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From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

Success began with SEMO ACES – Kristin Alexander, DDS

Dr. Kristen Alexander is the perfect example of perseverance and dedication. From the time she was young, she wanted to be a dentist, and her determination made that happen this June. She graduated from ATSU Missouri School of Dentistry and Oral Health's first class as a dentist.

Kristen began her journey through the SEMO AHEC ACES (AHEC Career Enhancement Scholars) in Poplar Bluff. She began participation as a freshman at Poplar Bluff High School and continued through high school, then through college at SEMO University and she even worked as a program specialist at the SEMO AHEC for a while.... all to keep her dream alive. Kristen said, "AHEC truly had a hand in connecting me with the dental school I attended. Because the AHEC knew me as a person, the school knew that I would be a successful candidate."

Each of the AHECs across the state have similar stories. Many doctors, dentists, nurses, and other allied health professionals began their journey in a fashion like Kristen's. The ACES program and the new SCHOLARS program both provide opportunities which allow the students to develop skills, experience real-world application and research health career options.

ACES students experience 30 hours of instruction in areas such as CPR, infection control, health literacy, vital signs, HIPAA, and professionalism. Structured job shadowing is also a strong component of the program.

MAHEC is a great example of how a program can help students experience success. Dr. Alexander is now working at the Poplar Bluff Community Dental Clinic. "Being a student from a rural area with limited resources, I was concerned about my ability to complete my schooling because of the astronomical burden of student debt, but through AHEC, I was able to find loans and scholarships and realize I REALLY could do this," said Kristen. Her dream has come true.



Kristen Alexander in her graduation regalia at the ATSU Missouri School of Dentistry and Oral Health graduation.

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University –
 - Kirksville
- University of Missouri –
 - Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC - Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC
 - St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri
 - AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC – St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC – Springfield

MAHEC: Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health