Program Guide

Structural Welding (AWS D1.1) · 240 clock hours

Our program, start to finish: what you'll learn, a day in the shop, what it costs, how people pay and how to start. It's written for students and for the parents, caseworkers and career planners who help them. Print it or pass it along.

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1. The program at a glance

Program	Structural Welding (AWS D1.1)
Length	240 clock hours of hands-on training, about 90% of it in the shop. No general education classes.
Certifications	Up to 8 AWS D1.1 certification tests: GMAW (wire) and SMAW (stick), each in the flat, horizontal, vertical and overhead positions (1G–4G).
Start dates	No set start dates. You start the Monday after a booth opens and your paperwork is in. We train year-round.
Class size	7 welding booths and a small student-to-instructor ratio, so you get one-on-one time in the booth.
Who can enroll	Students must be at least 16. Under 18, a parent or guardian signs a consent form. No welding experience, GED or diploma needed.
Tuition	$8,500 for the whole program, on any schedule. Students buy their own tools (about $350).
Where	420 Creek Drive, Bldg B, Rapid City, SD 57703
95%	of graduates are working in the trade. From our graduate records as of 2026: 77 graduates since 2023.

Schedules

Full-time
8:00 AM – 4:30 PM
About 7 weeks
Monday to Friday. The fastest way into the field.

Part-time mornings
8:00 AM – 12:00 PM
About 13 weeks
Train in the morning, keep your afternoon job.

Part-time afternoons
12:30 PM – 4:30 PM
About 13 weeks
Keep your morning job, weld in the afternoon.

Every schedule is the same 240 hours and the same 8 certification tests. Classes meet Monday through Friday.

2. Course outline

240 clock hours in eight modules of 30 hours each: four in GMAW, then four in SMAW. You work at your own pace, and each module ends with a certification test when your instructor says you're ready.

Module		Clock hours
GMAW 1	**Safety and introduction to gas metal arc welding** Shop safety, an introduction to metallurgy, and practice on t-joints and lap joints. When you're ready, you take your first certification test in the 1G (flat) position.	30
GMAW 2	**Horizontal** Take what you learned in the flat position to the horizontal position on t-joints and lap joints, then take your 2G (horizontal) test.	30
GMAW 3	**Vertical up** Learn the techniques for sound vertical-up welds on t-joints and lap joints, then take your 3G (vertical) test.	30
GMAW 4	**Overhead** Put everything from GMAW to work in the overhead position (4G, 4F), then take your 4G (overhead) test.	30
SMAW 1	**Introduction to shielded metal arc welding** Learn stick welding, starting flat (1G, 1F) on t-joints and lap joints. Once your fillet welds are solid, you move to groove welds and your 1G (flat) SMAW test.	30
SMAW 2	**Horizontal** Learn how electrode angle, drag angle and other factors make a good horizontal weld (2G, 2F), then move to groove welds and your 2G (horizontal) test.	30
SMAW 3	**Vertical** Master the vertical position (3G, 3F), one of the most common for structural welders, then take your 3G (vertical) test.	30
SMAW 4	**Overhead** Finish in the overhead position (4G, 4F) on t-joints and lap joints, and take your last certification test in the 4G (overhead) position.	30
Total		**240**

Classroom lectures

Along with your booth time, you cover these in the classroom. Your instructor initials each one in your progress book.

- Blueprint
- GMAW
- SMAW
- Weld Symbol
- Metallurgy
- Grinder Safety
- Band Saw Safety
- Welds and Joint Types

3. A day in the shop

GPWA is a working shop, and we run it like one. Most of your day is in your own booth, welding. The habits you build here are the ones employers look for.

Check in, gear up

Be in your booth, in your safety gear and ready to work when your session starts. Check in at the kiosk when you arrive and check out when you leave. Running late? Call or text the office before your session starts.

Weld, and keep busy

While a weld cools, prep your next coupon, grind, check your fit-up or ask for feedback. Out of work? Ask your instructor. There's always something to practice.

Phones stay in your booth

Not at the grinders, saws, tables or test area, and never while you're welding or cutting. Need to take a call? Step out of the shop and keep it short.

Breaks at break time

Breaks happen at break time, in the break area. Tables, benches and carts are work surfaces, not seats.

Clean up before you go

Leave your booth cleaner than you found it: slag and scrap in the bins, tools put away, leads coiled, machines shut down. Nobody leaves until their area is clean.

Talk about your progress

Your instructor goes over your progress with you every week, so you always know where you stand.

Your first day starts with your shop safety orientation. Then you're in your booth.

Watch a GPWA student talk about learning to weld here: greatplainsweldingacademy.com/program-guide

4. What "certified" means

You test to AWS D1.1, the structural steel welding code. Pass a test, earn that certification.

One test per module

When your instructor says you're ready, you weld your test in that module's position.

Bend tested to the code

Your test is bend tested and judged pass or fail by the AWS D1.1 acceptance criteria.

Witnessed by a CWI

Every test is witnessed by an AWS Certified Welding Inspector.

Papers you keep

Each certification you pass comes with printed papers, issued by the certifying official, for you to keep. GPWA keeps a copy of the procedure you tested to. An employer who wants to confirm one can call us.

Certificate of Completion

Finish your 240 hours and pass all your GMAW and SMAW tests, and you get GPWA's Certificate of Completion.

- GMAW 1G (flat), wire
- GMAW 2G (horizontal), wire
- GMAW 3G (vertical), wire
- GMAW 4G (overhead), wire
- SMAW 1G (flat), stick
- SMAW 2G (horizontal), stick
- SMAW 3G (vertical), stick
- SMAW 4G (overhead), stick

5. What to bring

Bring your tools and safety gear on your first day. Without them you can't work in the shop, so it's worth getting everything early.

The tool list (A&B Welding Supply, Rapid City, SD)

- 1" x 25' EZ Read tape measure
- 8-function welding plier ("Welpers")
- Tillman 1414 gloves
- Helmet, black, 1740 Series Viking
- Welding jacket (F9-30 C)
- LH-2 chisel and pick hammer
- Silver Streak round, with refill
- Pyramex Ztek clear safety glasses
- Jackson SG IR 5.0 cutting glasses
- Goatskin wire-welding gloves
- WY 400-1 FL holder
- Streamlight Microstream LED
- Vise-Grip (R-11 C-clamp)
- 3x19 curved-handle wire brush
- Angle grinder (4-1/2" to 6")

Every item is required. The list comes to about $350, and you're welcome to pick another brand. Buy them on your own: GPWA doesn't sell tools or bill for them.

Print the tool list: https://greatplainsweldingacademy.com/tools

What to wear

- Fire-resistant (FR) clothing, at all times
- Steel-toed boots, at all times
- Long pants of a heavy fabric, like denim
- Safety glasses at all times in the shop, even under your hood
- While welding: your hood, FR welding gloves, and at least two layers on your upper body, like a long-sleeved cotton shirt under a welding jacket
- Short sleeves only if they're at least 3 inches long and worn with welding sleeves
- Check your gear before each session, and replace anything damaged before you weld

6. Who teaches it

Tommy Myers, our President and Director of Education, is a Certified Welding Inspector and Certified Welding Educator with 20 years in the welding field, including work with many of the area's construction companies, and 4 years of teaching experience. Brianna Myers, our Vice President, is usually the first person you'll talk to. From your first tour to graduation, she makes sure every student has what they need.

Tommy Myers, President

AWS CWI · CWE · 20 years welding. Tommy found his passion for welding as soon as he entered the trade. He's worked in many industries and became an AWS Certified Welding Inspector at 28. Twenty years ago his only option was a two-year school, and he hated the general education classes it made him repeat. When he started GPWA, he cut out everything that didn't serve him and built the school he wished he'd had.

Brianna Myers, Vice President

Black Hills State · Marketing & PR. Brianna is usually the first person you'll talk to. She builds GPWA's relationships with students, families and employers, and she's the one behind the camera for our social media. When their youngest was born, she became a stay-at-home mom, and she homeschools their kids. Showing them how to show up, work hard and chase big dreams matters to her.

7. Cost and paying for it

Tuition is the same on every schedule, and it covers all 240 clock hours, your certification tests and your Certificate of Completion. Most students pay with one of the options below, and we help you line it up. You can combine them.

Tuition: all 240 hours and 8 certification tests **$8,500**

Tools: students buy their own from our tool list, about $350 at A&B Welding Supply in Rapid City, or on your own. They aren't part of tuition, and GPWA doesn't bill for them.

Pay your full tuition of $8,500 when you enroll. To hold your start date and booth first, $2,000 does it, and the rest is due on your first day. VA, WIOA or another funding source? That's lined up before you start. We pass on what Square charges us: bank payments add 1% (at least $1, no more than $5). Cards, checks and cash have no fee.

Ways to pay, step by step

VA / GI Bill® · GI Bill®

Approved for GI Bill® training by the South Dakota State Approving Agency. If you're eligible, VA education benefits can cover your training, and we'll guide you through the process. You won't be charged late fees or kept out of class while VA's payment is on the way.

1. Apply for education benefits on VA.gov
2. In your VA portal, choose Great Plains Welding Academy
3. Let us know and we handle the school side

VA education benefits: https://www.va.gov/education/

SD Dept. of Labor · WIOA

GPWA is an approved training provider on South Dakota's WIOA Eligible Training Provider List. For people who qualify, WIOA can cover a large part of tuition (up to the amount DLR approves). We work with your caseworker directly.

1. Contact your local Department of Labor office to see if you qualify
2. Tell your caseworker you want to train at GPWA

3. We send the paperwork they need

About WIOA: https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa

Equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Relay South Dakota: 711.

NFJP South Dakota · Farm & ranch workers

The National Farmworker Jobs Program helps people who've worked on a farm or ranch in the last two years (and their families) pay for training. Some of our students have used it. It's run in South Dakota by Black Hills Special Services Cooperative.

1. Check if you qualify on the NFJP South Dakota website
2. Talk to an NFJP staff member in your area about training at GPWA
3. We send the enrollment paperwork they need

NFJP South Dakota: https://nfjpsouthdakota.org/

Eligibility and what's covered are decided by NFJP, not GPWA.

Climb Credit · Financing

Prefer to pay over time? We've partnered with Climb Credit: a quick online application (about 5 minutes) and a soft credit pull to get started.

1. Apply online with Climb Credit (about 5 minutes)
2. Review your terms and pick a plan
3. Climb pays the school, you pay Climb monthly

Apply with Climb Credit: https://www.climbcredit.com/apply/greatplainsweldingacademy

Financing is offered through Climb Credit and is subject to approval. Terms and rates vary, so review all details during the application process. A loan has to be repaid whether or not you finish the program or find a job. Questions for Climb: hello@climbcredit.com.

529 plans · Education savings

Some students use a 529 plan or another education savings account to cover tuition. We'll send your plan the invoice or receipt it asks for.

1. Tell us which 529 plan or savings account you have
2. We send an invoice or receipt to your plan
3. Your plan pays the school

529 withdrawals for our program may be qualified under the 2025 federal change for credential programs on the WIOA training provider list or VA's WEAMS list. Confirm with your plan and a tax advisor; state tax treatment varies.

Bank loan · First Interstate & others

Private lenders like First Interstate Bank offer training loans to people who qualify. We give your bank whatever paperwork it needs.

1. Talk to your bank about a training loan
2. We send the enrollment paperwork they ask for
3. The bank pays the school

Pay direct · Bank, cash, check or card

Pay your full tuition of $8,500 when you enroll. To hold your start date and booth first, $2,000 does it, and the rest is due on your first day. VA, WIOA or another funding source? That's lined up before you start.

1. Pay your full tuition when you enroll, or the deposit to hold your start date
2. Pay anything left on your first day: bank, cash, check or card
3. Get a receipt by email

We pass on what Square charges us: bank payments add 1% (at least $1, no more than $5). Cards, checks and cash have no fee.

We're a private academy, so we don't accept federal financial aid (FAFSA or Pell grants), and we don't issue 1098-T tax forms. Your receipt documents what you paid. You can mix and match the options above. Not sure what you qualify for? That's what we're here for.

8. Key policies, in short

The short version of what's in the Student Handbook. Questions about any of it? Ask the office.

Attendance

Attendance is checked every week. If you miss 10% of your scheduled hours, you'll meet with the Director of Education and go on attendance probation, with clear steps to get back on track. Poor attendance can also affect your funding.

Making up hours

Missed hours have to be made up to reach 240. Your instructor schedules make-up time with you when a booth is open.

Five days without a call

If you miss five days in a row without calling in, you're withdrawn from the program, and we let you know by mail. Any agency paying for your training is told too.

Leave of absence

Talk with the Director of Education before a leave begins. Back within 3 days, and you pick up where you left off with an adjusted finish date. For a longer leave, give us at least 14 days' notice before you come back so we can line up your booth. Called to military service? You can leave and return with verification.

Conduct

GPWA is a professional, adult learning environment. Problems are handled in steps: a reminder, a written warning, a meeting with the director, then dismissal. Safety violations, threats or harassment can skip straight to the meeting or dismissal. Drugs and alcohol are never allowed.

Weather and holidays

We close whenever a weather emergency is issued for Pennington County, and on the holidays listed in the handbook. Not sure if we're open? Call or text (605) 510-8000.

Concerns

Start with your instructor. If that doesn't settle it, talk with the Director of Education, then the President.

Counting a full day

Part-time, if you finish at least 2.75 hours of a 4-hour session before leaving early, you get credit for 4. Full-time, at least 6 hours of an 8-hour day counts as 8.

Refunds and cancellation

Our refund policy, word for word as it appears in the enrollment agreement:

Cancellation. You may cancel this Enrollment Agreement within seven (7) calendar days of signing by notifying GPWA in writing. GPWA refunds all tuition and fees paid within thirty (30) days of cancellation. All money paid is also refunded if GPWA rejects your application or cancels the program's scheduled start date.

Withdrawing. If you need to withdraw, notify GPWA as early as possible. A pro-rated refund is issued if you withdraw within the first two weeks of class. No refund is issued after the start of the third week, or if you stop attending without notifying GPWA.

Students using VA education benefits. At any point in the program, GPWA keeps only the share of tuition and fees that matches the part of the program completed (instructional days or clock hours completed, whichever is less, out of the program total), plus no more than $10 of any registration fee. Everything else is refunded within thirty (30) days of the withdrawal date. Tools you bought are yours. If this paragraph gives a larger refund than the paragraphs above, this paragraph applies.

Funding agencies. If the VA, WIOA, a lender, or a sponsor paid any part of your tuition, refunds follow that agency's rules and are returned to the agency first.

The full policies

Student Handbook: https://greatplainsweldingacademy.com/api/public/handbook

9. Getting started

1. Apply

Apply on your phone. It takes about 10 minutes. No welding experience, GED or diploma needed.

2. Sign your paperwork

We send your enrollment agreement and paperwork to sign on your phone. Have a copy of your photo ID ready. Under 18? A parent or guardian signs too.

3. Line up how you'll pay

We help with WIOA, the GI Bill®, NFJP, Climb Credit or a bank loan. Pay your full tuition of $8,500 when you enroll. To hold your start date and booth first, $2,000 does it, and the rest is due on your first day.

4. Pick your start date

Start the Monday after a booth opens for your schedule.

5. Come ready on day one

Bring your tools and safety gear. Need an accommodation? Ask before you start, and the Director of Education will meet with you about it.

10. Contact

Questions about anything in this guide? Call, text or email. We're happy to help.

Phone	(605) 510-8000
Email	gpweldingacademy@gmail.com
Address	420 Creek Drive, Bldg B, Rapid City, SD 57703
Monday – Friday	8:00 AM – 4:30 PM
Saturday – Sunday	Closed
Website	greatplainsweldingacademy.com

Tours by appointment. Expect to hear back from us within 24–48 hours.

Ready to take the next step? Call or text (605) 510-8000, email gpweldingacademy@gmail.com, or visit greatplainsweldingacademy.com/program-guide and tap Get Info.

Equal opportunity employer/program. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Relay South Dakota: 711.