FACEBOOK LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN AT UA LITTLE ROCK TO PROMOTE COMPUTER SCIENCE EDUCATION IN ARKANSAS

Facebook has inspired the next generation of technology industry leaders in Arkansas with the launch of the “Tech Take Over” campaign at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Nearly 200 high school students from central Arkansas attended an exciting display of virtual reality technology from the UA Little Rock Emerging Analytics Center on Sept. 26.

The high school students learned about opportunities in the computer science industry from UA Little Rock students and tech industry leaders during the event at the George W. Donaghey College of Engineering and Information Technology.

“Tech Take Over” is part of the TechStart Partnership between Facebook and the state of Arkansas, which was announced earlier this year to generate student interest in computer science education and careers.

UA Little Rock, Facebook, Code Interactive, the Arkansas Department of Education, and the UA Little Rock STEM Education Center partnered to bring a technology roadshow to five universities in the state, beginning with UA Little Rock.

“Arkansas is a very forward-thinking state with all the governor is doing to push computer science education,” said Peipei Zhou, director of growth with Facebook’s TechStart program. “We want to help the state with its advancement of computer science, and we want to provide these students with a better future.”
Over the next two weeks, Facebook and the Emerging Analytics Center team will bring the “Tech Take Over” event to universities in Jonesboro, Magnolia, Fayetteville, and Pine Bluff. More than 100 high schools from around the state are expected to participate in the events.

“One of the most exciting areas of computer science is virtual reality,” said Dr. Carolina Cruz-Neira, director of the Emerging Analytics Center, who delivered a speech on developing virtual reality applications during the event. “Everything the students are experiencing here will go on the road to locations all across the state. We will reach over 1,000 ninth-through-12th graders around the state to get them interested in virtual reality and computer science.”

Facebook’s education initiative helps high school students explore computer science through modern technology. In spring 2017, Facebook donated 400 virtual reality classroom kits to 265 high schools in Arkansas. The kits included computers, cameras, and Oculus Rift equipment.

In August, Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson announced that Facebook expanded the donation and will provide virtual reality kits to all of the more than 360 public high schools. Each school will receive an Oculus Rift touch controller and 30 virtual reality viewers.

Expanding computer science education was a core campaign promise for Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who believes producing a tech-savvy workforce will be a boon to the state’s economy and help secure future jobs in the technology industry. In 2015, Hutchinson signed a law requiring public high schools to offer classes in computer sciences.

“This is part of Gov. Hutchinson’s campaign promise to bring computer science education to every student in Arkansas,” said Anthony Owen, director of computer science education with the Arkansas Department of Education. “This is also an aspect of his job creation promise and commitment to Arkansas. Computer science is one of the fastest growing industries. We’ve already been able to expand and attract computer and technology industry companies based on our expansion of K-16 computer science education in the state.”
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