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USU ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LAB TEACHES HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

LOGAN — InTech High School in Logan students spend every Friday afternoon designing new adaptive devices for people with disabilities and building books for children in a Mexican orphanage at the Utah State University Assistive Technology Lab. These activities, somewhat out of the ordinary for high school students, require critical thinking skills throughout the design and construction of their projects.



InTech High School student cut out books at the AT Lab for kids in an orphanage in Mexico.

“The AT Lab offers an environment where InTech High School students can learn to make creations out of their imaginations,” said Ryan Whittier, InTech student mentor and USU civil engineering student.

InTech High School is a charter public school with an emphasis on science, math, and engineering located on USU’s Innovation campus.

These nine InTech students, four girls and five boys, were recommended by teachers to participate in the USU InTech Internship Program, which began during the 2006 fall school year. Four student mentors are from the department of communicative disorders and deaf education and the other three are from Engineers Without Borders.

“The InTech students come up with some crazy ideas, but some that could work pretty well,” said Whittier. “The AT Lab is what makes it possible.”

The program focuses on changing perceptions and attitudes. This change begins at the freshman level as the students learn about communicative disorders and engineering through hands-on experiences, service projects and interacting with professionals and



An InTech High School student cutting out pages for a book for kids in an orphanage in Mexico.

mentors in these fields.

“My favorite part about the InTech Internship Program is knowing my work is helping someone,” said Peter Julnes, a freshman at InTech High School.

“And every time I come, I learn something new.”

The program became a reality when John Ribera and Sonia Manuel-Dupont, both program co-directors and communicative disorders professors, wrote a grant for early recruitment of Heritage Language students, ESL students and students very interested in science, engineering and technology.



InTech High School student spray painting pages of books for kids in an orphanage in Mexico.

“What I think is unusual about this program is that we are not waiting for kids to be juniors and seniors to immerse them in a college learning experience,” said Manuel-Dupont. “With a high-risk population, dropouts occur as early as eighth or ninth grade. So we are getting these kids involved in meaningful experiences with college-age mentors so the interns can see themselves as future professionals

in an academic field.”

“Before the InTech Program I did not know engineering existed,” said Menen Bitter, a sophomore at InTech High School. “Now I know I want to be a civil engineer and help people with a degree I will someday have.”

Bitter said she would like to return to her native country, Ethiopia, and use her skills as a civil engineer to help with the water plights the country often experiences.

“Eventually these students will see that college can become a goal, and that this goal is attainable,” said Manuel-Dupont.

The USU InTech Internship Program is currently nearing the end of its first pilot year, said Manuel-Dupont. “The program is still looking for funding to continue,” she said. “But, no matter what it takes, the mentors and I are dedicated to the program and the students for the next three years.”

InTech’s mission is to give every student the opportunity to complete high school and at least two years of college in a very challenging learning environment. By the time the InTech students reach their junior year, they will move into concurrent coursework.



A USU mentor helps InTech High school students make books for kids in an orphanage in Mexico.

For more information about the AT Lab, visit www.uatpat.org or call 800-524-5152. For more information about the USU InTech Internship Program, contact Sonia Manuel-Dupont at sonia@cc.usu.edu or 435-797-1340.

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