

Chicago Tech Academy Launches Second Annual Real World Learning Program

Classrooms empty as the senior students transition to month-long internship programs hosted at top Chicago organizations

CHICAGO, February 8, 2017 – [Chicago Tech Academy](#) (ChiTech), a nonprofit charter high school in the University Village neighborhood and the only whole-school project-based learning high school in Chicago, has launched its second annual corporate immersion program in partnership with Chicago's tech community. With this program, ChiTech gives all of its senior class the unique opportunity to spend an entire month of their final school year to receive real workplace experience as paid interns at local organizations in Chicago -- an especially rare learning opportunity available to a school student body made up of 96 percent minorities and whose family incomes fall at or below the poverty line.

The school leadership team of ChiTech decided to bring back internships as part of its Real World Learning Program after it proved to be an effective model in giving students hands-on experience needed to succeed post-graduation. This year, the program will span from January 30th to the end of February with partnerships at organizations, including [DDB Chicago](#), [TechNexus](#), [Actualize](#), [Black Tech Mecca](#), [Tie Bar](#), [25th Ward Alderman Danny Solis' office](#), and various companies at startup incubator, [1871](#).

"It's such a privilege to have a hand in this really unique program that Chicago Tech has organized for its students" said Michelle Auger, VP and director of human resources at DDB Chicago. "I know I wish I could have had an opportunity like this to get actual work experience when I was in high school. And on the flip side, it's been great to be able to tap the students' young minds as they bring a fresh perspective."

The program encourages students to define their interests before being assigned to a partner organization. Many of the students assigned to DDB Chicago, for example, voiced interest in developing creative skillsets, which they will grow as they help to create a recruiting brochure for the school.

"It's unrealistic that kids will make goals for tomorrow, when they're unable to see what tomorrow can bring," said Linnea Garrett, school director at Chicago Tech Academy. "This offsite learning program with the professional experience and connections it gives them, in tandem with our project-based learning curriculum and weekly guest speaker sessions that share their experiences from working in the local tech community, has allowed them to paint this picture in their minds, to dream bigger about what the future can hold for them post-graduation."

One success story of the program that serves as evidence in its ability to expose ChiTech seniors to the world beyond the high school's walls comes from a class of 2016 graduate, Brian Jones. After Brian participated in the internship program last year, impressing his internship supervisors at CNA Insurance with his work dedication and attention to detail, he has since been invited and recommended for a college internship with CNA while he pursues a degree at Northeastern University.

"Project-based learning is very core to our staff's ability to prepare our students for success post-graduation," explains TJ Pavlov, real world learning manager and social science teacher at Chicago Tech Academy. "We offer learning beyond our school walls, instead of putting subjects into separate boxes. For example, we combine math and science, or music and math. It's a common occurrence to see a student walk the halls with a drill in-hand to build their next project. Every day is a project or a presentation, because that's what's assigned in an actual workplace.

This internship program will take that concept to the next level as it continues to show a return on

investment in the capstone to each student's education at ChiTech – our graduation rates and college application numbers have already reflected as much.”

About Chicago Tech Academy High School

Chicago Tech Academy (ChiTech), a non-profit, 4-year contract school located in University Village, was founded to inspire, educate and connect a diverse next generation of technology leaders. ChiTech seeks to increase the number of minority and low-income students that pursue science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in college and careers.

ChiTech was founded in 2009 with a vision of bringing technology to Chicago youth. At Chicago Tech Academy, the leadership team and educators prioritize giving students access to real world experiences through project-based learning to encourage a deeper, connected form of evidence-based education. ChiTech's integrated college preparatory curriculum fosters critical thinking and intellectual curiosity, helping students to become leaders and lifelong learners, through partnerships with the Chicago tech community.

At Chicago Tech, every student takes a technology or entrepreneurship class every day for their four years at ChiTech, and will have left with 1,000+ hours of coding experience by the time they graduate. Chicago Tech is also the only wall-to-wall project-based learning school in the city, made up of a team of school leaders and teachers that equally value this modern pedagogy.

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