



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Online, Distance & Continuing Education

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Project Overview:

This project is a collaboration between Distance Education, the College of Engineering, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, College of Education, and Cooperative Extension Service. This project addresses distance learning education and technical support in Douglas, Thatcher, and Yuma, Arizona, representing increased educational opportunities for these three rural locations of the main campus of the University of Arizona. This project provides broadband access and technology support at our distance education sites, increasing digital equity in our student experiences and program opportunities in diverse regions of the state. In Fall 2021, almost 700 students are being served by distance education sites of the University of Arizona, administered from the main campus in Tucson. At the distance education locations of interest in this grant, the student body is primarily Arizona residents (81%), community college transfer students (79%), Hispanic/Latinx (80%), Pell grant recipients (57%), and first generation (74%).

This project ultimately aims to address low degree attainment rates in the communities served by the target distance education sites. Only 26% of adults in Thatcher have attended college, less than 14% adults in Yuma have attended college, and only 9% of adults in Douglas have attended college. According to the 2019 U.S. Census, 29.3% of Douglas residents live in poverty, 15.3% of Thatcher residents, and 20% of Yuma residents live in poverty. The use of technology and increase of digital literacy broadens student-learning opportunities and holds considerable value for rural communities overcoming the disadvantages associated with remoteness, geographical isolation, and the lack of technology support.

This project offers place bound students access to quality University of Arizona STEM-focused education and training in a variety of disciplines including Engineering, Nutritional Sciences, and Technology. Faculty will have the tools they need to deliver instruction from Tucson or between sites and will have the technology support to utilize available technology at full capacity. Synchronous distance learning favors the development of skills in the use of technology, autonomous learning, teamwork and provides the added benefit of learning about experiences and exchanging with colleagues/classmates from different regions, generating some additional skills that are especially beneficial to rural students when entering the job market and improving the quality of life in their areas. The University of Arizona has identified three gaps in current service delivery: 1) Yuma has the technical equipment but does not have the staff support to maximize the use of this technology, train faculty and students, ensure continuous service and troubleshooting, 2) Douglas and Thatcher have a staff member assigned for support for technology use, but the facilities are lacking the technology and university network access needed for programming expansion, and 3) Tucson has the faculty and expertise in quality STEM programming but lacks equipped classroom technologies to deliver to rural communities.

Anticipated Budget:

To extend University of Arizona internet access to the Douglas and Thatcher distance education sites and purchase classroom and student technology equipment in Douglas, Thatcher, and Tucson, the approximate one-time cost is \$234,000. The salary, ERE, and professional development of an IT Support Analyst I position in Yuma over two years is approximately \$95,000. Total project cost: \$329,000.