***For Immediate Release***

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Innovative General Education Program Exceeds Expectations

CEDAR CITY, Utah — Southern Utah University is continuing to expand its innovative approach to general education. Launched in Fall of 2015 with 48 students, SUU’s [Jumpstart General Education](https://www.suu.edu/jumpstart/) program is in its third year and is growing.  The program now includes two sections with 84 enrolled students and has taught the faculty a few things along the way.

According to [Dr. John Taylor](https://www.suu.edu/experts/profile/?expert=john.taylor), Jumpstart’s program director and SUU’s assistant dean for Integrative Learning, the Jumpstart program takes a lot of work to run smoothly.

“You have to understand that the structure of the typical college or university is not such that it lines up well to pull off something like Jumpstart,” said Taylor.

Each [Jumpstart](https://www.suu.edu/presidentspodcast/07/) section is a one-year, 33-credit class that covers 10 courses worth of material. The program allows students to earn all of their general education credits through an integrated curriculum with a central theme, taught by seven professors.

Typically, a college course appears on the schedule of either the fall or spring semester for both faculty and students.  In Jumpstart, the courses are integrated over both semesters.

The new format may be confusing for faculty and administrators and the logistics of creating and executing an educational experience like Jumpstart can strain the traditional systems of higher education. SUU has recognized these obstacles and has adapted to meet the unique needs of the program.

One large change that occurred this year was the removal of the math requirement that used to be included in the previous years.

“That one little tweak to the system helped a ton and it is probably the biggest change we made this year,” said Taylor. “More and more of our incoming freshmen are coming to us with varying needs mathematically. Some students may need remedial work, while others have already completed calculus in high school.”

Students are now given time in the spring to complete the math portion of their general education. This allows them to take the courses that meet their individual needs.

Talking about the program’s unique nature, Taylor said that he can see why a lot of schools don’t do it, it's hard work.

“One of my concerns about Jumpstart was the sheer amount of work that goes into this kind of project,” said [Dr. Kris Phillips](https://www.suu.edu/experts/profile/?expert=kris.phillips), assistant professor of philosophy. “I'm teaching in a way that relies not only on my own expertise, but requires me to adjust my work to fit into a coherent narrative with seven other faculty, each of whom have their own expertise, goals, and approaches.”

Phillips went on to say, “But Jumpstart allows me the opportunity to learn right along with my students. I have been able to incorporate material from biology, physics, and theater into my own courses outside of Jumpstart. It's really fun!”

“The benefits are pretty awesome,” said Taylor, “The retention numbers are really good, the students find it engaging and the teachers do too.”

The program has turned heads for its unusually high freshmen student retention rates. According to Taylor, “Students in the program are average students, but they retain at a higher rate than your average freshman.”

The retention rate of the first cohort was 88.6% and continues to be significantly higher than what the University typically sees. The integrated nature seems to ignite a spark in students giving them a greater sense of ownership over their education.

“Jumpstart is one of the most innovative things I have had the opportunity to participate in as a faculty member,” said [Bill Heyborne](https://www.suu.edu/experts/profile/?expert=william.heyborne), associate professor of biology. “The opportunity to work with a talented group of faculty, from across campus, has been a really exciting experience. Watching my colleagues work has made me a better teacher and given me so many great ideas for improving my own practice.”

Taylor said that many of the students have formed lasting friendships as they learn, eat, camp, travel and grow with each other.

“General education is meant to build our character and build a solid foundation for us,” said Andrew Hugentobler, a freshman from Moab, Utah enrolled in Jumpstart. “I feel that Jumpstart not only does this, but helps make this foundation relevant, interesting, and applicable in my own life. Jumpstart has been a very unique and special experience for me.”

“I absolutely love Jumpstart and the people I get to be with everyday,” said Cassidy Tueller, a freshman Exercise Science major from Hyde Park, Utah. “In Jumpstart they show the connects between each class that we are taking and that they all go together in some way or another. I have really enjoyed being able to see those connections and use it in my daily life to make connections with things I am learn to things around me.”

Another hurdle that the program overcame was how grades were assigned at the end of a semester when the class is a year-long.  Initially students were assigned temporary grades which showed students receiving a “T” for a grade. When students completed the year they would receive their final grades for all of the classes. Many organizations outside of SUU didn’t understand the process. That first year the NCAA initially ruled that Jumpstart students were ineligible to play sports because the students didn’t have a GPA for the first semester.

“I wrote a lot of letters that first year to different organizations explaining the Jumpstart program and letting them know that the student was in good standing,” said Taylor, “Now we assign grades at the end of fall semester and we clearly inform the students that the grades will change in the spring based on their overall performance.”

Jumpstart isn’t finished growing. Taylor said that next year they plan to add another section to its program along with smaller versions of the program called Mini-Jumpstarts. They will also explore new and engaging themes for the curriculum in the future.

“We’ll take portions of the model and try to apply it to other fields that may be underserved by the current model,” said Taylor. “We’re looking at doing some for aviation, psychology, biology and chemistry students.”

SUU’s President, Scott L Wyatt, explained, “We want the highest graduation rate we can possibly muster because our students deserve it. We think that Jumpstart GE is the best way to fully support our incoming students and tell them, ‘Welcome to SUU. We care about you and your future’.”

“Jumpstart is creating a community of learners that has no equal on our campus,” said Heyborne. “Jumpstart provides an unparalleled opportunity for students to see how all learning is connected. This type of teaching and learning just isn't possible in a traditional classroom.”

To find out more about Jumpstart, go to the [website](https://www.suu.edu/jumpstart/) or contact Dr. John Taylor at taylorjr@suu.edu.

**About Southern Utah University**

Established in 1897, Southern Utah University evolved from a teacher training institution to Utah's designated masters university, offering over 140 undergraduate and 19 graduate programs. With world class project based learning, unique undergraduate research opportunities, and a personalized learning environment (18:1) students lead projects mentored by professors. True to the University's core vision, SUU faculty, staff and administrators enable students to honor thought in all its finest forms, achieve excellence in their chosen field, and create positive change in the world.

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