STEM Challenge 2017 – Follow Up

The Bridges to STEM Careers (BSC) program, with funding from the National Science Foundation, hosted its annual STEM Challenge on April 8th 2017 in the Student Services Building at UHCL. This year, we had the biggest turn out yet, with 29 teams and 112 students. The students participated in the competition at two levels: beginner and advanced. Winners and participants won prizes including scholarships, internships, quadcopters, Amazon Echo dots and various other gifts.

The UHCL Alumni Association, Esyntaxis, Management Controls Inc (MCI) and Flow-Cal Inc. provided sponsorships for STEM Challenge 2017. Internships were provided by AtLink Communications Inc. and Tietronix Software Inc. Breakfast was generously donated by Panera Bread. Lunch was provided at a concession rate by Freebirds Inc. Additional support was provided by various other companies and restaurants in the community. Faculty members from community colleges, high schools and UHCL participated actively and served as judges, mentors and in various other capacities. Industry representatives from Flow-Cal, AtLink and Tietronix also served as judges.

The challenge was open to all high school and undergraduate students. Students from many high schools and community colleges and universities were represented at the event. It consisted of two levels of competition, with all teams displaying their capabilities in several areas ranging from creative, engineering design, math to software design abilities. A total of 29 teams (19 beginner teams and 10 advanced teams) registered for the event. Each team consisted of a maximum of 4 members.

All challenges were taken from and inspired by STEM subjects, and were designed in a way that allowed students to participate and succeed. The goals of the STEM Challenge were manifold: from encouraging students to try STEM fields, to recognizing that STEM fields can be fun, to taking away the fear of failure in a STEM field.
In the Beginner category, the *Falconauts* comprising of students Jonathan Dinh, William Zhang, Shanjeev Kukuruban and Arunan Thiviyanathan from Clear Lake High School placed first, and each contestant went home with a $500 scholarship to UHCL along with an Amazon Echo Dot. In the Advanced category, Team *Zero Knowledge Proof*, comprising of students Jonathan Goodman, Jesse Lira, Tatyana Royer and Benjamin Martinez of UHCL placed first, and also received $500 scholarship to UHCL, along with Amazon Echo Dots.

Team *10’000 Monty’s*, comprising of Sarah Cao, Andrew Nash, Madison Brewer and Sarah Koller from UHCL were awarded the Station Master status in the MATH Challenge. Cody Farlow, Reid Del, Ilyas Khurshid and Sharmin Rahman of team *Return_to_Sleep*, also from UHCL, won the Station Master status for the Engineering Design Challenge. In the Software Design challenge, Patrick Edelen, Rahul Yesantharao and William Jeang of the team *The Wizards* from Clear Lake High School won Station Master status. Each of the winners received $300 scholarship to UHCL and a quadcopter.

Representatives from AtLinks Inc. and Tietronix Software Inc. watched the teams and members as they participated in the challenges and at the end of the event, identified students that they liked to intern in their company. Tietronix invited Sarah Cao, Tatyana Royer, Joel Godinez, Andrew Nash, Kul Sapktoa and Paul Taplett to interview for internship positions, and AtLinks offer internship positions to William Zhang, Paul Taplett, Josh Holland and Ethan Dickey.

Thanks to several departments at UHCL and area restaurants and vendors, participants won various door prizes, such as 2TB solid-state external hard drives, flash drives, gift cards to area restaurants and UHCL memorabilia. Participants also each received a t-shirt, pens and notepads.

The STEM challenge was organized by Bridges to STEM Careers program – A partnership with the University of Houston Clear-Lake and San Jacinto College and supported by the National Science Foundation and partially supported by the Pathway to STEM Careers (PSC) STEM grant.