

UW-Stout: Career-connected learning: SkillsUSA brings nearly 400 middle, high schools students to UW-Stout

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Menomonie, Wis. – Nearly 400 students from 41 middle schools and high schools across the state will put their engineering, technical and design knowledge to the test at the SkillsUSA Regional Competition at University of Wisconsin-Stout, Thursday, Feb. 26, and Friday, Feb. 27.

Students will compete in more than 35 events hosted by the College of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Management. Using CSTEMM labs' industry-standard machinery, devices and software, competitors' hands-on experiences help prepare them for their future careers – a goal at the core of Wisconsin's Polytechnic University.

UW-Stout students will also build their leadership skills as they help coordinate judging and develop many of the challenges, such as the Team Engineering Challenge. Technical events include 3D printing, additive manufacturing, automotive service technology, carpentry, CO2 dragster, electronics technology, entrepreneurship, mechatronics, medical terminology, precision machining technology, robotics, photography and video production, welding and more.

Events are coordinated and judged by UW-Stout faculty, staff and students, SkillsUSA advisors, technology educators and alumni.

Media are welcome to cover the competition. Contact Youth Program Manager Tiffany Hoage at hoaget@uwstout.edu for a full schedule and

location of events.

The competition will also host a Future-Ready Workforce Summit from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Feb. 26. Area business leaders, human resource directors, and recruiters from across Wisconsin will participate with SkillsUSA Wisconsin team members to discuss the challenges of finding and recruiting skilled employees and how SkillsUSA Wisconsin can partner with organizations and school districts to provide a pipeline of skilled and qualified future workers.

Career-connected learning in action

Career and technical student organizations (CTSOs), like SkillsUSA, are what's working in education, said SkillsUSA Wisconsin State Director Jake Mihm, technology and engineering consultant with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

"When we think about career-connected learning and developing the whole child to be college and career ready, CTSOs are the perfect fit to round out a student's professional endeavors. Thank you to UW-Stout for hosting this event for more than 40 years," he said.

Mihm, a 1998 UW-Stout education in technology and engineering alum, hopes the competition helps students:

- Gain a sense of purpose and connectedness to what they are learning in their technology and engineering courses.
- Gain a sense that there is more to learn outside of high school and that there is a wonderful variety of opportunities for them beyond secondary education.
- Have a positive experience on a Universities of Wisconsin campus.
- Get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Students build leadership skills

Many student volunteers are members of student organizations, such as the Student Construction Association and the Technology and Engineering Education Collegiate Association, which provides leadership opportunities for future educators.

Students Jessica Heckenkamp and Lily Douty are leading two volunteer efforts this year. Heckenkamp, a double major in manufacturing engineering and mechanical

engineering, is the logistics lead for the Team Engineering Challenge, working with engineering technology Program Director Abhi Ghosh. Douty, a hotel, restaurant and tourism management major, is a SkillsUSA Wisconsin alum and has been helping to plan the regional competition.

“I hope the competitors take away from the challenge are the benefits of being able to solve a problem promptly, the value of teamwork, and gracious professionalism, which is the ability to be competitive whilst being a good sport,” Heckenkamp said. “The biggest benefits I see from young students getting to work within Stout are exposure to the college work environment and the confidence that they will get from knowing they can continue their learning and expand their skills up to the college level.”

For Douty, an events management minor, it’s been a nostalgic experience planning the event. “It has reconnected me with my old SkillsUSA advisor and brought back many other sweet memories. It’s been great to apply my HRTM skills I’ve learned in class to this event coordinator position. I plan to pursue a career in event management after college, so both HRTM and this campus position are equipping me for the future,” she said.

As a SkillsUSA alum, Douty’s biggest takeaway from participating in the competition was the connections she made. “I connected with like-minded students from all over Wisconsin, many of whom are still close friends,” she said. “Beyond the friendships, I developed valuable skills such as public speaking, leadership and project management. Competing and collaborating pushed me outside of my comfort zone and helped me gain confidence in my abilities, both personally and professionally.”

The annual SkillsUSA State Competition will be held April 7-8, in Madison. UW-Stout faculty and students will be running the Team Engineering Challenge at the state competition.

SkillsUSA is a nationwide organization that provides educational programs, events, and competitions focused on career and technical education. Founded in 1973, Wisconsin SkillsUSA has 166 high school and middle school chapters. Its talent pipeline covers more than 110 trades, technical, and skilled service occupations, mostly related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

UW-Stout’s College of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics & Management offers 26 undergraduate and 11 Graduate Studies degree programs,

eight academic departments, the School of Management and the Robert F. Cervenka School of Engineering.

UW-Stout, a member of the Universities of Wisconsin, is Wisconsin's Polytechnic University, with a focus on applied learning, collaboration with business and industry, and career outcomes. Learn more via the FOCUS2030 strategic plan.