Tennessee State University offers coding classes in Africa

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In this April 13, 2021, file photo, Tennessee State University President Glenda Glover smiles during a press conference in Nashville. Tennessee State University announced on Wednesday, MAY 26, 2021, that it will begin offering an online app design and coding class in two African countries this fall. Credit: George Walker/The Tennessean via AP, FILE

Tennessee State University announced on Wednesday that it will begin offering an online app design and coding class in two African countries this fall.

Robbie Melton, who runs TSU's coding program, said the idea is to get African students interested in STEM careers and increase the number of Black students entering those fields. App design and coding is an easy introduction.

The courses are offered through a partnership between the historically Black university and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which operates several schools in Africa. The participating schools are the African Methodist Episcopal University and its feeder high school, Monrovia College, both in Monrovia, Liberia, and Wilberforce Community College, which serves high school and college students in Evaton, a township in South Africa.

TSU already offers the app coding program to more than 30 historically Black colleges and universities in the United States, and more than 2,000 students have participated since it started in 2019, Melton said. Around 20% have gone on to pursue STEM degrees, she said.

In addition to teaching students, TSU faculty members train participating school faculty to be able to give the courses themselves. The same will be true for the African schools, which have signed up 500 students to take the course over the next three years. That includes both college students and high school students who will take advantage of dual-enrollment.

If some of the students decide to continue their studies with TSU, the school is now able to offer degrees remotely through virtual classes, TSU President Glenda Glover said.

"Our global mission is to empower underserved populations," Glover said. "Access to education is challenging in parts of Africa. We're meeting that challenge and breaking those barriers."