Brandon Hasley decided to pursue a career in photonics because he wanted to work in a hands-on technical field. “Ever since I can remember,” he says, “I have always enjoyed taking things apart and putting them back together.” By chance, Brandon came across the Laser and Optics Technology program at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC). “They advertised that forty percent of course work was spent in the lab with hands-on experiments,” he recalls. “I had always been fascinated with lasers and enjoyed doing math,” he says, so continued to research the program, as well as the photonics industry. He was even more excited when he found out about “the huge demand for laser optics technicians in the photonics industry. I knew there would be plenty of job opportunities for me,” he says.

When he began the Laser and Optics Technology program, Brandon had few expectations aside from what he heard from other students. “I was told that the program was going to be difficult,” he remembers, “and that there would be more than one time that you were going to want to give up and quit.” But Brandon knew that if he buckled down and put forth the time and effort, he would be able to persevere. He did find the program difficult. “From the math to the lab experiments,” he says, “there were a lot of things that I encountered that were difficult to try and figure out. Plus, the instructor was not forthcoming about just giving the answer. He wanted you to try and figure it out on your own.” To get help understanding the math that the program required, Brandon took advantage of IHCC’s on-campus learning center. “I’ve always loved math,” he says, “but math was difficult in college. I didn’t take the math courses in high school that would have prepared me for college geometry.” But with the learning center’s free tutoring, Brandon was able to pass all his math classes. Today, Brandon recommends that other students persevere in the same way:

“Be prepared to encounter situations where you won’t have the answer right away. It may take some time, some thought, research, and digging around for the answer, but in the end, if you work hard and apply yourself, you’ll figure it out.”

During his last semester at IHCC, Brandon participated in Interview Week, a time when presenters visit campus to talk about their companies and interview students interested in their job opportunities. Brandon wanted to use this opportunity as a learning experience, so he decided to interview with as many companies as possible. “I didn’t care what they did, how much they were offering, or what their benefits were,” he says. “I wanted to interview with every company to help me become more comfortable during interviews.” After interviewing with about twenty-five different companies, Brandon received six offers. Brandon carefully weighed each one and accepted a position as an engineering laser electro-optics technician for Akima Infrastructure, a contractor company that works with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which fulfills government contracts for the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense.

As a Laser Electro-Optics Technician, Brandon has numerous responsibilities. He works in the Optics Mitigation Facility (OMF), supporting the National Ignition Facility (NIF), which fixes damaged optics. He also works with engineers to conduct tests and collect data for development projects.

In the future, Brandon would like to go back to school and obtain a bachelor’s degree, but for now he loves the sense of purpose that his work offers. “I really enjoy the challenges in my every day work life and enjoy the opportunity to have a part in getting our company’s goal accomplished,” he says.

“I work in the Optics Mitigation Facility which supports the National Ignition Facility operations. The experiments that I do on a daily basis help the NIF be more efficient and get us one step closer to creating fusion. I love that I am a part of this.”

Brandon earned an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology from Indian Hills Community College in 2014. He loves that he is part of a huge team of individuals who are determined to achieve fusion ignition.