The USU STARS! GEAR UP program provides students with science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) readiness experiences, and partnered with FOCUS Training to cultivate leadership and team building skills at Engineering Camp and Game Changer Camp this year. This combination of technical and leadership skills prepares students for the real world challenges they face as they progress towards higher education and careers.

Students learned the basics of engineering through activities like designing & building rockets at Engineering Camp.

FOCUS Training helps students at Game Changer Camp develop communication and teamwork skills with large group activities.

Summer started with a bang as middle school students from across the state arrived to build rockets and code mobile apps in two of the first five camps offered by USU STARS! GEAR UP on the USU Logan campus. In June, 2019, Utah State University STARS! collaborated with the USU’s College of Engineering and Computer Science program to host the two summer camps. Engineering Camp challenged students to design, build, and test projects ranging from friction bridges, to rockets and trebuchets. Students in Game Changer Camp learned the skills necessary to create and code their own unique mobile applications.

When asked about their experience at Game Changer Camp, one student said, “I actually want to be a coder, or someone who works with technology. This helps me understand how it works. If there’s a virus, I will know how to fix it; how to change the code to make it do what it’s supposed to do.” Another student said that because of Engineering Camp, “I’m actually thinking about becoming some kind of engineer, or an architect, maybe; that would be really fun. It’s opened up a lot of career options for me.”

“A difficult part of this camp is not necessarily the activities,” said one student at Engineering Camp. “It’s getting to know everyone. We’re all diverse, from all around the state. Everyone’s different, and you’ve got to find a way to work with them and find a way around your differences in order to find a way to complete your goal.”

USU STARS! GEAR UP partnered with FOCUS Training to help students develop leadership and team building skills at these camps. “The modern classroom environment has a lot more team focus,” said Matt Meuleners of FOCUS Training. “You’re doing team projects and working through assignments in teams, so the leadership skills we teach of being able to communicate with team members, set clear expectations, and work with different personalities, become really critical if you’re going to thrive in a team setting in an academic environment.”

The FOCUS activities build a student’s confidence and help them overcome negative thoughts about their potential. “A big part of the message behind a lot of our activities is, ‘throw those assumptions out and start telling yourself that it’s possible,’” said Meuleners. “Figure out the how after - first, decide that this is a possible reality for you.”

The combination of confidence-building, leadership, and team building skills, helps students apply the interests they have towards their college education and meaningful careers. While STEM-education is important, having the confidence to work together in teams is essential for success in both college and career.

USU STARS! GEAR UP will host students at five camps in Logan this summer, including Transition Camp, a second Engineering Camp, and Biology in Life Camp. Activities are supported by Academic Success Center and the ROTC program at USU, as well as faculty and staff from
the College of Engineering and the College of Science. Summer camps are also happening at eight junior high schools in the Granite School District.

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