

MARITIME ADMINISTRATION
U.S. Department of Transportation

Center of Excellence (CoE) for Domestic Workforce Training and Education

University of West Florida – Pensacola, Florida

The Secretary of Transportation designates the University of West Florida (UWF) a 2026 Center of Excellence for training the engineers and technical professionals powering Gulf Coast shipbuilding. Through industry partnerships and research, the university fast-tracks students into advanced marine systems and active national defense and commercial construction pipelines.

Operational Footprint & Assets

The university's instructional framework combines campus-based engineering laboratories with a dedicated waterfront operations facility located right at the shipping docks.

- **Waterfront Complex:** Features 15,000 square feet of academic and research space with direct water access for live testing.
- **High-Tech Fabrication Labs:** Utilizes over 10,000 square feet of on-campus instructional space including eight academic and nine specialized research laboratories.
- **Industry-Standard Design Software:** Equips design suites with engineering and modeling platforms, including SolidWorks, MATLAB, ANSYS, and LabVIEW.
- **The WAVE Initiative:** Deploys a privately funded, project-based watercraft curriculum tailored to coastal marine manufacturers.

Workforce & Regional Impact

The program functions as a major technical workforce driver for the Florida panhandle, directly supporting production yards as they build deep-water vessels and modular military assemblies.

- **Student Base:** Coordinates a steady pipeline of 1,085 active students across maritime-supporting engineering, technology, and science majors.
- **Employer Placements:** Mentoring and paid worksite pipelines with American Magic, Jupiter Bach, and Tocaro Blue.
- **Defense Production Support:** Aligns curriculum with Birdon's 400,000-square-foot facility to supply Navy modules and Coast Guard Cutters.
- **Veteran Fast-Track:** Translates military navigation and electronic skills into shoreside roles, leveraging pre-existing security clearances to accelerate hiring.

Strategic Outlook

To offset Gulf Coast retirements, UWF is scaling engineering enrollment and its regional training network. Expanding free high school math pipelines and embedding CAD certifications ensures a continuous supply of job-ready graduates. In a crisis, the university can accelerate training through expanded dual enrollment, mobile welding pods, and rapid upskilling partnerships to secure domestic ship production.