

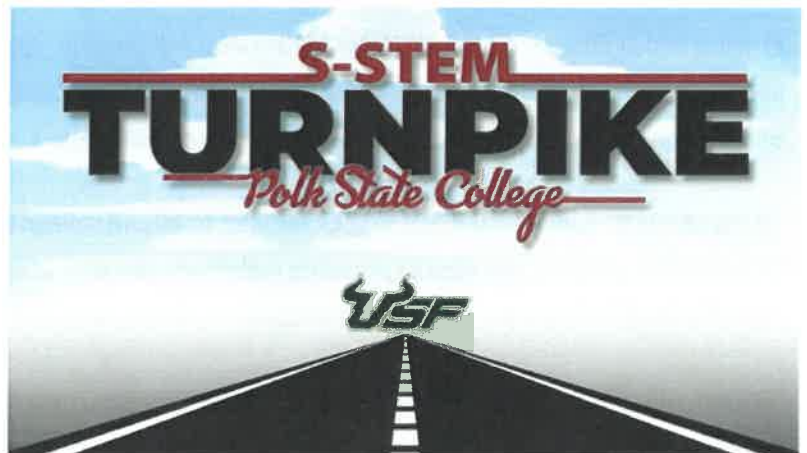
# National Science Foundation awards \$3 million to Polk State, USF STEM partnership

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The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded \$3 million to a collaboration between Polk State College and the University of South Florida to implement TURNPIKE, a project that seeks to create a bridge from associate to baccalaureate degree programs for students in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics (STEM).

Funds were provided as part of the NSF Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S-STEM) program which aims to address the need to develop a high-quality STEM workforce by encouraging educational attainment in STEM fields for low-income, academically talented students with financial need.

“Polk State College is proud to partner with USF to create financial and academic support systems that foster student success at Polk State today and at USF tomorrow,” said Polk State President Angela Garcia Falconetti. “This program will ensure that students from diverse backgrounds and circumstances have the opportunity to pursue degrees in STEM fields including Engineering, Computer Science, and Information Technology.”



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*TURNPIKE, Transfer Undergraduate Rural/Nontraditional Student Pathways Through Identity, Knowledge & Engagement, targets academically promising, low-income, non-traditional students and provides them with financial support, along with cohort-based academic support, mentoring, and transfer and career advising. The goal is to assist students in achieving Associate in Arts degrees from Polk State and transferring to USF’s College of Engineering to complete baccalaureate degrees in engineering or computer science/information technology disciplines.*

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*Polk State President*

*Angela Garcia Falconetti*

Fifty students will be served through the project, each receiving up to \$10,000 annually in scholarships while pursuing their associate degrees at Polk State and up to \$10,000 per year while completing their bachelor's degrees at USF. Students will participate in a Pre-Engineering Academy as an orientation to the field of Engineering to learn about the broad range of career opportunities, and to prepare for the rigorous coursework.

Students will participate in Course-driven Learning Communities (CLC), which host activities organized and led by peer mentors to provide academic support for students enrolled in General Physics courses and English Composition. This

program is modeled after a similar one already implemented at USF.

Additionally, students will work with faculty mentors including Mike Malone, Professor of Mathematics; Dirk Valk, Professor of Physics; and Li Zhou, Professor of Mathematics who will provide regular counseling and check-ins throughout students' time at Polk State. Dr. Bulmuo Maakuu, Professor of Physics and the College's manager of the project, emphasized the importance of mentoring and supporting students through degree completion.

“Many of our students are the first in their families to attend college and do not have someone who they can talk to about the expectations, process, and rigor of pursuing higher education in STEM fields,” Dr. Maakuu said. “Faculty mentors nurture students' potential and provide them with support, advice, and encouragement.”

Mentors will provide enhanced advising and support services, help students understand career options, provide academic support, and facilitate academic and transfer planning.

In addition to the support of Polk State faculty, TURNPIKE students will participate in project-based learning activities with USF faculty – individuals who will also serve as the students' mentors when they successfully complete their degrees at Polk State and transfer to USF.

Project participants who successfully complete their degrees at Polk State and meet all eligibility requirements to enroll in USF's College of Engineering will receive up to \$10,000 annually in scholarships while at USF toward their baccalaureate degrees.

Polk State has a successful track record with STEM-focused projects and programs including the [Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation Program \(LSAMP\)](#), which focuses on increasing the number of STEM baccalaureate and graduate degrees awarded to underrepresented minorities and growing the number of minority individuals serving in STEM careers. Since the program's inception in 2017, 70 students have graduated from the program and 61 are continuing their higher education.

Polk State is accepting applications for the first class of the TURNPIKE project for enrollment in the Spring 2021 Semester. More information about the project and the application can be found at [polk.edu/TURNPIKE](http://polk.edu/TURNPIKE).