



COEHD^{news}

ATE brings service learning opportunities to COE

by [Jo Ann Jones, COEHD](#) | September 08, 2016

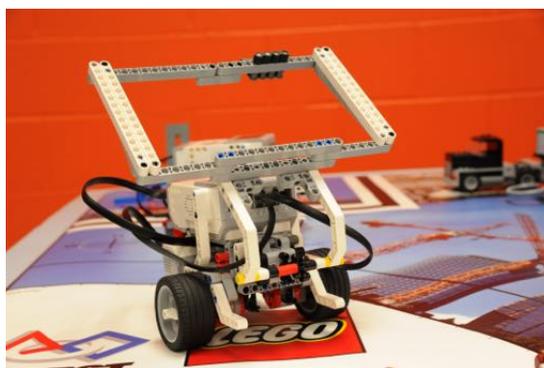


The College of Education and Human Development's Academy for Teacher Excellence (ATE) and the Center for Civic Engagement have partnered up with the College of Engineering (COE) to bring service learning opportunities to students in a whole new way.

Through a Title V for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) grant from the U.S. Department of Education awarded to ATE and a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant awarded to COE, 36 students in Dr. Pranav Bhounsule's Fundamentals of Robotics course will complete their 10-week required service project at one of ATE's 13 after school robotics clubs. They will begin working in the schools in mid-September.

"What we want to do is to have sustained Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) mentoring in schools," said Bhounsule, assistant professor of mechanical engineering. "If the UTSA students go every week, the students in the schools will realize their potential in STEM and hopefully become interested in science."

Once a week, the UTSA students will travel to schools throughout the San Antonio area to mentor elementary and middle school students and teach them how to work with LEGO robotic kits. They will also help the elementary and middle school students prepare to participate in the first LEGO League, a national level robotics contest for school children.



"I teach using LEGO robotics kits and the UTSA students can take their classroom skills to mentor young kids in the community," said Bhounsule. "The close interaction with young children allows the UTSA students to enrich their learning experience while instilling a sense of civic responsibility. That's exactly what service learning is about."

Through the NSF grant, Bhounsule will be able to provide a stipend to support the UTSA students' travel to and from these schools.

News

- [Bicultural-Bilingual Studies](#)
- [Counseling](#)
- [Educational Leadership and Policy Studies](#)
- [Educational Psychology](#)
- [Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching](#)
- [Health, Kinesiology and Nutrition](#)
- [Students](#)
- [Research](#)
- [ALL COEHD](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Admissions](#)
- [Current Students](#)
- [Prospective Students](#)
- [Graduate Programs](#)
- [No Show](#)
- [Center for Accelerated Schools](#)
- [Center for Education Leadership, Policy, and Professional Development](#)
- [Center for Research and Policy in Education](#)
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- [African American Studies](#)
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- [South Texas Consortium for HIV and STI Research](#)
- [The Teacher Education Autism Model](#)
- [LEADS](#)
- [Featured on Homepage](#)

Past News

- [September 2016](#)
- [August 2016](#)
- [July 2016](#)

“Reciprocal collaborative efforts across departments and colleges at UTSA, like the one we have created with the Department of Mechanical Engineering, are imperative for us to better serve our English learners, Latino, and other culturally and linguistically diverse learner populations,” said Dr. Lorena Claeys, executive director and research associate for ATE.

All of the schools served by ATE’s after school clubs are in underserved areas around San Antonio. The funding for the clubs has been made possible through ATE’s resources and funding from its Title V – HSI and Title V – HSI STEM grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

“This partnership is also about making our UTSA students role models to these children and create a college-going culture at these low-income schools,” said Deborah Chaney, ATE education specialist. “Our UTSA students can talk about the importance of a college-going culture and how exciting it is to be an engineering or STEM student.”

The partnership will also serve as way for ATE and Bhounsule to showcase the efforts UTSA is making in encouraging young students to pursue STEM career paths, including STEM education.

“The National Science Foundation is interested in increasing the number of Americans who follow STEM careers,” said Bhounsule. “We are placing these UTSA students as role models in the community. My hope is that the students in the schools who do the robotics club will say, ‘Hey, this is something that I really want pursue as my dream career.’”

Since its inception, ATE has been working with schools across local school districts to strengthen their university-school-community relationships and collaborative efforts. As a result, ATE has been able to provide field experiences and service learning opportunities to teacher candidates and other undergraduate students through its informal learning clubs.

“In addition to science and other STEM careers, we are also promoting STEM education across the P-20 spectrum through our informal learning clubs, like our robotics clubs,” said Claeys.

For the past two years, ATE has worked with Bhounsule’s robotics students to provide volunteer opportunities through their robotics club. The fall cohort is the largest group of student mentors ATE has had. This is due, in large part, to the course’s service learning designation from the Center for Civic Engagement, the first designation of its kind for the College of Engineering.

“For me, the excitement is about the mentorship that is going to happen,” said Brian Halderman, director of the Center for Civic Engagement. “We know that you need that sustained period of time to really develop a mentorship relationship with young people. It is important for those young students to see college-aged students who are excited about what they are doing at UTSA and passionate about what they are studying and to share their knowledge and skills with those students.”

For more information about ATE’s service learning opportunities, visit the [ATE website](#).

For more information about the College of Engineering’s Mechanical Engineering program, visit the [college’s website](#).

For more information about the Center for Civic Engagement, visit the [center’s website](#).

[June 2016](#)
[May 2016](#)
[April 2016](#)
[March 2016](#)
[February 2016](#)
[January 2016](#)
[December 2015](#)
[November 2015](#)
[October 2015](#)
[September 2015](#)
[August 2015](#)
[July 2015](#)
[June 2015](#)
[May 2015](#)
[April 2015](#)
[March 2015](#)
[February 2015](#)
[January 2015](#)
[December 2014](#)
[November 2014](#)
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[July 2012](#)
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[April 2012](#)
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[January 2012](#)
[December 2011](#)
[October 2011](#)