

FOR STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS.



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—**Iowa State University Research Park**
 s secondary education has evolved over the decades, a greater emphasis has been placed on providing students options for practical experiences, outside the classroom setting. Seizing on this trend, Ames High School, the Iowa State University Research Park and the Ames Chamber of Commerce came together to develop a unique program to give students an opportunity to work hand-in-hand with businesses throughout the community.

Established in 2016, the Ames High Business Engagement Collaborative (BEC) has quickly established itself as a valuable option for students, and as legitimate outlet for businesses in need of outside help with a host of projects. In just two years, the program counts its alumni in the dozens.

“We like to say that this is a program shaped by students, for students,” says Alison Doyle, Marketing Director at the Research Park and a BEC Business

Mentor. Doyle works side-by-side with Ames High Business Teacher and BEC Faculty Advisor Vicki Hales to manage the program. Additionally, Brenda Dryer and Sarah Buss serve as mentors.

Doyle says that while the team provides oversight, the students run the show.

“They have a great deal of latitude in the projects they take on and how they work with local businesses to see them through. It has been amazing to watch our students bloom when put in ‘real-world’ situations. As a mentor, I can say that I have learned as much from the students as they have learned from me.”

The BEC is open to Ames High students in their junior and senior year. The students meet at least one per week as a group at the Research Park Core Facility for updates and check-ins on projects that are currently in process and others that are coming up. To successfully complete their coursework in the program, students are required to provide 120 hours of work and ensure all projects are done on an agreed

upon timeline.

Expanding the Network
 Makai Muhammad, a 2018 graduate of Ames High and a member of the BEC during the 2017-18 school year, says the experience he gained was invaluable as he prepared for college.

“It opened my eyes to different job opportunities that I may not have been looking at before and I may have never looked at if I hadn’t joined the BEC,” Muhammad says.

Among the projects he worked on during his year in the BEC was a “music video” for Story County Medical Center in Nevada. BEC students Muhammad, Ella Glen, Kevin Maxwell and Nikki Aroche developed three-minute video that garnered more than 10,000 views and more than 100 shares in its first few hours on Facebook.

While the project was successful, and Muhammad picked up some new video editing skills, he says his participation in BEC was always about

more than the work.

“The best part for me is how it has sharpened my people skills,” he says. “I had the opportunity to make a lot of connections I would have had no way to make otherwise. It has been valuable to build a network around Ames that isn’t just my friends and family. I have gotten to work with and get to know business owners and leaders.”

Growing in Confidence
 Sabrina Hegelheimer, now a student at the University of Iowa studying health and human physiology, was a member of the first BEC class during the 2016-17 school year. She says the skills she picked up in the BEC helped her from Day 1 at Iowa.

“It has helped me with communication with my professors,” she says. “It also helped me decide my major, find work in my area of interest, and helped me with an internship.”

And even though Hegelheimer was only in the BEC for a year, she gained the kind of confidence required to step up and volunteer for opportunities that used to be outside her comfort zone.

“I am on the activity board at Iowa and I help plan events,” she says. “I planned the Cornapalooza this past year. I knew how to do this because of BEC. That relieved a lot of stress.”

Carter Mumm, who also graduated

from Ames High in 2017 and was a member of the 2016-17 BEC, says his participation has proven invaluable in helping him stand out from others his age as he pursues internships.

“The experience in a real workplace put me at an advantage when compared to my peers,” Mumm says. “I have already been able to put what I learned into practice. Before I was in BEC, I was nervous to interact with professionals but now it’s easier and I know what I’m doing. BEC gave me more opportunities and helped me get my name out in the Ames community.”

Hands-On Experience
 Students in the BEC are able to earn four Ames High and three DMACC credits upon successful program completion. The practical experience is huge resume builder and the students are provided with insight on how to boost their employability skills so they are ahead of the game when they land in college or in the job market.

“By nature of being in the program, our students pick up a ton of experience it is hard to acquire in the classroom alone,” Doyle says. “Things like time management, responsibility, communication skills, commitment, teamwork, and working with a client on a deadline.”

Adding to the real-world feel is getting them off the high school campus on into the ISU Core Facility to do their work. By



being in a professional work space, they are immersed in what it looks and feels like to be in a work-a-day environment.

The group sessions allow the students to spend time brainstorming solutions to challenges on specific projects, share ideas about future opportunities, and perfect the timeless art of networking – with students and professionals they may not otherwise share a common bond with.

“It’s a real mix of kids from the high school,” says Muhammad, who was the starting point guard on the Ames High basketball team his senior year. “There are kids in sports, kids in band, kids with all kinds of different interests. But we all share an interest in business and that’s what brings us together. It has been fun to get to know such a wide range of people from different backgrounds.”

A Bump from Business
 Doyle says the BEC has been a winner from the get-go, due in part to the engagement of the students, but also because the business community has been so open to the idea. Once word spread that the BEC was offering up its services, a number of local organizations jumped at the opportunity to add their projects to the queue.

Through the first two years, the BEC has tackled more than 50 projects ranging from the viral video at Story County Medical Center to creating a fundraising plan for an inclusive playground in Ames, determining the return on investment for a project impacting Mainstream Living, and more.

“We didn’t know what to expect when we launched that first class,” Doyle says. “But it has been successful beyond what we could have imagined, especially with the buy-in we’ve gotten from our business partners. We are excited to see it grow.”

