Program Model: Grades 11 – 12

Industry Focus: Aviation Technology, Biotechnology, Industrial Technology, Information Technology, and Cyber Security

Overview of the Innovation Frontier Career Connect YCC Program

The Innovation Frontier Career Connect program had its genesis when employers in the growing fields of biotechnology, aviation, health information technology, and industrial technology made it known that they needed a more consistent flow of highly-trained employees. That’s when Pima County’s One-Stop Career Center approached area partners to develop comprehensive curriculum and training programs to fill the science, technology, engineering, and math jobs pipeline.

The One-Stop, part of the county’s Community Services, Employment and Training Department, administers the programs for more than 745 high school students across Southern Arizona. Many of the students from that first group of participants have now begun their postsecondary education at Pima Community College as part of a $5.4 million Youth CareerConnect (YCC) program supported by the U.S. Department of Labor through June 2018.

In addition to Pima Community College, other partners include:

- Pima County Joint Technological Education District (JTED);
- Sunnyside and Tucson Unified School Districts; and
- Tucson Youth Development.

Pima County is the grant awardee on behalf of Innovation Frontier Arizona, which also includes Santa Cruz, Cochise and Yuma counties.

Program Highlight

Each year the Pima County Regional Wastewater Reclamation Department (RWRD) conducts a three-week BioScience Academy in June. All students participate in a one-day orientation which introduces them to Pima County and RWRD and to the expectations of the program. They also receive safety training to prepare for work within an industrial environment. During the program, in addition to contact time, students have approximately ten hours of required homework.
At the completion of each academy program, students participate in a graduation ceremony during which they share their experiences with family, friends, community partners, and RWRD employees and demonstrate lessons learned by giving presentations on various aspects of the wastewater treatment process.

**Success Story**

In March of 2018, in partnership with a number of local organizations, the National Forest Foundation supported and held the first week-long Earth Conservation Internship (ECI) Program outside of Tucson, Arizona on the Coronado National Forest.

This program was developed as a collaboration between the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Forest Foundation, Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC), YCC, and Pima County One-Stop. The aim of ECI was to give high school students the opportunity to participate in environmental conservation, develop leadership skills, and learn about career opportunities in environmental science.

Program staff selected 11 Juniors from the bioscience program at Tucson’s Sunnyside High School as interns. Each was paired with a mentor from the AZCC. At the end of the week, students were asked to write a short description of the events of the week, including outstanding highlights, examples of lessons learned, or projects that made them particularly proud.

**Community Impact**

Students studying Health Information Technology through Pima County’s JTED program may go on to careers as nurses, EMTs, or paramedics, but they are learning more than patient care. “Informatics is part of all of these pathways,” said Beth Francis, nursing program manager for Pima County JTED, referring to the use of information management and analytical sciences in nursing practice. For JTED students at Tucson Medical Center, integrating informatics may be as simple as learning to use an electronic blood-pressure cuff or updating computerized patient records. However, this type of practicum is an invaluable introduction to any career in health care.

“This summer,” Ms. Francis said, “students paired up with health care professionals who served as mentors and did rotations in departments such as vascular medicine, cardiology, and orthopedics. After their senior year, many students go on to work per diem as caregivers or certified nursing assistants, jobs that pay $10-$13 an hour.” However, 97 percent pursue additional education so that they can become office managers, registered nurses, respiratory therapists, or even physicians.

The traditional JTED health program is two years – the student’s junior and senior years of high school. The YCC grant has expanded that to four years, so that students can gain additional health information technology skills at Pima College.