

USU Eastern Introduces Technology Skills Partnership Program for Local High Schools

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By Ysabel Nehring | September 27, 2021



(Price, UT) – Utah State University Eastern is excited to announce a Strategic Workforce Initiative (SWI) in Rural Technology, a concurrent enrollment program for high school juniors and seniors at Carbon High School and Pinnacle Canyon Academy.

Beginning this fall, students can enroll in this program to complete courses from USU resulting in 15 credits that can be applied to a certificate of proficiency from USU as well as gaining career-ready skills to help students transition into professional careers.

The Rural Tech Pathway has three areas of focus for students: design, coding and 21st century skills. The program guides students to develop skills that

will serve as a tool kit that translates to many different career and educational opportunities. The program also strongly emphasizes personal accountability and project ownership. Students will develop a personal portfolio alongside industry-standard certifications which open the door for career opportunities after graduation. Students also have future opportunities at Utah State to complete a general technology associate of applied science or bachelor's degree.

Zak Konakis, the regional pathway and internship coordinator for technical education at USU Eastern, describes the SWI program as an opportunity for the university to be sensitive to the needs of students and to respond by supporting students who choose to enter into the workforce before pursuing higher education.

“This program is designed to help meet the needs of students who would historically fall between the cracks and bring tech pathway to new places,” said Konakis. “I believe we are seeing massive shifts in labor demands, and the SWI is a robust program looking to help high schoolers find a viable pathway into both college and industry.”

To provide the SWI in Rural Technology, USU Eastern has partnered with Future-IN-Design (FIND), a local non-profit focused on providing education and professional training to underserved youth and communities.

According to its website, “Future-IN-Design closes the wealth gap through training and support to underserved individuals to nurture their entrepreneurial and creative strengths; challenge systemic barriers and personal limitations; and build the confidence to find prosperity.”

Over the last four years, USU Eastern has developed strong relationships with the non-profit, local school district, and community partners.

“As a result of our collaborations, we have built the foundation for a sustainable program rather than a single organization creating a singular focused solution,” said Konakis. “All parties bring their expertise and opportunities to this program making it a truly exciting and unique opportunity for local students.”

Konakis also shared that new and exciting internship opportunities, pathways, and apprenticeships have been created to support students in the program. The SWI program is available to all students at the two secondary schools and is offered during school hours.

“Because of the school district’s partnership, this program is a credible educational program without the barrier of transportation or interfering with work hours or extracurriculars,” said Konakis.

Gary Straquadine, USU’s associate vice president of career and technical education compares the program to Boys & Girls Clubs and 4-H.

“The SWI in Rural Technology is a unique, concurrent enrollment program for youth,” said Straquadine. “USU has created these new pathways, which we refer to as ‘stackable credentials,’ to support students in a more complete way. We recognize that not every student exits high school ready or able to pursue a degree. Regardless of when or if these students pursue further education, their participation in our program will help them build essential skills to help them succeed.”

In 2018, Pinnacle Canyon Academy, Utah State University Eastern, and Castle View Hospital collaborated on a Talent Ready Utah grant to start a medical pathway for high school students in Southeastern Utah. The success of that program, which has placed nineteen students in community internships, paved the way for the Rural Technology program.

For more information about the SWI Rural Technology Program, contact Melissa Baron, FIND Creative Program Coordinator, at (801) 597-8569 or by emailing melissb@futureindesign.org.

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