Distributed by UW News Service, December 16, 2024

Link to original story: <https://uwlax.edu/news/posts/getting-their-feet-wet/>

### **Getting their feet wet**

### **UWL partners with J.F. Brennan, providing hands-on experience in hydrographic surveying**

Written by UW-La Crosse University Marketing & Communications

J.F. Brennan, a fourth-generation, family-owned marine construction firm based in La Crosse, specializes in environmental remediation, dam construction, commercial diving, harbor management and submarine cable services. It is also a top employer of UW-La Crosse students.

Students in [Colin Belby](https://www.uwlax.edu/profile/cbelby/)’s Geospatial Field Methods course ([GEO 410](https://catalog.uwlax.edu/undergraduate/coursedescriptions/geo/)) recently gained hands-on experience in hydrographic surveying through a unique partnership with J.F. Brennan.

“It’s reassuring to see former UWL geography students succeed at J.F. Brennan, knowing I can apply the skills I’ve learned at UWL in my own career,” says Jordan Carvenough, a senior majoring in [geographic information systems.](https://www.uwlax.edu/academics/department/geography-and-environmental-science/)

The collaboration kicked off with a training session led by J.F. Brennan hydrographers, who introduced students to the basics of setting up a sonar survey. The following week, students visited J.F. Brennan’s headquarters for a day of fieldwork and data processing.

“This partnership is an excellent opportunity for UWL students to work in the field with cutting-edge technology and processes to help craft the skills needed, as well as affording J.F. Brennan the chance to work with a world-class learning organization to assist with the development of tomorrow’s workforce.” says Brian Reitzel, senior learning and development officer at J.F. Brennan.

"My favorite part of the J.F. Brennan experience was using the [UWL Research Vessel Prairie Springs](https://www.uwlax.edu/news/posts/ready-to-make-waves/) to collect the hydrographic data," Carvenough says. "We then learned how the data is processed. Seeing how the data is collected in the field and then brought to the computers and turned into a product they give their customers was an eye-opening experience."

Carvenough highlighted how the experience bridged the gap between academic learning and practical application.

"The collaboration enhanced my education by just understanding how my classes throughout my college career can be applied to the real world," Carvenough says.

During the collaboration, J.F. Brennan staff went above and beyond to support the students' learning experience.

"I am appreciative of the J.F. Brennan staff who took time out of their days to set up the Research Vessel Prairie Springs to perform this data collection," Carvenough adds. "They stayed late while we were at J.F. Brennan to show us how the operations work and thoroughly answer any questions we had."

The collaboration highlights a valuable connection between UWL and J.F. Brennan, an academic partnership that was formalized in 2022, offering students an inside look at industry practices and potential career paths.

“The exciting part of growing this partnership,” Reitzel says, “is the opportunity to pass on what we are seeing as the important factors that the workforce needs to understand and learn to be successful in tomorrow’s world.”