

UCF Newsroom

500 FIFTH-GRADERS INTRODUCED TO UCF

By Erika Finnimore

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Fifth-graders covered their ears as they watched a hydrogen-filled balloon burst into flames and a can launch into the air with a loud explosion.

The chemistry demonstration was part of the University of Central Florida's first-ever Achieve a College Education (ACE) program, which brought 500 local fifth-graders to campus on Monday, March 21.

ACE was designed and developed by UCF's Burnett Honors College in partnership with WORKFORCE Central Florida and Orange County Public Schools' Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program.

The fifth-graders toured campus and attended a variety of hands-on learning sessions that introduced them to in-demand careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Nearly 140 UCF students from the Burnett Honors College and LEAD Scholars helped the children learn throughout the day.

The goal of the program was to inspire local elementary school students by showing them higher education opportunities that lie ahead.

"If students are exposed to college when they are younger, they are more likely to take an interest in going," explained UCF student volunteer Ashley Ewh.

The fifth-graders learned how to identify real skulls of animals, such as a loggerhead sea turtle, horse and capybara, while learning about anatomy. They passed around the different skulls and identified what each animal ate by feeling the skulls' teeth.

In an engineering workshop, groups of students built structures using only toothpicks, gumdrops and marshmallows. The challenge was to build a structure that would hold a notepad.

Fifth-grader Bryce Tolbert from Palmetto Elementary School high-fived Gabriele Rivera with an accomplished "We did it!" as their Lego-inspired structure was judged the "prettiest."

"Hands-on projects are the most exciting and inspiring way for them to learn," Ewh said.

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Later in the day, industry leaders from Walt Disney Imagineering spoke to the fifth-graders about how the animatronic figures they see on rides are made. Representatives from Universal Studios talked about designing roller coasters and the environmental engineering and solar technology movements.

The day's activities emphasized to the youngsters that college is within reach and showed them how the skills learned in college connect to real life.

At the end of the day, UCF President John C. Hitt echoed that message as he shared some words of wisdom with the students.

"College is a place to learn about the world, and education is one of the keys to success in life," he said.

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