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U of L to broaden access to STEM clubs

Destination Exploration at the University of Lethbridge, in partnership with the Holy Spirit Catholic School Division, will offer STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) clubs to upper elementary and junior high school students this school year, thanks to a grant from the Arconic Foundation.

“This is such a great opportunity for our students and I’m hopeful that by providing a focus on STEM at this age, we will entice more girls into this area of study,” says Chris Smeaton, superintendent. “Holy Spirit is thrilled to be involved in this partnership with Destination Exploration and the University of Lethbridge.”

“This is an amazing opportunity for Destination Exploration,” says Valerie Archibald, director of youth outreach for the Faculty of Arts and Science. “To have a grant of this calibre is phenomenal. It will allow us to grow in our capacity and our offerings and it puts another notch in our belt for being recognized as an organization that’s worth funding.”

Overall, girls and indigenous youth are under-represented in STEM fields and their numbers continue to decline as students enter middle school or junior high. And, without the required classes for entry into STEM options at the post-secondary level, the gap widens further.

“One of the biggest things we need to be working and focusing on is not only teaching our girls they can do STEM, but showing our boys that girls can do STEM,” says Archibald.

That point was vividly illustrated during a Destination Exploration tech camp where 11 boys and one girl had signed up. When the instructor asked the boys why they thought only one girl had signed up for the class, the response was ‘girls don’t like science.’

“We realized that we need to be teaching not just our girls and not just providing opportunities for girls-only programming, but that we need to have gender parity within our programming,” says Archibald. “Then we need to teach the boys to support the girls and teach the girls that they can also be involved in STEM. That’s one of the things we’re hoping to achieve with this grant.”

The grant, worth \$21,500, will allow Destination Exploration to offer a STEM club for students in Grades 6 to 9, with eight sessions in the fall and another eight during the winter. The clubs are open to both boys and girls. Archibald plans to involve mentors, ideally role models from under-represented groups, in the club to help the youth picture themselves in STEM roles. The funds will also be used to partner with the Piikani and Kainai First Nations to expand their STEM offerings.

The first session will be held at St. Francis Junior High School this fall and at Father Leonard Van Tighem School early next year. Anyone interested in joining can contact Archibald at valerie.archibald@uleth.ca or Laura Keffer-Wilkes (Destination Exploration program coordinator) at kefferwilkesl@uleth.ca.

Now in its 15th year of delivering programs, Destination Exploration operates on a cost-recovery basis. The grant from the Arconic Foundation is crucial to expanding access to STEM clubs and inspiring youth to participate in STEM fields. Archibald says many former campers with Destination Exploration are now U of L students.

Destination Exploration secured the grant with the help of Kawneer, a subsidiary of Alcoa. Arconic is a spinoff of Alcoa, and the Arconic Foundation supports the company's mission by helping to prepare tomorrow's workforce for careers that advance the future of manufacturing.

This news release can be found online: [Arconic Grant](#).

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