

EDUCATION

Study Buddies

Corps partners with colleges to offer students real-life experience



A student at Southwestern Oklahoma State University

KAREN SWEENEY

By Stacey Freed

IN 2017, KAREN SWEENEY, assistant professor of computer science at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (SWOSU) in Weatherford, Okla., wanted to find a final project for graduating seniors. As luck would have it, Sweeney received a call from a park ranger looking for help on the Corps' Junior Ranger program, which teaches children ages 6 to 12 how to become honorary rangers.

To engage youngsters, Sweeney's students created an app meant to teach camping skills, provide information about how dams work and offer basic facts about nearby

CONTINUED »

EDUCATION



SWOSU students and
Tulsa District Corps staff

STACEY REESE/USACE TULSA DISTRICT

“Being able to pass on our love of science and inspire a few students to pursue that down the road is a great opportunity.”

— MICHAEL VOORHEES,
biologist, USACE Buffalo District

Canton Lake.

The program was so successful, the Corps has since established partnerships in 14 districts, including Little Rock, Ark., Los Angeles and Buffalo, N.Y. All are part of the Multi-District Innovations Team.

“College students bring positive energy, excitement and innovative ideas to meetings and workshops,” said Jason Knight, a natural resource specialist with the Corps’ Tulsa District, which has partnered with SWOSU on a variety of projects. “Without our SWOSU partners, many of the solutions the (Corps) team has produced would not be possible.” Here are highlights from four districts and their partnership programs:

TULSA DISTRICT: COMPUTER ACCESS

Sweeney’s SWOSU students have been involved in more than a dozen projects

with the Corps, including “Bid Assist,” a program that helps prospective contractors who wish to bid on government contracts complete the required application on PCs or smartphones.

The Corps partnership has become so popular that the college has created a second class, Design Practicum, which partners with the Corps to update existing apps as well as develop new ones. Sweeney credits the Corps for helping to grow SWOSU’s computer science department.

“We knew from the beginning this

program and partnership would be special. Students are getting to be the innovators using the leadership, resource and manpower of the team,” said Knight. “So far, this team has created some very good solutions to a lot of common problems we’ve faced for years.”

LITTLE ROCK DISTRICT: FRESH PERSPECTIVES

At Arkansas State University, students are helping to assess the Corps’ six reservoirs in the White River Basin (WRB), which includes large parts of

Missouri and Arkansas. “An additional 10 inches of rain has fallen each year during the past decade in the upper WRB,” said Jaysson Funkhouser, program manager for the Corps’ Little Rock District. “Do we need to change how we make releases? We need to more closely examine the effects of this.”

This year, the Arkansas students will help the Corps decide what data would be most effective in analyzing water control and how the information should be collected. “We hope to get the needs identified by end of summer and get the study started later in the calendar year,” Funkhouser said. “We anticipate that it could take anywhere from two to three years before the report is available for publication.”

The Corps has already had a successful

CONTINUED »