

# Marianne Donoghue

Learning Lab Director

LIFT

When students look back at their time at a school or in a training program, the educators who they remember most are often the ones willing to go the extra mile to help them succeed. As the Director of the Learning Lab at LIFT, Marianne Donoghue manages the operations of seven spaces dedicated to training students from K-12 all the way up to adult workers. Though the work of a director is not the same as that of an instructor.

“Being a former teacher, I think my biggest concern was that I wouldn’t be interacting with students,” said Donoghue. She worked as a high school teacher for 15 years, and is used to engaging directly with students. “That’s what I like the most. Being able to make a difference.”

When she was a high school teacher, she taught mathematics in Pontiac, Michigan to students from diverse backgrounds. Managing their expectations for what they should get out of education and teaching students who were culturally different from her gave her insight that she brings to her role at LIFT. “When I design programs, I know these are probably the resources they’re going to have at home,” Donoghue said. “I feel like my understanding is a little bit deeper.”

She designs programs that focus on hands-on and interactive work, so that students can both work in the lab and observe what the professionals are doing in LIFT’s Research and Engineering Institute. That’s where students see what the real work looks like. “We talk about what technicians are doing, and I show them these are the skill sets that they will have,” said Donoghue. “I found that worked really well.”

Earlier on in the pandemic, Donoghue designed a program in partnership with the United Way to send STEM kits to students so they could do that hands-on work at home.

Prior to the pandemic, the time in the lab allowed Donoghue to walk around and observe how the students do their experiments. Typically, each student comes to the lab with a teacher from their school, and this helps Donoghue build stronger relationships with them. “I would start to see their personalities. Do they get frustrated fast? Do they seem to like it?” Whether in person or online, she finds that the best way to encourage students is to say something positive about what they are doing. “Even if you’re going to critique them, you always want to say you’re really good at this, but you need to change that,” Donoghue explained.

On top of giving students technical skills, she goes one step further. “We do a résumé building workshop,” she described. “I started doing it in the second to last week of the program, but once I started doing it closer to the beginning I noticed the students actually got really motivated.”

Doing the workshop at the beginning gives the students more time to get a second certification than at the end



of the program when there are only two weeks left. Students bring their résumés to Donoghue to review and she instructs them on how to emphasize their talents. “I show them where the credentials they are earning should go on their résumés, because sometimes I think people get these credentials, and nobody tells them how to use them,” Donoghue lamented. “They need to know how to word their résumés to market themselves. I talk about very specific career wording and how it should be framed. So when a company sees it, they’re going to know, oh, this person is what we want.”

LIFT also does career talks, where Donoghue gives students a holistic view by inviting industry partners to attend. They are very receptive to her tips on how to talk to students in an engaging manner. They talk about the credentials they will earn, and what they can do with those credentials. If students do want to pursue higher education, but don’t have the resources, Donoghue helps them find the funding and coaches them on how to write a letter of intent.

“Whether it be to go get a job on the production floor or become a welding engineer, I like to give them options,” she said.