From a stint as a paratrooper in Iraq, Gregory Walsh knew how to jump out of an airplane from 1,000 feet up. But he was a bit apprehensive when he walked through the door for his first day at State Street Corporation in downtown Boston. “I didn’t know what to expect,” said Walsh, a Bunker Hill Community College business major who had signed up for a new initiative called Learn and Earn in which 20 BHCC students were matched with major Massachusetts corporations to work one or two days a week for 14 weeks.

The Plymouth, Massachusetts, native, who had once worn the uniform of the U.S. Army was now wearing a sleek suit and tie as he headed into a leading financial service provider that administers more than $23.2 trillion in assets worldwide.

What he found working in the “talent acquisition” area of human resources surprised and pleased him: a welcoming workplace in which he drew on skills learned in BHCC classes like Accounting Information Systems and Introduction to Business. Then came an unexpected bonus: at the end of the 14-week Learn and Earn program he was offered a full-time summer internship that would boost this 28-year-old’s résumé for employment after graduation.

“Through Learn and Earn, students get to do something they wouldn’t be able to do otherwise—the opportunity to prove their value,” Walsh said.

Walsh was one of five BHCC students placed at State Street through the Learn and Earn program initiated at the College in January 2012. Another was Matthew Hobert, a U.S. Marine and BHCC business major, who was matched with the Corporate Development and Global Relations Management Department. There, he was assigned to work on what began as a two-day project intended to chart traffic at financial web sites. He became so interested in the data that Nidhi V. Shandilya, assistant vice president in the Center for Applied Research, increased the project’s scope to an analysis of large and small investor web behavior during market fluctuations. In July, Hobert presented his findings to a group that included not only fellow interns but top State Street officials.

“Matt has been absolutely fantastic to work with,” Shandilya said after Hobert’s presentation. “He is very calm and composed; he absorbs a lot of information and reflects back on that. That’s a great asset.”

Hobert, like Walsh, was also offered a summer internship. In fact, four of the five Learn and Earn students matched with State Street continued with a summer internship; a fifth, who had graduated, was hired to work part time. “The students came in here with guns blazing, so to speak, essentially to do a good job,” said Richard Curtis, manager of Community Recruiting Programs at State Street.

Apparently, they succeeded.

Barely a year earlier, BHCC President Mary L. Fifield had sat down for a meeting with members of the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership (MACP), a coalition of 15 influential Massachusetts CEOs. The group discussed creating a pilot program at Bunker Hill Community College, replicable elsewhere, that would prepare Massachusetts community college students for the workplace by giving them the chance to step into a corporate setting at a major company. Much of the inspiration for the initiative came from Bill Swanson, Chair and CEO of Raytheon.

Swanson had earned an associate degree from a community college in San Luis Obispo, California, before graduating from California

Getting a Foot in the Door

The Learn and Earn Program of the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership takes students into some of Greater Boston’s most prestigious firms for workplace experience.
Polytechnic State University with a bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering. Bunker Hill Community College has a long track record of working with local industry to provide hands-on learning opportunities for students. Over the years it has placed thousands of students in hundreds of Massachusetts companies in fields ranging from accounting and nursing to criminal justice, culinary arts marketing, human resources, technology and engineering. They found real-life applications for BHCC coursework and quickly picked up new skills. They made valuable contacts for future networking. They gained deeper insight into how to speak, dress and react in a corporate environment or a highly professional situation.

“Learn and Earn is a win-win. Students gain valuable on-the-job experience that would help them whether they go on to attend four-year colleges or enter the job market after earning their BHCC degree. For students like business major Jamal Kirk, who had enrolled in BHCC to make a career change after a less than satisfying career in retail, the program was a chance to see if his entrepreneurial spirit, creativity and ambition would have a place amid the pressures of corporate culture. He was passionate about business but wasn’t sure where to find the best fit. In his previous job, he said, “They called me ‘the visionary’; they called me ‘the maverick’ but they didn’t know how to make the best use of my innate talents.”

At BHCC, Kirk concentrated in business and helped found the Entrepreneurship Club, which has won plaudits for its ingenuity in marketing and promotion. (See story, page 28.) When Kirk heard about the Learn and Earn program, he applied. “I really wanted to give the corporate world another shot,” he said. He worked in a position at EMC in the technology giant’s social media division, where he helped write content for one of the company’s technology blogs. Working at the Hopkinton, Massachusetts, headquarters of the multinational corporation—which ranks 152 in the Fortune 500 and had reported revenues of $20 billion in 2011—he got a front-row seat on the company’s use of social trends. “I wanted to see how a big company leverages social media to connect with their customers and improve their branding,” he said. “I wanted to see how they use tools like Facebook and Twitter and blogs.”

He was impressed with what he saw, and EMC, apparently, was impressed with him—“I was matched with BJ’s Wholesale Club,” Kirk said. “I felt the need to understand business,” said Keshishian, who plans to get a master’s degree and is now also considering law school. “I had never worked in a corporate setting; I had never worked in a job that didn’t engage all of her skills, Keshishian admitted lackluster high school student who had enrolled in BHCC to study finance and accounting, was pleased at the atmosphere of BJ’s Wholesale Club, which operates more than 180 locations in 15 states and employs 24,000 throughout the eastern United States. He worked in the company’s finance department. “It is a very people-oriented culture,” he said. “They focus on providing clients the best possible prices for the products they are getting, while making employees feel at home.”

Bernadeau had previously worked in an area related to health insurance and now he had a chance to “compare different models of company culture.” He discovered that a good atmosphere produces motivation. “The woman I work for in the tax department is such a great manager, I would rather leave at 8 p.m. at night to make sure the work is done. It’s not that I’m afraid of her or her position—it’s how she treats people.” He even got a chance to sit down for a chat with BHCC’s CEO Laura Sun. He was asked to stay for a summer internship.

Like Bernadeau, Mike Demers came to BHCC seeking to retool his career. He had worked 20 years in a range of management positions but lost his job in the spring of 2010. “They say you should treat your job search like a job, but after searching for 40 hours a week for two months, I didn’t have a single call-back because I didn’t have a degree,” the 44-year-old Demers said. “I thought long and hard about what I want to do. I looked into returning to school. I didn’t want to continue in management because I wanted to diversify my skill-set a bit.”

Demers enrolled at BHCC in the fall of 2010 to study information technology, and applied to the Learn and Earn program, where he was matched with Raytheon in its corporate IT headquarters. Raytheon Company, with 2011 sales of $25 billion and 71,600 employees worldwide, specializes in defense, homeland security and other government markets. Demers found his team to be welcoming and his manager “awesome,” and while his position was not precisely in line with his education focus, it definitely related to what he wanted to do in his future career. Demers was given a capstone project for browser security

State Street Corporation

Suffolk Construction

“Learn and Earn is a win-win. Students gain valuable on-the-job training while employers can observe them in action and make informed hiring decisions. We hope to expand the program at Bunker Hill Community College and to other community colleges.”

Daniel O’Connell
President & CEO
Massachusetts Competitive Partnership

BHCC Business major Matthias Hibbert presents his findings on small investors with behavior during market fluctuations to a group that included top officials at State Street Corporation.
"The Massachusetts Competitive Partnership program not only gives our students a chance to gain work experience at major companies, it forecasts a strong and growing partnership between BHCC and leading companies in Greater Boston that can be replicated at other community colleges in the Commonwealth."

Mary L. Fifield
President, Bunker Hill Community College

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"As employers, we value the unique talent and maturity of Bunker Hill Community College's student body," said Sharon Schaff, BHCC Director of Career and Internship Programs. "The investment by our Learn and Earn employer partners has really given this program an edge."

Theresa Trant, 30, an accounting major matched with Suffolk Construction, said, "I would definitely encourage others to try out Learn and Earn because it helped me decide if I would like working in the accounting field. While I was studying accounting I was unsure if I would enjoy working in that field, and this program showed me that I would. It helped me focus more on the direction I want to go in."

All the students realized that they were pioneers in a pilot program, a program that will be continued because of their hard work.

Dr. James F. Canniff, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, made that clear in a meeting with Learn and Earn students, saying: "This program is expanding because these businesses were impressed with you. I'm not sure they knew much about community colleges. They have begun to understand the value of the student experience at BHCC and other community colleges."

Representatives of Learn and Eam companies reported to Schaff that "participating BHCC students are enthusiastic, professional, prepared and well-dressed. They fit in with their teams, provide fresh perspective and ask good questions."

Richard Curtis, of State Street Corporation, said the company was delighted to build upon its partnership with BHCC. "These five students made a difference in a company of 30,000. Their presence was very noticed—not because of where they came from but because of their individual contributions," he said.

Learn and Earn itself appears set to make an important contribution to the education of community college students in the area. The Massachusetts Competitive Partnership program not only gives students a chance to gain work experience at major companies, it forecasts a strong and growing partnership between BHCC and leading companies in Greater Boston that can be replicated at other community colleges in the Commonwealth."

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"Getting the Job Done"

A BHCC student discusses a position at Raytheon with a company representative at a recruitment event at the College.

"As employers, we value the unique talent and maturity of Bunker Hill Community College's student body. From students who have served in the military to those who balance coursework with jobs and family life, these motivated individuals are ready to contribute from day one."

John F. Fish
Chairman of the Board
Massachusetts Competitive Partnership
Founder, President & CEO
Suffolk Construction

Gubernatorial Encouragement

In a show of support for the new program that takes community college students into major Massachusetts corporations for hands-on experience, Governor Deval Patrick met personally with students selected for the pilot in the spring semester of 2012.