

Moraine Valley CSSIA student alumni land jobs

They all studied at Moraine Valley Community College where they earned a variety of certificates. Some earned Associate's degrees and nearly all competed in cyber security competitions. Now, seven former Moraine Valley students from the college's Center for Systems Security and Information Assurance (CSSIA) program work at DELL SecureWorks, a worldwide IT security services company.

John Hanson, Paul Jankowski, Kyle Leubscher, Nan Li, Carlos Marquez, Joe Mayer, and Ursula Radwanski either were or still are students at Moraine Valley. Collectively they've earned a variety of certifications and degrees including N+, CCNA and A+ certification. They all work in various departments at DELL from the firewall team to network engineering.

Although each person had their own path to a career at DELL, they cited the benefit of quality teachers, classes and competition to get them there. Marquez received an Associate in Applied Science—Internet Specialist, along with several certifications, after studying at Moraine Valley from 2005 to 2008. After graduating in 2008, he was hired at DELL in large part due to his participation in a CSSIA cyber defense competition. “The key was the competition, the exposure to people, teachers, employers, and schools such as DePaul and Illinois State universities. DELL was a big player in the competition,” he said. Mayer competed in 2008, helped with a competition in 2009 and from those experiences was hired by DELL in 2010.

For Radwanski, the key was connections and an internship. She received an Associate in Science in 2008 before being hired at DELL in 2011. In between she had help from Lou Balek, Moraine Valley information security specialist, to secure an internship with the Chicago Fire as an assistant IT manager. That experience in addition to earning a bachelor's degree from Saint Xavier University aided her journey to DELL. And how does Radwanski feel in a field typically dominated by men? “Our company has never made me feel out of place; I'm not treated differently. There are not that many women in my area but many throughout the company,” she said.

Mayer earned an associate's degree in 2010, along with several certifications. He had an internship at CSSIA, worked at some CSSIA competitions and said DELL hired him from a competition.

Hanson has several certifications from Moraine Valley and continues to take classes while working at DELL. He participated in the competitions as a student and judge. "You really see how Moraine Valley stacks up to bigger schools like DePaul University. We measure up to them," he said.

Li worked at the CSSIA competitions which along with earning a bachelor's degree helped him secure his job. He is currently working on a master's degree. Jankowski finished his studies at Moraine Valley in 2011 before being hired the following year while Leubscher studied at the college from 2006 to 2009 and was hired in 2010.

Each person mentioned the value of Moraine Valley teachers, highlighting Ricky Moore, associate professor of information technology; Erich Spengler, professor of computer integrated technologies and director and principal investigator of CSSIA; and Dr. John Sands, professor of information technology and co-principle investigator of CSSIA. In their classes students didn't just read about situations, they were thrown into them. "John and Erich show you these things in the book and then say 'now here's real life.' They go above and beyond the book," Marquez said. Radwanski added, "Ricky's LAN 101 class was the most inspiring moment. If not for him, I wouldn't be here. He's so passionate and makes you feel you can do anything. He shows where you can go. It's crazy inspiring."

Studying at Moraine Valley before pursuing a bachelor's degree made them feel ahead of the curve. "Schools like Moraine Valley are like a pot of gold you don't know about, but it's great. It's the best bang for your buck," Marquez said. "All around, the curriculum is solid. The firewall classes I took and taught are almost the same scenarios as in reality." Li even went so far as to say he could take naps in classes at the four-year university he transferred to because he was so ahead of the class thanks to his Moraine Valley studies. The common pattern in this field is earning a two-year degree along with certificates, getting experience in the work world and then getting paid by an employer to go back to school for a bachelor's degree. Fortunately for them and future employees, DELL offers tuition reimbursement for continued education. Moraine Valley pushes for certifications, unlike most four-year universities, Radwanski said. The group agreed that you don't need a degree to get these kind of technology-based jobs, but more degrees help these days. A degree is insurance.