

University of Dubuque's aviation program sees enrollment increase, paralleling job market

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Published: Sep. 8, 2021 at 9:43 PM CDT

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG) - Dulani Evans has wanted to be a pilot for as long as he can remember. The love for aviation runs deep in his blood.

"I had a family background in aviation," Evans said. "We have family in the military, also family members who were a part of the Tuskegee Airmen program, so I got to see a lot of exposure early on via my mom taking me to flight shows and things like that."

That is why he enrolled in the University of Dubuque's aviation program, set up at the Dubuque Regional Airport. He is a senior now hoping to soon start his career in this industry that currently has many opportunities for graduates, according to Randy Warm, UD's director of aviation operations.

"The airlines are taking them right away, so a lot of our instructors are leaving as soon as they get their thousand hours and they are hired at the airlines," Warm said.

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Warm explained that that, in part, is thanks to many workers either retiring or looking for jobs elsewhere because of the pandemic. He said most openings are for pilots and mechanics.

Since there are so many open positions out there, UD staff have seen many more students enroll in the program. The previous incoming class was of about 120 students. That number used to be closer to 60 new students. Warm mentioned that they have also seen a more diverse class of incoming students.

"A lot more females are getting into aviation, which is good," Warm said. "They want to be pilots too. A lot of minority students are coming here."

Warm said they are already planning for growth as they want to make sure they can meet their students' needs.

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"We have three hangars in design to be built right on the north side of this building and then expand this building to more than double its capacity to keep up and have all of our classes out here, aviation classes," Warm said.

The program is preparing to have a total of about 400 students in the coming years.

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