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NSF Makes Award to Florida State University (FSU) Information Institute To Study Information Technology (IT) Education and Rural Broadband: Project Abstract

The National Science Foundation - Advanced Technological Education (NSF-ATE) program announced that Florida State University, College of Communication & Information, School of Library and Information Studies, Information Institute will receive an \$847,000 award to support the four year project *Assessing Information Technology Educational Pathways that Promote Deployment and Use of Rural Broadband*. The project begins summer 2013 and is one of a number of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) initiatives underway at the FSU College of Communication & Information.

Charles R. McClure PhD, Francis Eppes Professor and Director of the Information Institute will lead the project as the Principal Investigator. Marcia Mardis, PhD, Associate Professor and Senior Researcher at the Institute, and Ebrahim Randeree, Assistant Dean at the FSU College of Communication & Information are Co-Principal Investigators as are James P. Froh, PhD, Dean School of Business and Technology at Chipola College (CC) and Kathryn M. Stewart, PhD Dean, Technology & Professional Development at Tallahassee Community College (TCC). The FSU, CC, TCC and a number of industry and private sector firms/organizations will collaborate closely in completing the project.

The project was prompted by the growth of broadband use in all industries that has resulted in a significant workforce need for IT/broadband workers. The project's research will focus on the educational and career pathways of individuals working as information technology (IT) technicians who support broadband deployment in nonmetropolitan communities in Northwest Florida. The project team will identify the workplace roles of broadband technicians; the education needed to develop skills to be successful in these roles; and the processes to sustain partnerships between educational and industry stakeholders.

This study will examine the IT/broadband technician staffing needs of employers and employees and compare these to the career and technical education skill sets that comprise the curricula of two-year and four-year IT programs at two community colleges in Northwest Florida. Project activities include 1) a gap analysis that will support curriculum development; 2) extension and expansion of the network of nonmetropolitan stakeholders including employers, industries, community institutions, and technician educators; 3) an iterative curriculum/labor needs assessment; 4) a comparative analysis of career pathways; 5) faculty/industry workshops to solicit faculty/industry review of both preliminary and final research findings; 6) recommendations to better integrate curricula with industry needs for faculty and industry; and, 7) a one-day seminar held at FSU to disseminate findings, inform a broad range of local educators and industry, and engage all stakeholders in ongoing discussion.

The results of this project will further define a field that requires flexible workers who can manage a constant stream of new knowledge and support work functions that are increasingly broadband dependent. Project activities will align the efforts of educators directly to the needs of employers and industry as they integrate continued broadband deployment initiatives. This study will support the efforts of career technical education to facilitate economic development and connect the nonmetropolitan communities to global society.