiquette and manners. Practice listening and having conversations face to face. Review their digital footprint and social media accounts. Practice time management and goal setting. Expect responsibility and dependability of your teen in everyday life. Any practice at home will help to hone the skills that will benefit a teen for a lifetime.



<http://dm.greenville.edu/2019/05/soft-skills-9/>



Avenue Scholars students are given opportunities to explore jobs in various career fields, such as automotive technology.

### *Outstanding Junior Scholar*

## **Gilbert looks forward to career in trades**

Junior Trent Gilbert enjoys working hard, but he also looks forward to engaging in fun activities.

“Trent loves playing soccer and has experience working in the trades,” High School Career Coach Kayla Gillian says. “Even as a junior in high school, he has put in many hours at work. Outside of work and school, Trent hangs out with his friends and would describe himself as chill, funny, and loyal.”

Students in the Avenue Scholars program are expected to gain experience in the work force by working part-time during the school year. Scholars are also mentored and encouraged to choose a career field to explore and pursue early in the program.

Gilbert plans to go into the trades and earn his degree at Metropolitan Community College — with mentorship and guidance from Avenue Scholars — after high school.

### *Outstanding Senior Scholar*

## **Zedkaia focuses on business career**

Senior Lisa Zedkaia says she would take money and invest it if she had the right knowledge to do so. Once she has her Associate’s Degree in business, she hopes to have the necessary knowledge and the money to invest after finding the right job in her field.

When not working or attending classes, “Lisa loves playing basketball and hanging out with her family,” says High School Career Coach Kayla Gillian.

Avenue Scholars explorations at Union Pacific and the Healthcare Superday solidified Zedkaia’s interest in the business career field. Currently, she works in retail at Old Navy and enjoys her position, but she is looking forward to a challenge in her second semester of high school by attending MCC classes and applying for the post-secondary internships that partner with Avenue Scholars.

Zedkaia plans to attend Metropolitan Community College to earn a degree in Business Management and obtain her Real Estate license.

# UPDATE

Millard South’s Avenue Scholars program for this school year consists of 29 juniors and 25 seniors.

In a time of concurrent learning with some students needing to learn completely remote and the others in class, we all are learning something new during this time.



Seniors’ career interests include one auto career path student, seven looking into a variety of business areas, six healthcare career focused students, three going into information technology, six interested in the trades, and two more looking into other career path options.

Students will take various pathways, including being full-time students at MCC, internships, and straight to work options. Seniors are really focusing on their career plans and setting goals to begin their career path after high school. Setting goals have been focused around academics, transportation, work experience, and personal skills for after high school. Tanner Fryant has taken on a position with Intern Omaha in the trades. After high school, he plans to apply to the Plumbing Union or take classes at MCC to gain knowledge in this field. Another senior, Zel LaPlante, participates in the MCC Academy in Culinary Arts. He will complete some of the classes that will go toward his Associate’s Degree at Metropolitan Community College.

Juniors’ career interests include five in health service, four in auto, seven in the trades, five in information technology, and eight in business. Juniors are focusing on learning more about themselves in work ready skills, their career industry knowledge, and taking a self assessment on their Gallup strengths. Students will be learning more about their strengths, taking on career awareness or exploration opportunities, building their resumes, and researching their career interests. Students have received their Avenue Scholars polos and started looking for job opportunities if they do not already balance a part-time job and school. These students will be with us for five years, so they are building rapport and relationships with their peers and career coaches through assignments and their involvement in class activities.

Recruitment of the 2023 Cohort is starting up, and we always are looking for 25-30 students who fit the criteria of attending MCC for an Associate’s Degree or less. We hope to gain candidates who are looking to go into high demand, high wage, and high skill careers in the Omaha area. Hats off to all the remote learners sticking through this to get in homework and attending classes online.

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