

Local Youth Take to the Skies with USU Eastern Drone Camps

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By Ethan Brightbill | August 18, 2021



(Price, UT) – As the 2021 Utah State University Eastern Drone Camps wound down for the summer, parents and teens alike praised the program for making aviation fun and accessible.

“I can’t stop my daughter from talking about drones,” read one parent’s review. “It’s great!”

Organized by the Aggie Drone Academy, the USU Eastern Drone Camps offer 40 grade school students three activity-filled days where they learn about drones and the principles of flight. The program this year was spread across three locations: the Carbon County School District offices, Emery High School and Green River High School.

Campers built gliders, flew fixed-wing drones, piloted drones in a simulator and learned how to use coding to control a quadcopter. At the conclusion of the camp,

students piloted drones through an obstacle course and participated in a drone jousting competition.

Shawn “B.W.” Barstow, director of the Aggie Drone Academy and lecturer in aviation technology, is proud of what the students accomplished.

“My favorite part of each summer camp is watching the campers learn and grow, especially in the vast world of aviation,” said Barstow. “To see them reach those ‘aha!’ moments and want to learn more is incredible to experience for me and my fellow staff. It’s an absolute pleasure teaching someone about a concept or principle that can help them fulfill their dreams.”

In addition to being fun, the USU Eastern Drone Camps also prepare students to earn a growing number of aviation degrees and certificates at Utah State.

“All of these camps are designed to introduce high school and other primary education students to aviation,” said Barstow. “At USU Eastern, we’ve opened up our aviation programs to include a professional pilot degree with an emphasis on fixed wing craft and an aviation management degree with an emphasis on unmanned aircraft systems. And this fall we are starting our certificate of drones program. It’s a one-year, two-semester certificate that will help students enter the aviation industry ready to fly!”

Demand for drone pilots has increased in recent years as more industries have begun to make use of the technology. From geological surveys to search and rescue missions to videography, drone pilots can apply their skills in a variety of fields. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) estimates that there are more than 800,000 registered commercial and recreational drones as of August 2021, and that number is expected to grow in the future.

Barstow is optimistic about career opportunities in aviation, although he cautions that flexibility is needed.

“My advice to future aviators is simple: Keep an open mind,” said Barstow. “In the world of aviation, you can often find yourself on a path that you didn’t expect, so you need to keep an open mind and accept what comes your way. I didn’t see myself teaching others about drones, that’s for sure, but I do love it and look forward to it each and every day.”

To learn more about the USU Eastern Drone Camps or the university’s aviation degrees and certificates, contact

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