University of Oklahoma Announces Digital Alliance with Microsoft Corporation

Wide-range of programs encourage math, science and technology education for all ages

The University of Oklahoma has formed a Digital Alliance partnership with the Microsoft Corporation. This partnership is intended to support the promotion and establishment of initiatives that focus on STEM education and economic development for the University of Oklahoma and the University’s state and local government partners.

The 2015-16 STEM initiatives include six programs supported in part by Microsoft Corp., including YouthSpark in Schools, YouthSpark LIVE, DigiGirlz Camp, BizSpark Training Session for Entrepreneurs, DreamSpark for Students and the IT Academy. The first Digital Alliance event, DigiGirlz Camp, was held on the University of Oklahoma’s Norman campus on Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2015 with over 85 girls in attendance in the Gallogly College of Engineering facilities.

“I had a lot of fun learning how to program a robot,” said DigiGirlz participant and seventh-grader Brooklyn Foos.

This was the first DigiGirlz Camp ever to be held on a university campus in the world. This camp gave middle and high school girls the opportunity to learn about careers in technology, connect with STEM industry professionals and Microsoft employees, and participate in hands-on computer and technology workshops.

“The importance of the STEM workforce to the global economy is well known along with the need to increase the representation of women in these fields. Studies show it is social and environmental influences at an early age that steer girls away from STEM careers. Partnering with Microsoft to host the first Digigirlz event in Oklahoma, is one way OU is reaching out to provide young girls the opportunity to explore STEM careers in a hands-on, fun, and encouraging environment. The excitement was contagious, the interactions were exhilarating, and the curiosity was inspiring,” said Anna Biggers, Associate Vice President, OU Information Technology.

“Today’s students are tomorrow’s workforce, and nowhere will there be a greater need for future employees than in the STEM fields,” said Marcy Rodriguez, Academic Account Executive, Microsoft. “That’s why providing STEM education at all grade levels is so important — we need to ensure all our students, whether they’re about to
graduate college or just beginning elementary school, are receiving a strong foundation in STEM.”

Additional events supporting the Digital Initiative partnership will be offered throughout 2016, and will be co-hosted by the University of Oklahoma. These include:

- **YouthSpark in Schools (in collaboration with the K20 Initiative).** Teachers, school and district administrators, and youth group leaders with a passion for STEM education are invited to a dynamic day of professional learning. Participants explore new tools, discover free resources and build their networks to better serve students through technology.

- **YouthSpark LIVE.** High school STEM students are eligible to attend the YouthSpark LIVE events, held on University of Oklahoma campuses across the state. Each event focuses on three key areas of student development: employment, careers in technology and entrepreneurship.

- **BizSpark Training Session for Entrepreneurs and BizSpark Network Partnership.** This global program provides free software and support to eligible startups.

- **DreamSpark for Students: Tools to Support Student App Development and Campus Hackathons.** This program supports technical education by providing access to Microsoft software for learning, teaching and research purposes.

- **IT Academy.** Academic institutions and their educators, students and staff may receive digital curriculum and certifications for fundamental technology skills through the Microsoft IT Academy program. The program includes unlimited access to more than 400 courses through the Microsoft Online Learning curriculum and e-reference access for educators to more than 600 technology books. The Microsoft Digital Literacy curriculum provides essential computing skills for students who are new to computing.