Big Blue Journey Transition Camp

This summer, Utah State University hosted the second annual Big Blue Journey Summer Transition Camp for 8th grade students heading into the 9th grade. A total of 189 students attended the three day, two night summer camp which focused on strategies to improve their academic habits and skills to become better students as they enter high school. Students attended workshops with topics such as time management, study skills, and asking for help. They also participated in workshops taught by college professors in Landscape Architecture and Computer Science.

During camp, the students were broken into nine smaller groups. Each group was led by a current USU college student who spent the entire day with them as a peer. These college students were available to talk with campers about college and their future plans, as well as answer any questions the students had about college life.

While academics was the main focus throughout the day, the Big Blue Journey students did get to have a little fun. They spent hours at the USU Ropes Course during the second day learning about teamwork and stretching their comfort zone; they also spent one evening watching a movie outside on the Quad.

Top: Students at Big Blue Journey participate in the flag ceremony. Left: Big Blue Journey students, (L to R) Samantha Guadian, Leslie Ramirez, Hannah Cammer, Diane Vazquez, Alison Galicia, and Angela Garcia, show off their Aggie swag.
GEAR UP Greenpower Workshop: Teachers Build Electric Cars

Thirty-two teachers were tasked to connect the GEAR UP Greenpower initiative to the new research being conducted as part of the Electric Vehicle and Roadway (EVR) on the USU Innovations Campus. Greenpower USA and teachers from Utah State University’s GEAR UP partnering schools, and from the Edith Bowen Laboratory School, met to learn how to build electric cars. They can now take those engineering skills back to the classroom to have their students reengineer the vehicles to be more efficient and sleek.

John Devitry, Lecturer in USU’s Mechanical Engineering Department, developed a Udemy course that uses industry leading Solid Edge software developed by Siemens Corporation. It helps the students learn CAD and conceptual blending concepts in order to design their own cars. The Greenpower battery powered vehicles will reinforce students’ concepts about applied physics, mathematics, computer programming, digital prototyping, problem solving, leadership, and teamwork.

Top: Cody Ghiggia, Site Coordinator for West Wendover High School, and Ed Schirner, Automotive Teacher from Clearfield High School, building their electric car.

Above: Dax Higgins, Technology Trainer at North Sanpete, in the electric car getting ready for his first test run.
The three-day training was led by Utah State University GEAR UP and representatives from Greenpower USA. There will be two exhibition events where the schools will test their electric cars at the Miller Motorsports Park and at the Historic Wendover Airfield. This STEM initiative is an innovative way to introduce students to potential career paths and will increase the number of students who pursue post secondary education opportunities.

The Greenpower USA Foundation’s objective is to advance education of young people in the subjects of sustainable engineering and technology. Greenpower runs engineering challenges for schools based around designing and building a single-seat electric powered car.

Greenpower USA has many goals:
• Change current views about engineering by presenting it as a fascinating, relevant, and dynamic career choice for students. The project strengthens college and career readiness.
• Demonstrate the importance of engineering and associated STEM subjects to solve the problems faced by societies today, particularly in the areas of sustainability.
• Link education, industry, and community through inspirational engineering projects.
• Promote social inclusion by engaging with students.

It was a great workshop for all involved, and the teachers are excited to have their students participate in the electric powered car project.

Greenpower USA - www.greenpowerusa.net
USU’s GEAR UP Program - utahstars.usu.edu
Edith Bowen Laboratory School - edithbowen.usu.edu

Dual Immersion Academy Visits USU

This July, Dual Immersion Academy set off on a College Tour of five different universities throughout Utah. Utah State University was fortunate to host them for an overnight visit. Once the students arrived on campus, they were able to participate in many activities: a Food Science activity with the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences, a rocket launching competition, and even a visit to the Biology Department to dissect a pig heart, lung, and eyeball. After their busy day, the students spent the evening at Cutler Marsh learning to canoe and toasting marshmallows for s’mores around the fire.

Top: GEAR UP Greenpower workshop participant conducting a test run. Above: (L to R) Erica Rax and Ivonne Jimenez, from Dual Immersion Academy, at Cutler Marsh learning to canoe.
In September, the GEAR UP Team held the 2015 Technical Guidance Seminar (TGS) to prepare for the new school year. Site Coordinators and Counselors joined us for break-out sessions to learn more about the many resources available through partnership efforts. We reviewed student program data and discussed strategies to improve the program for the students. Each school was provided a Reality Check poster (shown below) to be displayed in each school detailing the number of weeks until graduation.

One of the objectives of the GEAR UP Technical Guidance Seminar is to provide hands-on activities for Site Coordinators and Counselors to take to their schools and use with students. This year at the TGS we focused on showing how to implement college and career readiness throughout everyday activities.

Duane Merrell, BYU Professor, and one of the partners from the Utah Space Grant Consortium led a physics activity where participants were tasked with building a crane-like structure that was used to suspend 50 gram weights at the maximum distance from the base. The only materials allowed were one sheet of newspaper, a meter of tape, and a chair. Hands on activities, like these, help students take charge of their learning and develop skills such as tenacity and grit that will help them prepare for rigorous coursework in the future. The team pictured above built the structure with the longest suspension of the mass. This is only one of several activities Duane has shared; all are aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards and Engineering Practices.

During the TGS, Site Coordinators and Counselors had the opportunity to build a college carnival game that would educate students about the degrees one can obtain: associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral. The object of the hoop-throw game is to help students understand admission requirements for different types of colleges. The largest hoops were for community colleges. Ivy league schools represented the smallest hoops, since the requirements are much more difficult. Schools will use these carnival games to help students and parents better understand college requirements.

The last day of the seminar was spent at the Utah System of Education’s (USHE) Counselor’s Conference. The keynote speaker at this conference was Deneece G. Huftalin, President of Salt Lake Community College. She talked about barriers to college entrance and ways Counselors and Administrators can better assist students. USHE provided each GEAR UP student with a STEP UP guide book. This annual publication provides information about college admissions requirements in the state of Utah. It also provides steps and guidelines for students to apply for financial aid and college admissions. We would like to thank the partners at USHE for their generous contribution to the program. The GEAR UP students definitely benefit from their resources.
The 2015 National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP)/GEAR UP Annual Conference took place July 19–22, 2015, at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square in San Francisco, California, drawing 1,746 attendees. USU STARS! GEAR UP sent 15 participants.

The conference theme was Together We Rise. Participants learned how to leverage partnerships and work with others to improve their GEAR UP programs. The Annual Conference featured five plenary sessions, 140 concurrent sessions, and a variety of pre- and post-conference events. One of the pre-conference events participants were treated to, was a private screening of Underwater Dreams, a documentary by Mary Mazzio. This documentary tells the story of an underwater robotics team that became National Champions. USU STARS! GEAR UP hopes to use the Greenpower vehicle project to help students realize similar dreams as those students in the movie.

Cody Ghiggia - Professional of the Year

On July 21, 2015, Cody Ghiggia, GEAR UP Site Coordinator at West Wendover High School in Nevada, was recognized by NCCEP and GEAR UP for his outstanding contributions to his students, parents, teachers, and GEAR UP partners. Cody is pictured with NCCEP National Director for Training and Technical Assistance, John C. Donaldson, and USU STARS! GEAR UP Coordinator, Melia Balls.

Cody strives each day to make a significant impact on students’ opportunities for postsecondary educational success. We are grateful to Craig Kyllonen, West Wendover High School Principal, who submitted the nomination.

The GEAR UP Professional of the Year is someone who is committed to the GEAR UP movement and the goal of ensuring that college access and success is available to all students. Through his work with a GEAR UP grant, this person exudes the passion, professionalism, and perseverance to effectively assist students in their quest to access and succeed in college. Congratulations Cody Ghiggia for believing every student is capable and deserving of the opportunities that college success affords.

Above: Cody Ghiggia receives award from both NCCEP and GEAR UP.
This summer, Superintendent Sam Ray from North Sanpete School District accepted the invitation to represent USU STARS! GEAR UP on the Superintendent Leadership Institute (SLI). SLI seeks to maximize the talent and leadership of superintendents serving in GEAR UP schools. SLI is a 10-month program designed to engage a small learning community of superintendents in senior-level discussions and experiential training that focus on creating, sustaining, and strengthening the college-going culture in your district.

Superintendents in schools that are benefiting from federal GEAR UP funding are in a unique position to leverage federal dollars to create systemic change. The leadership of superintendents can have a profound impact on a district's success, positively influence the leadership and teaching staff, as well as inspire students, their families, and the community. It is an exciting yet challenging opportunity. Thank you, Superintendent Ray, for representing the program so well.

Sam Ray - Superintendent Leadership Institute

USU STARS! GEAR UP Cohort 2

We want to thank the school and commercial partners for their time and effort in helping us submit the successful proposal. Utah State University was awarded funding for a second cohort beginning on August 10, 2015, from the U.S. Department of Education.

USU STARS! GEAR UP Cohort 2 will partner with 12 schools in the first year; within those 12 schools, over 3,000 students will be a part of the GEAR UP Cohort 2 from the year 2015 through 2022.

The new project is distinguished by increased per pupil allocations to the school district partners. We will be adding new Site Coordinators at some sites and will bring both groups together at the monthly meetings to collaborate and communicate the best practices.

USU STARS! GEAR UP Administrative Team

Program Director Cohort 1 - Eric Packenham
Program Director Cohort 2 - Jim Dorward
Program Coordinator - Melia Balls
Business Officer Cohort 1 - Brent Baum
Business Officer Cohort 2 - Meg Boudrero
Data Analyst - Doug Reiter
Web Developer - Greg Brown
Staff Assistant - Heather Ericson
Office Assistant - Lauren Resendes