

## **UWO students bring STEM-focused activities to Oshkosh schools**

by **Danielle Beyer - Thursday, February 23, 2012**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/17162/uwo-students-bring-stem-focused-activities-to-oshkosh-schools/>

About 60 University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students teamed up with Oshkosh Merrill Middle School students, parents and teachers Feb. 21 for a fun night of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) exploration.

Family STEM Night was held at the middle school to encourage students to take an interest in STEM subjects. Middle school students from Merrill, along with Merrill, Reed and Oaklawn elementary students, were invited to the event and encouraged to bring their parents along to experience hands-on learning activities in a non-threatening, collaborative environment.

Students from the UW Oshkosh College of Education and Human Services and various other student clubs led about 20 targeted activities, including games and demonstrations, including an appearance by Gene Drecktrah, a retired UW Oshkosh entomology professor who brought his bug collection to share with students.

For many of the activities, the University students were teamed up with a student from Oshkosh North High School to help teach the activities to younger children.

Alexander Turinski, a physics student at UW Oshkosh, helped out at the air-powered vehicles station. The task was to help children make a vehicle out of paper, tape, straws and Life Savers candies that could be moved using only their breath.

“The emphasis is on engineering,” Turinski said. “We give them materials, and the kids can do it how we did or they can design their own. The goal is to help with critical thinking skills and problem solving, but in a fun way.”

After creating cars, the children were challenged to move them across the finish line in less than six breaths.

Another station involved making tangrams, a puzzle made by cutting paper into five triangles, a square and a rhomboid that are able to be recombined in many different figures.

Sara O’Connell and Lisa Berger, both education majors at UW Oshkosh, helped students and parents cut out paper shapes and assemble them onto various templates at the tangram station.

O’Connell said involving the parents helps get younger students more excited about math, and it encourages them to stick with it. When children get to teach their parents or even learn something together, they seem to enjoy it more, she said.

“One of the hardest things with math is that you can’t give up,” O’Connell said. “That goes for

education in general and these tangrams.”

Along with many educational opportunities and exposure to community professionals with STEM-focused careers, the event also provided a free chili dinner.

Cindy Olson, principal at Merrill Middle School, estimated about 240 students and their families attended Family STEM Night.

Read more:

- [Human Services coursework become and ongoing community program](#)
- [Inclusive education conference again brings together professionals, families](#)
- [Faculty focus on student success: Gene Drecktrah](#)