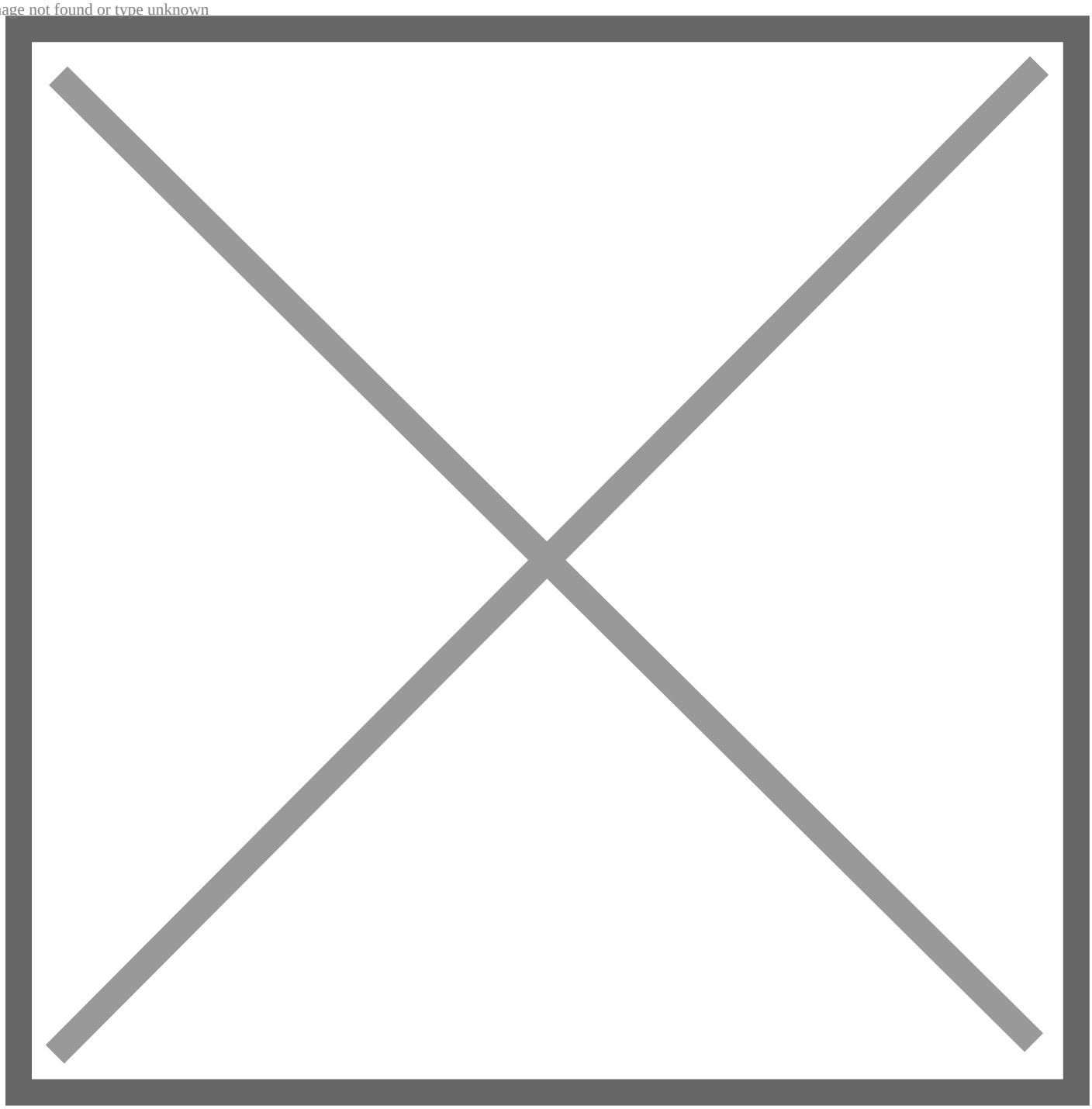
FAME Program Helps Grow Talent, Futures at Toyota Research & Development

November 18, 2026

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At Toyota R&D Michigan, students do more than learn on the job. They contribute.?

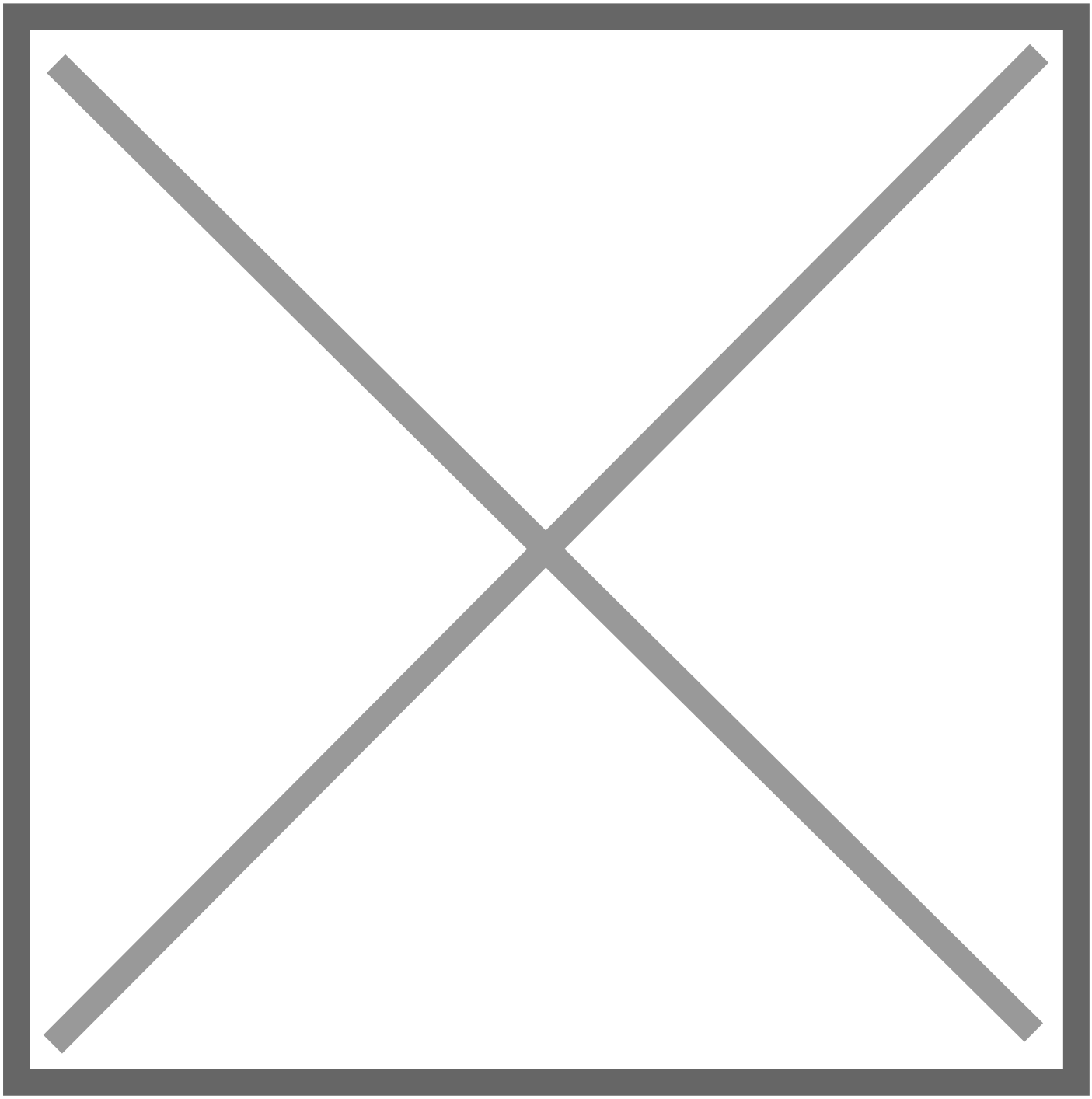
Through the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME), students combine two years of college coursework at Washtenaw Community College with paid, hands-on work experience to build technical skills and professionalism to become “Global Best” technicians. Along the way, they gain confidence and a sense of belonging all while connecting Toyota R&D to the next generation of talent.

?Meg Wallace, FAME Mitten Chapter president and consultant at Toyota R&D, sees that connection firsthand. Each semester, students learn the Toyota Production System through “Manufacturing Core Exercises (MCEs)” and apply that knowledge on the job. This mix of theory and practice brings to life Toyota Way basics such as problem solving, the 5S methodology (sort, set in order, shine, standardize and sustain) and Design Review Based on Failure Mode (DRBFM). Textbook concepts become real, practical, and connected to everyday work.

?The value of that connection becomes clearer as students recognize the overlap between class and work.

“The projects I’m doing at work correlate to the classes I’m taking, allowing the given information to stick with me properly,” said Daniel Damitio, a first-year student in Powertrain Testing.?

That kind of learning is powerful. Daily experience makes abstract knowledge more concrete.?



Hands On Experience?– RJ Lambert sets up RF antenna for radiated immunity testing in R&D's electromagnetic compatibility chamber.

For RJ Lambert, a second-year student in the Electrical Lab, classroom learning made a real difference at work. When testing resistance to electromagnetic interference, he noticed that the antenna cables didn't cross at the required 90 degrees, a rule he had learned in class.

After consulting with his mentor, the cables were rerouted, avoiding potential measurement errors. It was a small moment in the workflow, but a big moment in his personal development, demonstrating that textbook knowledge can bridge the learning gap and improve the quality of on-the-job work. That kind of impact is what makes FAME so meaningful.

?Asher Isaacs, a second-year FAME student in Prototype Development (PD) Weld, described it as “more than just work and school.” For him, the value is also in the relationships built with coworkers and cohort members. FAME fosters human connections that support “a lifetime of kaizen and growth.”?

Set Up for Success

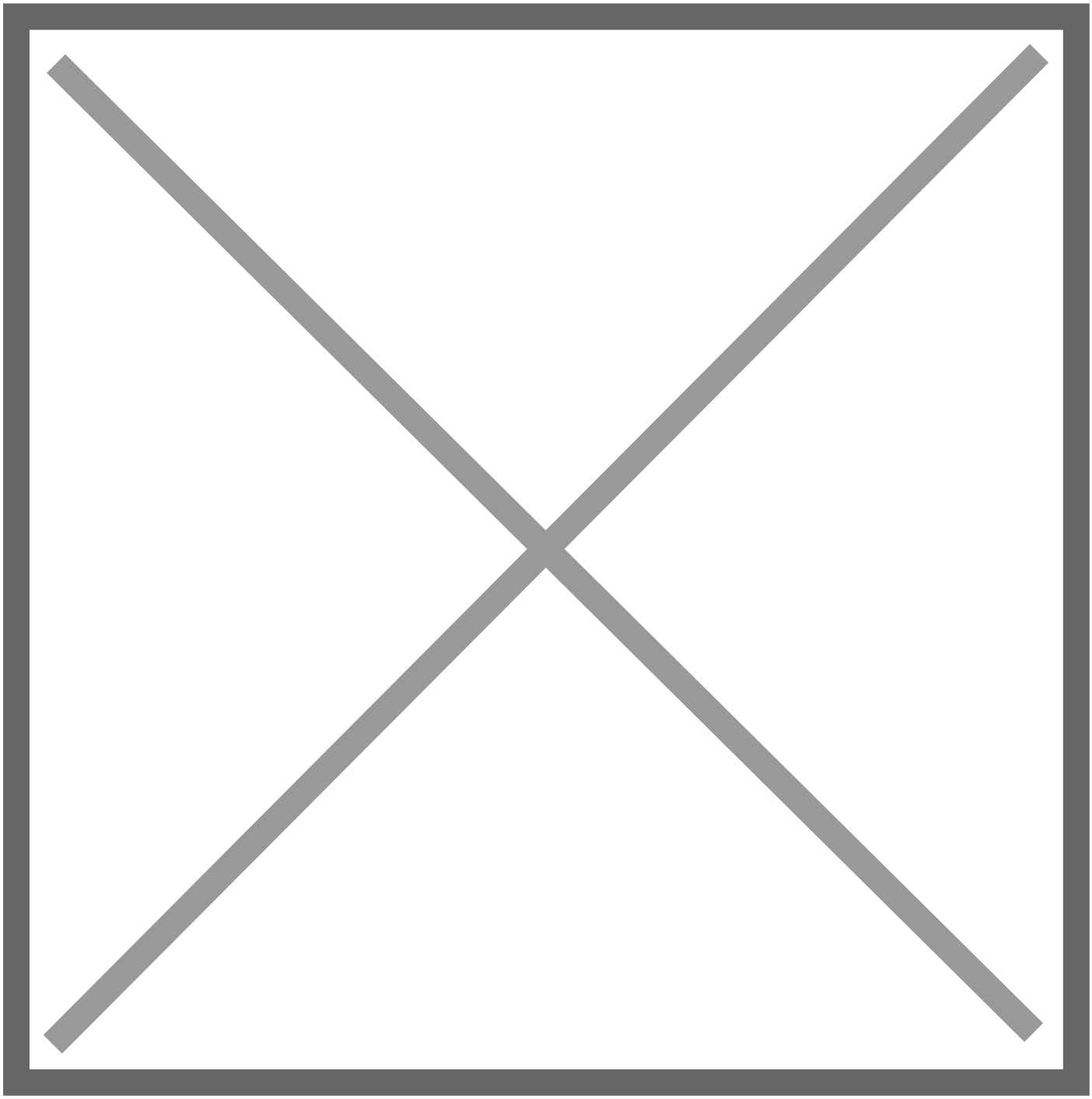
Through shared experiences and progress, students are not only building skills: they are building confidence, friendships, and habits for success.

FAME mentors see that transformation up close: watching students evolve from uncertain to confident, from observing to doing. FAME is a structured development opportunity that works best when students receive meaningful work, clear expectations, regular feedback, and consistent support. Over the two-year period, students have become more self-assured, communicative, and responsible, showing that the program is working for both the student and the team.

James Grygo, PD weld supervisor, said the value goes both ways.

?“FAME is a rewarding and mutually beneficial experience to both the students and the mentor,” he said. “There is a shared commitment to the ultimate goal of growing each other’s skills and dedication to a team and the Toyota Way.”?

That is the heart of FAME at Toyota R&D. It’s not just training: it’s about helping students thrive, learning by teaching, and building relationships that last beyond the program.?



Opportunity Leads to Employment (from left)?– Meg Wallace,?FAME Mitten Chapter president and consultant at Toyota R&D, poses with Richard Brooks, Steven Conrad, and Xavier Bethea at Washtenaw Community College. The trio are now Toyota team members.

From the creation of the FAME Mitten Chapter in Michigan to now, the impact is visible in alumni like Xavier Bethea, Richard Brooks and Steven Conrad. This cohort of FAME students began in the summer of 2024 and all have been hired as team members. ?

When asked about his experience, Bethea said that “FAME prepared me for my current role in various ways. It provided me with development in public speaking, punctuality, professionalism, and technical knowledge.”

It was these skills that he took with him to the 2026 FAME conference in Jacksonville, Florida, which he called “the culmination of the whole FAME program for me.” There, Bethea won the People’s Choice Award for his MCE4 project, an app he developed for Toyota. His experience shows how FAME not only prepares students for work but helps shape who they become. ?

Toyota R&D is driven to growing similar success stories. Applications are now open for the FAME Mitten Chapter. The early action deadline for this cycle is Nov. 20.

The FAME program started at Toyota Kentucky in 2010. As the program grew and more non-Toyota employers saw the value of this “earn and learn” educational model, Toyota transferred it to the National Association of Manufacturers’ Manufacturing Institute in 2019. There are now 46 FAME chapters in 17 states, 10 of which are affiliated with Toyota facilities. The FAME Mitten Chapter in Michigan at Washtenaw Community College was established in 2023.