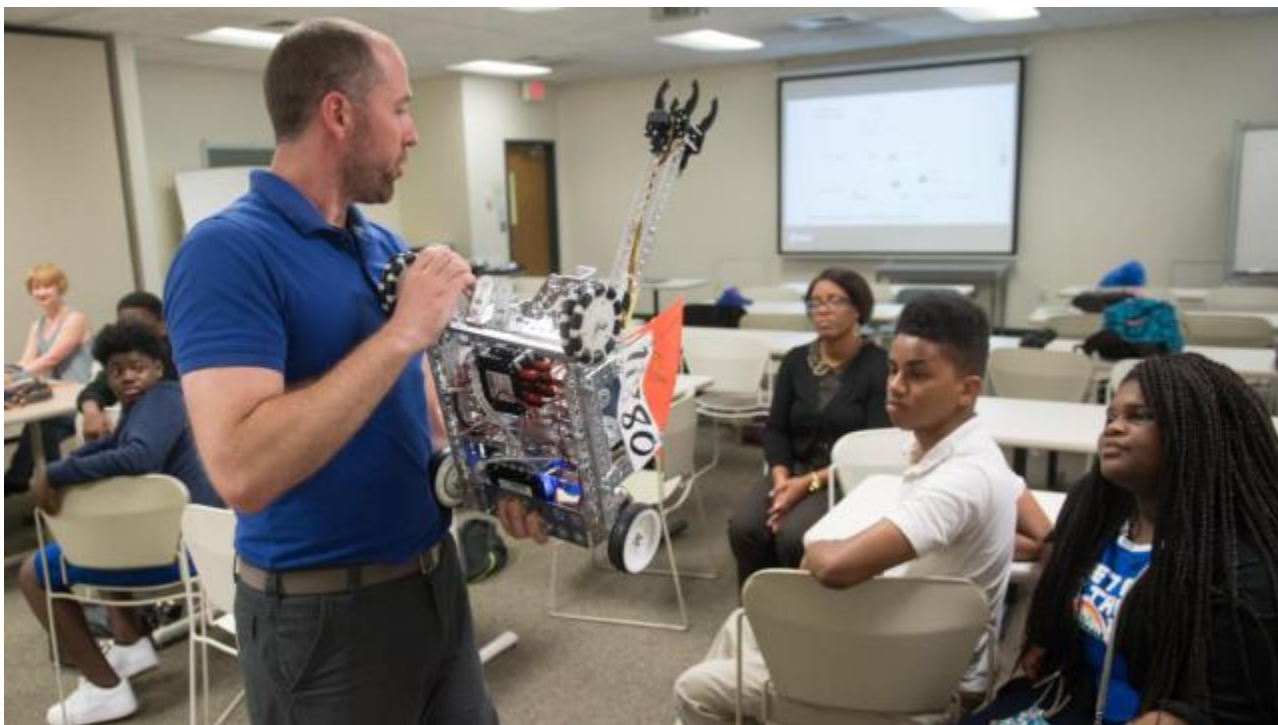


# Upward Bound students get excited about engaging summer programming

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville East St. Louis Center (ESLC) Upward Bound Program showcased its engaging summer programming during a demonstration event held Thursday, April 20. Program instructors and participants shared the results of their year's work in robotics and entrepreneurship in an effort to inspire more students to get involved.

[A video of the inspiring demonstrations is available here.](#)

“At SIUE’s Upward Bound Program, we’ve been doing a lot of project-based work,” said Jesse Dixon, executive director of the ESLC. “Whether it’s building a robot, or creating a new business, it ends in some tangible artifact that is a culmination of a year’s work.

“They’ve learned to be part of a team, and they’ve learned to persevere. It’s that skillset that we’ve been working hard to help them develop, because they’re capable of everything.”

The Upward Bound Program serves students from East St. Louis and Cahokia (EC), and Brooklyn, East St. Louis Charter and Madison (BEM), High Schools.

“Our goal is to offer the students we serve an opportunity to explore career pathways they may not otherwise have an opportunity to explore,” said Javonda Quinn, program director for Upward Bound EC/BEM. “My hope is that when they graduate from high school, they will have experienced enough through our program around career exploration that they are able to move forward in their educational journeys with ample information to make a decision on what career path they want to pursue.”

During the demonstration event, Criseona Moore, a student at Cahokia High School, watched as her peers guided the robot they had created through an obstacle to complete a recycling task.

“I saw all of this amazing equipment and thought ‘what are they doing?’” she said. “They told us they started a new program. I was amazed. I loved it.”

The students had assembled and programmed the robot as part of the FIRST Robotics team.

“It’s very intricate,” explained team member Edgar Williams, from East St. Louis High School, “But, at the same time, once you get done, you just take a step back and think ‘Wow! I really did this.’”

Other science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) offerings highlighted were the Cyber Patriot and Code Red programs. Upward Bound EC/BEM Instructor Jay Hubert encouraged students to explore the possibilities of the interactive learning opportunities.

“I strongly believe in the value of STEM education,” Hubert said. “It prepares students for any degree or professional field they may go into, because it teaches a scientific approach and a critical mindset.”

Students involved in the inaugural entrepreneurship class also displayed their creative work.

“We have our own company called Onyx Creations,” said Kyler Odgen, from East St. Louis High School, on behalf of her business partners. “We have made t-shirts, necklaces, ear phones, magnets, wood panels and more. We have pop-up shops every month or so to sell things.”

“I am always excited to see the students learning new things that will ultimately move them forward in life,” Quinn added. “The students have worked hard all year, learning through new, engaging programming where they have also had opportunities to compete. I am proud of their efforts and interest in STEM learning. We will continue to bring new opportunities to our program that increase our students’ critical thinking skills and broaden their experiences.”

The Upward Bound Program’s exciting growth will continue with four new STEM-related offerings in summer 2017. These include the planting of a youth garden, with emphasis on horticulture and sustainability, as well as the creation of a computer club, a renewable energy exploration program and an environmental science program.

“For the SIUE Upward Bound Program, this was a transformative year,” Dixon said. “A lot of the classes we saw during demonstration day were new this year. It’s part of an effort to try to be as engaging and interesting for these students as possible.

“While we’re there to help them be prepared for college, complete that degree and succeed after college, we are also here to foster a love of learning and a belief in themselves.”

[Upward Bound](#) helps youth prepare for higher education. Participants receive instruction in literature, composition and STEM subjects on college campuses after school, on Saturdays and during the summer.

With a focus on empowering people and strengthening communities, the [SIUE East St. Louis Center](#) is dedicated to improving the lives of families and individuals - from pre-school through adult - in the Metro East. Head Start/Early Head Start and a charter high school are among the programs that offer the community renewed hope and an opportunity to reach educational, career and life goals. The Center also assigns first priority to encouraging, supporting and improving the educational success of the residents of East St. Louis and surrounding urban communities. The Center provides comprehensive programs, services and training in the areas of education, health, social services and the arts.