

For High Schools Regionwide, AU is "IT" -- The Center for Information Technology

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Alfred, NY -- For high school students enrolled in the Cisco Networking Academies Program, there's no final exam. The important question isn't how much information the students can regurgitate, but "Does the network work?" If a student's project culminates in a functional computer network, then the student learned the semester's lesson. The Networking Academies is a cooperative venture between school districts and Cisco, a world leader in networking for the Internet. Using the building blocks of global information networks, students learn by doing as they design and bring to life local and wide-area networks. For instance, during their first full semester in the Cisco Local Academy at Thurgood Marshall High School in San Francisco, two dozen students wired the San Jose Convention Center for the California Community Colleges in Education Foundation Technology Conference. With the help of teachers and Cisco mentors, they provided state-of-the-art high-speed Internet access to vendor booths and seminar rooms for the conference. Now the same learning opportunity is available to students from Buffalo to Syracuse, Jamestown to Binghamton, and everywhere in between, thanks to Alfred University, which has been named a Regional Academy or "hub," a center that will support at least 10 Local Academies. AU was named a Regional Academy early this summer. Faculty from AU's College of Business and the Computer Science and Electrical Engineering programs have been trained and certified to teach in the Local Academies program. The first Cisco courses were offered the summer of 1998, and the University plans to offer a full range of training workshops in summer 1999. High school faculty can get graduate credit for completing Cisco classes. "The American economy runs on information -- yet companies today face a shortage of IT (information technology) workers," said David Szczerbacki, dean of the College of Business at Alfred University. "And although America's schools are struggling to supply the needed skills, more than 80 percent of our classrooms lack the basic technology tool of a direct Internet connection." Cisco provides courses on a range of basic through advanced networking concepts, "from pulling cable through such complex concepts as subnet masking rules and strategies," Dr. Szczerbacki added. "In a nutshell, Cisco Networking Academies is a complete, four-semester program on the principles and practice of designing, building, and maintaining networks capable of supporting national and global organizations." Cisco recently announced that it would establish Networking Academies in 15 impoverished inner-city and rural communities, saying students who complete four semesters of certified training can expect to get jobs paying \$35,000 to \$45,000 a year. The announcement won praise from Vice President Al Gore, who said, "Cisco's Networking Academies program gives kids a first-class ticket to a high skill, high-pay job."