SOUTHSIDE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE RECEIVES NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION GRANT

Southside Virginia Community College is pleased to announce that the National Science Foundation has awarded the College a grant of $495,026 to increase the number of SVCC students, specifically from populations currently underrepresented in the IT professions, who achieve stackable or stacked IT credentials.

Dr. Quentin Johnson, President of Southside Virginia Community College, states, "SVCC appreciates the National Science Foundation's support of our initiative to increase enrollment of underrepresented populations in the STEM fields. This project will assist in meeting the area's high demand for a skilled and qualified IT workforce."

SVCC's extremely rural service area coupled with a high demand for a skilled technical workforce has created a significant need for trained IT professionals. Therefore, the 3 year project, entitled "Path to Information Technology (IT) Practice: Increasing Credential Completions in IT within the Southern Tier of Virginia" (PIP), provides funds to assist local school districts to increase dual enrollment opportunities. The project utilizes a cognitive apprenticeship approach for increasing student retention by focusing on authentic activities such as professional networking, shadowing and internship opportunities, team building through cohorts, and tutoring and test prep. The PIP program further employs the cognitive apprenticeship framework through modeling, coaching, and scaffolding activities focused on building students' self-efficacy and identity as IT professionals.

The project also aims to build strategies that are culturally responsive. Principal Investigator and CITE Program Coordinator Crystal Pendergrass states, "The PIP project will allow students from underrepresented populations to receive the tools and resources needed to be successful in the program and in the workforce." These strategies value individual students' unique experiences, prior knowledge, and cultural identities, and recognize them as strengths rather than deficiencies. The PIP program will build on a college-wide Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative by bringing a culturally responsive lens to recruitment and retention strategies.

The Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill, VA is home to SVCC's Center for Information Technology Excellence (CITE). The 3,000 sq. ft. facility equipped with hardware, tools, and state of the art networking technology was established in 2017 and expanded in 2019 through grants from the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission and partnerships with the Town of South Hill, Benchmark Community Bank, Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation and Microsoft Philanthropies. The Center currently trains both adult and dual enrollment students through real world, hands-on assignments that mimic the work that entry-level IT employees perform daily.

The full grant abstract can be found on the National Science Foundation official website. For more information on SVCC, the College's CITE lab, and IT course offerings, visit www.southside.edu.