

USU Helps Students GEAR UP | CEHS

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The GEAR UP grant has helped me prepare for college and increase my confidence as a student,” said Piper Christian. She is a recipient of critical early college awareness and support services provided by the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate (GEAR UP) grant awarded to researchers in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership. The grant funds tutoring, mentoring, academic preparation, financial education, and college scholarships to improve access to higher education.

GEAR UP starts serving students in seventh grade, following them through high school graduation and their first year in college. This competitive grant program from the U.S. Department of Education increases the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

One part of this multi-faceted program, the GEAR UP Youth Leadership Summit (YLS) is a three-day training experience in Washington DC, focused on providing GEAR UP students the resources and tools to act as leaders in their schools and communities. After attending this summit, Carmen Guadarrama, from Logan, Utah, said, “I felt like a stronger person who could create a change in my school or community if I put in the effort and hard work.”

Six students from Utah were selected to attend, along with 144 students from across the United States. At this national Youth Leadership Summit, GEAR UP students focused on strengthening leadership qualities and learning how to make positive changes in a community with goal planning, community building, and public speaking. “YLS was an extraordinary experience,” said Christian. “We were given a great deal of autonomy in projects and

activities at the summit, so we were able to strengthen our leadership skills through hands-on experience.”

Caitlyn Tippetts from Manti, Utah, was one of the six students selected from Utah. “What an awesome experience to be able to observe firsthand the uniqueness of each person I met, their talents and personalities, but also how very much alike we are no matter our circumstance, color, race, or where we live,” said Tippetts. “Our differences were few. We all had dreams and aspirations and we basically worried about the same kinds of things in school and in life.”

Christian and Guadarrama were asked to visit with Congressman Rob Bishop in Washington DC as part of the YLS conference events. They described how GEAR UP helped broaden their college aspirations since beginning the program in middle school. The students shared their personal experiences attending college campuses and learning about financial aid and scholarships. “I loved the opportunity to speak with Congressman Bishop’s staff about the importance of GEAR UP,” said Christian. “I hope that we can continue this relationship between Congressman Bishop and the GEAR UP community, so more students can reach their full educational potential.”