IOWA, WHERE STEM CAREERS HAPPEN

UNI hosted a STEM Career Conference for middle and high school counselors and teachers on Monday, February 23rd, 2015. The day included tours of modern post-secondary learning spaces, concurrent sessions, a mini-career fair, and business and student panels.

This day is the first in a series of STEM Career Conferences that will take place across Iowa over the next two years. Funded by the Iowa Farm Bureau and supported by the University of Northern Iowa and our community college partnerships, the conferences connect teachers and counselors to the changing landscape of Iowa STEM Careers and engage participants in dialogue about how to best prepare their current and future students to leave high school ready to embrace the career opportunities before them.

UNI’s STEM Career Conference began with a choice of touring the Tallgrass Prairie Center or the Industrial Technology Center. These tours provide an example of how classroom space is not always dominated by desks and chairs.

Morning breakout session selections were tailored to the two different attendee audiences. Counselors met with ACT to learn about the 2014 Condition of STEM report and ACT’s efforts to supply guidance data for schools and students to make the best choices about a student’s STEM opportunities. Meanwhile, teachers met with the Iowa Ag. Literacy Foundation to learn about how technology is changing the face of agricultural careers.

After the breakout sessions a mini-career fair provided an opportunity for UNI and Hawkeye Community College departments to share information about current degree programs and stories of recent graduates.

The conference ending with a business panel and a student panel. During these panels the teachers and counselors were able to hear what employers are looking for. Soft skills are becoming more important, including being a team player, organization, communication, planning, and problem solving skills.

The student panel consisted of students from UNI and Hawkeye who talked about their experience in their STEM degree and shared the most helpful and least helpful advice/information they had been given prior to college.

Stefani Keller, UNI STEM Program Associate, spoke with some of the teachers about the conference. AJ Feuerbach, who is a general and environmental science teacher at Clear Lake shared, “I came here to look for new ideas and pathways for my kids. There is a lot of opportunity for kids to stay in Northeast Iowa.” Stefani asked AJ what he plans to take back to his students: “I think UNI gets pigeon holed for being just a business and education school, but they have so much more to offer. They have more STEM opportunities than people think. They have environmental science that I plan on telling my kids about.”

Sign up for a future STEM Career Conference: http://www.uni.edu/chas/outreach/stem-resources/career-conferences

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