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12 More High Schools Sign Up for Helicopter Aviation Learning with Southern Utah University

Cedar City, Utah (February 3rd, 2020), Twelve more high schools have signed on with Southern Utah University (SUU) to pursue coursework in the field of helicopter aviation, up from just two high schools when the program launched in the fall of 2019. High school students from the following Utah counties are taking part: Iron, Washington, Beaver, Piute, Wayne, Sanpete, Sevier, Kane and Utah.

“Our program focuses on both Rotor Wing (helicopter) and Fixed Wing (airplane) training. But we know that nearly 60,000 helicopter jobs need to be filled in the next ten years,” says Michael Mower, Executive Director and Chief Instructor at SUU’s College of Aerospace. “Having more high school students gain college credit while joining our already thriving university aviation program stands to both help the economy and also educate young people in this exciting field.”

Behind the scenes, this is the Utah Rotor Pathway initiative at work, co-chaired by SUU’s Mower and Helicopter Association International (HAI) Vice President of Government Affairs, Cade Clark. HAI, which represents the helicopter industry internationally, designed the plan, which is the first in the nation to join universities and high schools to teach rotorcraft training, meaning helicopter piloting and maintenance. Industry partners including Intermountain Life Flight, Universal Helicopters and Mountain West Helicopters and others are offering students added benefits like mentoring and internships during high school and the chance to interview upon completion of the college aviation programs. The Utah Rotor Pathways Program was also helped off the ground by Utah Governor Gary Herbert and funding from the Utah Department of Workforce Services.

“I am heartened and inspired by the government and business leaders who’ve had the forward thinking to address Utah’s workforce development issues in an industry with amazing jobs to fill,” said Clark, who grew up in Utah. “With Utah’s large rural stretches, mountainous terrain, and weather, helicopters conduct highly-skilled and often life-saving missions that require well-trained pilots and technicians. State and local leaders heard this call and responded.” Clark says several other states have approached him about starting rotorcraft training programs like Utah’s.
Educators at SUU are aiming for these high schoolers to feed into the university’s Professional Aviation Pilot Program. University students can pursue an Applied Associate Degree in Aviation and several bachelor’s degree programs which enhance their aviation goals, including 4-year degrees in Interdisciplinary Studies, General Studies and Aviation Science. Administrators and educators at SUU say they are turning out pilots who are also scholars. The program so far has a 90 percent job placement rate.

The Utah Rotor Pathway program is now seeking ongoing funding for its efforts via a Strategic Workforce Development grant, sourced by the Utah legislature. Lawmakers will vote on this soon.

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