Max Schiller began his college education at the University of Iowa, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in history. After graduating, he spent a few years working in a field related to his degree, but he didn’t enjoy the work, wasn’t making much money, and felt like he wasn’t going anywhere. But Max had grown up in Ottumwa, Iowa, home of Indian Hills Community College (IHCC). Several of his friends had graduated from the Laser and Optics Technology program there, and Max’s mom had encouraged him to follow the same path. So, when Max decided it was time to try something new, he knew where he wanted to go. “[The IHCC Laser and Optics Technology program] was always something I kind of had my eye on,” he says. “It was always something in the back of my mind.”

Going into the program, Max didn’t know what to expect. “I had not had much experience with lasers or optics or anything like that,” he explains. He wasn’t worried about the math portion of the program, having done well in math during high school. But he had avoided science in high school and hadn’t taken any science classes at the University of Iowa. He felt unprepared and a bit anxious, but he was surprised to learn that he enjoyed all his classes, in no small part thanks to his instructors, who provided helpful feedback that encouraged him to grow and improve. “I knew that I could do something in lasers and optics that I would enjoy,” he recalls, “even though I was going to have to work a little harder than I would have in some other things.”

Indian Hills Community College did more than just develop Max’s technical skills in lasers and optics—it made him feel ready for the workforce.

“With all the mentoring and everything that I got at Indian Hills, I felt that I was really ready to go out there, and get a job, and do all the right things that I needed to do.”

Max graduated from IHCC with an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology in 2014, and quickly found a job he wanted. “The job I’m working at is the first job offer I got,” he says. “It was kind of the one that I wanted in the first place, so I took it.”

Max is employed as an Optics Technician 2 at ABS Global, a bovine genetics company. Much of the work he does is proprietary, and Max enjoys getting to work with new technology. After working for ABS Global for a little more than a year, Max received a raise of $8,000 a year. He expects that he can make as much as $50,000–$60,000 per year if he continues with ABS Global.

Max is confident that lasers and optics will be important for many years to come. “It’s an industry that just continues to grow,” he explains. Max is looking forward to the travel opportunities his job affords; working for an international company, he has the chance to go all over the world.

Max Schiller lives in Wisconsin. He graduated from Indian Hills Community College in 2014 with an associate of applied science degree in laser and optics technology. He enjoys travel, and loves that his job provides him with the means to travel around the world.