



PREPARING STUDENTS EFFECTIVELY FOR FUTURE CAREERS

Utah Tech's innovative partnership with Pluralsight is a win for students, employers, and the university itself.

WHEN UTAH TECH UNIVERSITY MET with local employers and learned that they desperately need graduates to fully understand the intricacies of the modern workplace, leaders at the university realized they needed to offer students specialized training and support.

In response, Utah Tech has partnered with **Pluralsight**, a technology workforce development company that helps colleges and universities provide IT skills training to meet rapidly changing industry needs.

As a result of this innovative partnership, students are graduating ready for jobs in the IT industry and other fields right out of the gate. Utah Tech has seen an increase in the number of students applying because of this benefit, which has helped the university stand out in a highly competitive marketplace. Even alumni have access to IT skills training from Pluralsight, which helps them keep their jobs skills up-to-date in a fast-moving workplace environment.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

As an open-access polytechnic institution, Utah Tech was already unique.

“Our goal is to give opportunities for as many students to pursue a higher education as possible and prepare them for a world that’s driven by technology,” said Assistant Provost Christopher Guymon.

Utah Tech functions as both a community college and a comprehensive four-year university. It offers workforce-related technical training programs ranging from microcredentials and certifications to associate and bachelor’s degrees as well as bachelor’s and master’s degrees in humanities, arts, education, health sciences, business, and STEM. All microcredentials and certifications are stackable, meaning they can be applied toward a full degree.

Students can take courses either online or in person, and experiential learning plays a fundamental role in the school’s instruction. “We learn by doing,” Guymon explained. “We believe that’s the best way for students to master the content.”

While Utah Tech’s pedagogical approach leads to a deeper understanding of important skills and concepts, Guymon and his colleagues were hearing from employers that their IT needs weren’t fully being met.

“When we talked to industry advisory boards,” Guymon recalled, “their typical message was: ‘We respect what your university is doing, but we find that your students aren’t fully prepared for the emerging roles that technology plays in the workforce. We need graduates who can have an immediate impact on day one in their new job.’”

It was a sobering message to hear, especially for a polytechnic school that prides itself on high-quality instruction. Guymon and his colleagues recognized their usual way of operating couldn’t keep pace with technology’s exponential rate of change.

FILLING A KEY VOID

The way most colleges and universities function doesn’t lend itself to rapid change, as decisions are typically made by committee and require lead time. Changing course curricula or adding new courses, for example, often requires several planning meetings involving academic deans, faculty, and even board members.

“It’s a very detailed process that we have to follow,” Guymon said.

In contrast, the world of technology is changing almost daily. For instance, Amazon makes dozens of changes to its AWS Cloud platform every week — and new cybersecurity threat vectors are constantly emerging, putting businesses at risk.

“We offer programs and courses in areas such as cloud



Quick Facts

To ensure graduates are fully prepared for the emerging roles that technology plays in the workforce, Utah Tech University has tapped into Pluralsight’s digital learning offerings to supplement the institution’s IT skills training programs.

Every member of the Utah Tech community now has the opportunity to earn industry-recognized certifications in the IT skills that are most desired by employers.

Now, Utah Tech students are better positioned for success in the workplace and report choosing to attend the institution because they can learn cutting-edge skills on demand via the Pluralsight platform.



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Utah Tech Assistant Provost
CHRISTOPHER GUYMON

computing and cybersecurity, but the ability to stay current with companies like Amazon and Microsoft just isn’t possible,” Guymon admitted. “It’s beyond our scope.”

Bound by limited resources and a somewhat inflexible governance structure, Guymon and his colleagues knew they needed the help of an agile industry partner to supplement the university’s IT skills development offerings.

“We chose Pluralsight because they serve many of the same organizations we’re looking to have our students join when they graduate,” Guymon said. “To us, it was a natural connection. Pluralsight fills a void that we couldn’t fill ourselves.”

HOW PLURALSIGHT CAN HELP

Pluralsight offers more than 10,000 online courses and lessons for learning in-demand technology skills, ranging in length from a few minutes to a few hours. Topics include software and web development, cloud computing, cybersecurity, data analysis, and more.

Organizations use Pluralsight’s searchable digital learning platform for onboarding new employees and keeping team members’ skills up-to-date. Colleges and universities partner with the company to augment their curriculum and degree programs with current, domain-specific knowledge that is continually changing to meet evolving workplace needs.

Pluralsight uses very short assessments of 10 to 20 questions to measure users’ technology skills. The artificial intelligence and machine learning technology built into the company’s learning platform can very quickly identify the gaps in students’ skills and automatically align lessons with these gaps, delivering the precise instruction that students need.

“We provide bite-size opportunities for learning,” said Tony Holmes, practice lead for Solutions Architects Public Sector for Pluralsight. “Students can experience a five- or 15-minute lesson that addresses a particular skills gap identified in our assessments. These modules home in on very discrete skills.”

Utah Tech began working with Pluralsight in January 2022. “Anyone can buy a license to Pluralsight’s content, but we wanted an organized curriculum around topics built out for us,” Guymon said. Utah Tech worked with Pluralsight to identify which technology skills were most in demand, and the two organizations then created 20 certification and microcredentialing programs based on this information.

ALL STUDENTS BENEFIT

While Utah Tech’s partnership with Pluralsight gives students an opportunity to earn industry-recognized certifications in the IT skills that are most desired by employers, students (and faculty) are benefiting in many other ways as well.



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**Pluralsight Practice Lead for
Solutions Architects Public Sector
TONY HOLMES**

Every member of the Utah Tech community — including students, alumni, faculty, and staff — has unlimited access to Pluralsight’s more than 10,000 unique video courses, labs, sandboxes, and projects covering almost every technology topic.

“The skills you can develop on this platform will increase both your knowledge and marketability in the workforce as you set on a journey to find success in this technology-driven world,” Utah Tech tells students and alumni **on its Pluralsight web page**. “We firmly believe that regardless of what your chosen field of study is, you can benefit from the content in the Pluralsight platform.”

At a minimum, Utah Tech encourages all students to become proficient in Microsoft Office Suite and Google Workspace, regardless of what subject they’re studying. “The chances you’ll have to use one or both of these in your professional life is nearly 100%,” the university tells students. “This can put you one step ahead and minimize your learning curve on the job.”

Internal research suggests that 80% of Utah Tech students have only novice-level Microsoft Office skills, Guymon said — and very few students are taking full advantage of all the features this software suite has to offer. Using Pluralsight’s self-guided platform to learn Office and Google Workspace thoroughly will position students for greater success as they collaborate on projects in college and beyond.

MANY USE CASES

Guymon and others in the Utah Tech community are excited about the potential for Pluralsight to be used for both structured and unstructured learning opportunities.

Faculty are integrating Pluralsight lessons and trainings into their courses where appropriate. For example, business school faculty are directing students to the Pluralsight platform to learn advanced spreadsheet skills in programs such as Excel and Google Sheets. Rather than taking up valuable class time to teach these technical skills, faculty can have students learn these skills on their own time and then spend class time discussing higher-level concepts and applications, such as how to use spreadsheets to solve key business problems and what data are most useful to collect in various scenarios.

A music history professor who used to assign a written term paper to students now asks them to build a website for their chosen topic instead — and students use the Pluralsight platform to learn the technical skills required for this task. Not only does this assignment better prepare students for their future by equipping them with invaluable skills that will give them a leg up in the job market, Guymon said, but it also enables them to create an artifact documenting their learning that they can show to potential employers.



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“We think this is the type of work that students will be called on to do more in the future,” he noted.

The nature of Pluralsight’s platform encourages self-directed learning, which itself is a key skill that all students should learn. Whether students are planning a career in a tech-related field or they want to make themselves more valuable to employers, students can explore tech-related topics that interest them or engage in specific learning experiences on demand to help them with projects or problems they encounter at work or in school.

“We hope Pluralsight will guide students to where they want to go next,” Guymon said.

NO NEED TO GO IT ALONE

Partnering with Pluralsight has helped Utah Tech prepare students more effectively for postgraduate success. It’s helping the university meet employers’ needs more comprehensively. It’s even helped with student recruitment and retention, which is another timely challenge faced by higher education institutions nationwide.

The pandemic has had a huge effect on student enrollment in the last few years. Enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities dropped by nearly 6% from spring 2020 to spring 2021, according to **data from the National Student Clearinghouse**. Community colleges, which tend to serve the most vulnerable student populations, suffered the largest hit — with enrollment **falling by 11.3%** in that time. Meanwhile, Utah Tech’s enrollment increased 3.4% in that same time frame and has grown by 50% since fall 2014.

While the pace of decline has leveled off, undergraduate enrollment was **still down by 1.1%** in fall 2022 compared to the prior year — and the long-term outlook unfortunately **looks even worse**. Declining enrollment could put a big strain on campus budgets unless colleges and universities find innovative ways to attract and retain students — and Utah Tech’s partnership with Pluralsight is one example.

“We’re aware there are students choosing our university specifically because of our relationship with Pluralsight,” Guymon said. “They’ve told us they appreciate the ability to learn cutting-edge tech skills on demand.”

One of Utah Tech’s main goals is to prepare students for what a technology-driven world expects of them — and Pluralsight is helping the university meet this goal.

“Universities have a tendency to think the same ways they always have,” Guymon concluded. “I would suggest to campus leaders: It’s time to think differently. We can’t do everything ourselves. We need the help of industry partners like Pluralsight.”

For more information, visit www.pluralsight.com.