

Resource Center for Distance Education receives grant to create professional certification in Computer Science ^[1]

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The Resource Center for Distance Education (CREAD), attached to the Dean's Office of Academic Affairs of the University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez Campus (RUM), received a grant of \$537,800.00 from the 21st Century Technical and Business Education Fund of the Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC). The grant will be used to establish the CREAD Computer Science Academy, an educational program for professional certification in Computer Science, which will provide a credential in nine to 12 months.

"This proposal aims to expand the supply of short courses in Computer Science in a coherent sequence, designed to improve the opportunities for participants to enter this field of high demand and limited supply on the island. Currently, Puerto Rico does not have sufficient manpower with the knowledge and skills for an increasingly technological industry and economy, mainly in the areas of artificial intelligence, Big Data, Machine Learning and Blockchain, among others," said Dr. José R. Ferrer López, director of CREAD and the Division of Continuing Education and Professional Studies (DECEP).

He explained that the funds will be used to create nine courses in addition to the existing six-module DECEP Coding School programming academy. The areas of study will be: introduction to programming, mathematics for Computer Science, data structures and advanced algorithms, object-oriented programming, operating systems and networks, databases and information systems, web development and mobile applications, web and mobile development frameworks, and culminates with a final project and knowledge integration.

"This is a great achievement for CREAD, for RUM and for the University of Puerto Rico because in this highly complex specialty it is very onerous to develop short courses in a cost-effective manner. With this grant, we will be able to develop courses that can then be offered in an affordable and flexible manner to future participants. The funds include tuition for the first participants of these credentialing trainings," she added.

Yaritza Ortiz González, CREAD's assistant director, agreed, noting that the allocation of these funds opens the door to new opportunities.

"We are excited about the possibilities this program provides, both for students and professionals who aspire to upgrade their skills in an ever-evolving field. We are committed to providing more people with the opportunity to access key skills in the field of technology, while promoting equal opportunities in education," he said.

Over the next 18 months, they will work with subject matter experts to develop the modules. Then, they will create the educational materials for the courses that will be offered remotely.

"The CREAD Computer Science Academy will be offered in distance mode, asynchronous with the multi-strategy model for effective online teaching and with support from CREAD's course development team. We will also follow the quality parameters of Quality Matters," said Ferrer Lopez.

Dr. Betsy Morales Caro, dean of Academic Affairs, said that this proposal will give participants a competitive advantage in the job market.

"I congratulate the CREAD team for their dedication and commitment in obtaining this grant. Their hard work and perseverance have paid off, and I am confident that the CREAD Computer Science Academy will become a benchmark of excellence in Computer Science education. We are excited to be able to provide an accelerated pathway to acquire knowledge and skills in one of today's most promising and in-demand fields. I thank the DDEC for their support and confidence in our institution. This grant demonstrates their recognition of our efforts to promote quality education and economic development in our region," said Morales Caro.

Dr. Agustín Rullán Toro, rector of RUM, expressed the same opinion. "This initiative reflects our continued commitment to provide quality education adapted to the needs of the labor market. With this project, we are providing all interested parties the opportunity to obtain a valuable credential in an accelerated period of time. This grant will not only strengthen our academic offerings, but will also contribute to the island's economic and technological development," he said.

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Content Categories:

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