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For media inquiries, contact:
Sam Orne, H. PR Strategies
Sam.orne@hprstrategies.com

Higher Education Regional Alliance Creates Data and Artificial Intelligence Badge to Certify Student Skills

First badge recipients celebrated at MKE Tech Hub Coalition's Demo Day Showcase as part of its pre-internship program

MILWAUKEE (August 12, 2021) – The Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA), a collective force of 18 southeastern Wisconsin public and private, two- and four-year colleges and universities and a network of partner organizations, today announced its first badge aimed at advancing education and training for local students to meet the workforce needs of the region's employers. HERA's Foundations in Data and Artificial Intelligence badge was awarded to 70 students from area high schools, colleges and universities who participated in the MKE Tech Hub Coalition's pre-internship program on the ethics and impact of data and artificial intelligence. The certification demonstrates the knowledge the students gained from the program and the strong skillset they can offer to the region's employers.

"This is a critical step in achieving HERA's goal of better aligning, evolving and innovating educational programs so they better meet the needs of Southeastern Wisconsin's rapidly changing economy," said Dr. Phyllis King, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at UW-Milwaukee and HERA member. "Many of our industry partners shared the need they have for more talent in data and AI amongst all industries. Because of this, we partnered with the MKE Tech Hub Coalition to create a new micro-credentialing and badging program that helps train future talent in Southeastern Wisconsin. With this badge certification, students can now showcase the knowledge they need to fill the jobs of tomorrow."

HERA's Foundations in Data and Artificial Intelligence badge recognizes the MKE Tech Hub Coalition's pre-internship program as a credible educational course that teaches students how to develop new data-driven solutions and use artificial intelligence and data in a variety of industries. The badge represents each student's new skillset that will differentiate them as they apply to internships and careers post-graduation. The badge may also lead to college credit at select higher education institutions.

"The Coalition is involved in conversations at the national level regarding the importance of democratizing data and artificial intelligence education. It seemed important to bring that discussion forward in MKE," said Laura Schmidt, chief talent development officer at MKE Tech Hub Coalition. "The level of regional collaboration involved in developing and executing this early talent program is a testament to its relevance as we consider how we prepare students for the future of work in a digital economy."

The pre-internship program teaches students the impact data and artificial intelligence has on industries in Southeastern Wisconsin, like health, manufacturing, financial services as well as society, civic life and the environment. Through the program, students learn the nature, behavior, power and consequences of technology from a real-world perspective as well as how critical diverse backgrounds and perspectives are to the development of technological solutions. By using data tools, they are taught how to capture, discern and tell a compelling story in order to make informed business decisions and find solutions for civic issues. Students are also given the opportunity to develop peer and professional network connections as they prepare for their future careers.

“Helping the next generation leverage the power of technology is incredibly important for our region, and the HERA badge brings credibility to MKE Tech Hub Coalition's pre-internship program,” said Matthew Friedel, senior lecturer and co-founder of the Disruptive Technology Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and curriculum director at the MKE Tech Hub Coalition. “The sooner we incorporate the importance of data analytics and AI into a student’s education, the better they will understand it and be able to bring a data-driven mindset to the industry they’re pursuing a career in.”

For more information about HERA and its collaborative, please visit: www.herawisconsin.org.

For more information about the MKE Tech Hub Coalition and its pre-internship program, please visit: www.mketechtalent.org/preinternship.

About Higher Education Regional Alliance

The Higher Education Regional Alliance (HERA) is a talent producing collaboration with 18 southeastern Wisconsin public and private, two- and four-year colleges and universities and a network of partner organizations. We are dedicated to closing achievement gaps and educating students today to become an innovative and nimble workforce that meets the needs of the region’s industries tomorrow. This challenge is too large for any one university or college to solve alone, so we are working together. We know that education impacts more than individual lives; it can change the trajectory of our entire region. For more information, please visit www.herawisconsin.org.

About MKE Tech Hub Coalition

The MKE Tech Hub Coalition is a non-profit membership organization that serves as a unifying voice for the Milwaukee tech ecosystem. We are committed to inclusively doubling the tech workforce in southeastern Wisconsin in order to drive economic success and innovation in the region. To achieve this bold milestone, the Coalition brings together companies, entrepreneurs, educators, community organizations and other individuals invested in growing tech talent and innovation in the region. For more information, please visit www.mketech.org.

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