

# USU Eastern Diesel Tech Students Triumph at Competition

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By Shelby Ruud Jarman | May 8th, 2024



Eight students in the Utah State University Eastern diesel technology program recently competed in the Skills USA Leadership Conference.

Matt Nunez, Lance Prows, and Danner O'Neil performed exceptionally well at the competition and received medals for their efforts. Nunez took gold in the job skills demonstration open category, Prows took silver in the job skills demonstration A category, and O'Neil, who attends USU as a pre-college student, took bronze in the high school diesel technology skills event.

The students were coached by Cody Mecham, USU Eastern diesel mechanic professional practice instructor, Dean Collard, USU Eastern associate professor of diesel mechanics, and Joe Birch, the USU Eastern diesel lab assistant.

"The students get really excited when we start competing," Mecham said. "Especially if they place, that really boosts

their enthusiasm for the field they're going into. And every bit of this competition is something that they will use in the future."

Finding confidence in presenting

The job skills demonstration categories require students to showcase their expertise in a chosen job task by delivering a presentation to a panel of judges. This shows off their industry knowledge, but more importantly, it displays their communication skills and professionalism. Contestants are judged on how well they can teach someone who's not in their field.

Nunez demonstrated how to measure the lobes and lift of a camshaft with a micrometer for his job skill. Nunez, who speaks English as a second language, overcame his shyness and a stutter to win the gold medal.

"In elementary school, I couldn't speak English at all," Nunez said. "Presenting was a lot of pressure at first. Practicing with my teachers helped me overcome that, and now I can speak more confidently than ever before. I couldn't have done it without all the help and support my instructors provided."

Prows, who demonstrated how to use a dial bore gauge for his skill, also emphasized the key role that the coaches played in his success.

"Ultimately, the instructors are the biggest part," he said. "They are the best teachers I've ever had. I've learned more in the past couple of months on campus than I have in the last four years."

### A career head start

O'Neil attends Carbon High School and takes classes at USU Eastern as a pre-college student. His competition involved a series of stations where he had to service and repair large diesel engines, transmissions, drive trains, electrical systems, brakes, hydraulic systems and cab components used in farm equipment, trucks, and construction equipment.

"Diesel isn't going anywhere," O'Neil said. "Delivery trucks, buses, trains, and tractors all use diesel engines. This competition showed me how to work on diesel engines in the real world. It taught me how to diagnose and problem-solve."

Taking classes at USU Eastern while still in high school allows students like O'Neil to get their diesel technician

certificate of completion before graduating, granting them valuable job skills and a headstart in their careers.

### **A booming industry**

The diesel technician certificate of completion at USU Eastern prepares students with the skills to work as equipment technicians. Students learn to repair and maintain diesel engine-powered equipment. Mecham said the diesel industry is booming and the program's graduates are in demand.

"We get calls from people in the industry about two or three times a week to see if we have anybody available yet who's either going to be graduating or ready to go to work," Mecham said.

With local connections and a close-knit community, along with the resources of a large university, USU Eastern is a great option for anyone looking to explore diesel technology. Technical education programs through USU Eastern give students the career-ready skills to get into the workforce faster. USU Eastern offers personal and professional development training and certificates, as well as associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees.

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