

Partnerships Put Student Success In CITE

Staying relevant in today's fast-paced digital world is a challenge. At times, it seems an impossible task, but students in the Center for Information Technology Excellence (CITE) lab at the Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center (LCAKC) are making progress with both the software and hardware side of computers. With this state of the art lab, the "advanced" in the name of the center itself rings true.

Located in South Hill at the LCAKC, the establishment of the lab is due to a partnership of the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission, the town of South Hill, Microsoft and SVCC.

Beginning in August of 2017, these CITE classes have been popular. Dual Enrollment students are in the lab during the day and night students are filling the classes in the evening. Amazingly not one of these students has yet to withdraw from a class nor been dropped by the instructor for lack of attendance. As LaDelta Williams, center coordinator states, "The program is student-driven."

The CITE program is entitled "Networking and Computer Support" and with the completion of 18 credit hours, students earn a Career Studies Certificate. This program answers employer needs in the work force. Another positive of this program is that it seamlessly slides into the Associate Degree in Applied Science of Information Systems Technology with one-third of the coursework completed.

Currently, it is the industry certification of A+ that a small study group has focused on as an immediate goal. Instructor Kyle Johnson explained that there are several CompTIA certification exams that can provide a definite edge for employment.

About obtaining this certification, he said, "Even someone who has worked in the industry for ten years would have to study and prepare if he or she wanted to be successful."

Students Brenda Cross, Shanell Toone, Christian Jackson and Kelly Arnold who is the Apprenticeship Coordinator for the College, are committed to the goal of successfully passing the A+ certification examination. They are spending hours in and out of class in preparation.

The students have varied goals to accomplish through this coursework. Toone is presently employed by a vendor supporting the local Microsoft Datacenter as a telecommunications technician. She can envision a

path to more responsible positions through training at CITE. Cross is planning to enter the high-tech field of networking as a newcomer with every intention of becoming more and more proficient through academic and professional accomplishments. Jackson has a long-term goal of transferring to a senior institution to study computer science engineering.

Cross who learned about the program when she attended an open house at the Center stated that when she first started the program in January, she thought, "What am I doing here?" But with scholarship support provided by Microsoft, with peer support to one another, and with solid instruction, they realize it is doable.

The present topic in the Tuesday night class is learning the formula for IP addresses. Instructor Johnson explained that every device connected to a network has its own IP address; its identifier. There is a new version of the IP formula which will accommodate the trillions of IP numbers needed in the future. This IP calculation is just an example of what the students are expected to know and understand.

Johnson explained that the CITE lab simulates a data server environment with laptops donated by Microsoft. The students agree that the hands-on approach solidifies the understanding of the basic theory. Cross also feels that it is helpful in remembering the material to perform the activities as if it were "the real thing."

The opportunities abound for students willing to work hard with the cutting-edge technology available at the CITE lab. The CITE lab itself is an example of how a partnership can make things happen for a community. The Town of South Hill renovated what was a shell of a building transforming the space into an upscale, glassed-in computer lab. The ongoing involvement of Microsoft is crucial with donations of equipment, funding of scholarships, and consulting on curriculum. And then there is the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission which provided the seed money to make the lab a reality. The College at the Lake Country Advanced Knowledge Center is providing the courses, instructors and space and of course all that goes with facilitating student success.

Dr. Chad Patton, Dean of Career and Occupational Technology at SVCC, has proven a passionate supporter and champion for making the lab a reality and is enthusiastic about its future.

Exciting plans lie ahead including a summer program, a boot camp designed for teachers and, possibly, a weekend class. There is a continual effort to assist more students financially. Cyber security courses will expand and the various certification exams will be made available to the students without cost due to scholarships and financial aid. It could all be called a triple win for students, employers and the community college!

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