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From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

Academic and Community Connection in AHEC: Putting it All Together

“When are we ever going to use this stuff?” One of the most important functions of the Missouri AHEC is to continually answer this question for the young people with whom we work -- students who have big, amazing dreams about making a difference in their communities, world, and lives through health care careers. Sometimes the path from classroom to dream job just is not clear. This can be especially true for students growing up in rural and urban under-served communities, where educational and community resources can be few, and health care professionals can be scarce.

Our job through Missouri AHEC is to help reverse that trend. One of the ways we do this is by providing hands-on exposure activities to students exploring health care careers in our long-term recruitment programs. Our goal is to answer the question above--to show students how academic training grounds and day-to-day career activities relate.

On October 28, 107 high school students, participants in East Central Missouri AHEC’s health career clubs came to the Health Professions Campus of Saint Louis University for “AHEC Health Careers 101”.

Featured disciplines for the day included Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, Physical and Occupational Therapies, Athletic Training, Biomedical Laboratory Sciences, Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy, Health Information Management, Health Science, and Nutrition and Dietetics.

The Medicine rotation, for example, had students in the School of Medicine Simulation Lab, using real medical equipment to intubate a high-tech patient mannequin. Students also took turns suturing synthetic mannequin skin using two different suturing techniques, authentic sutures and instruments. The nursing rotation included asthma assessment and nebulizer treatment with mannequins, as well as practice with infection control materials such as glow germ wash, masks, disaster preparedness equipment, and real-life scenarios. A public health rotation included a case-based Ebola study, with students teaming up in public health work groups. Health sciences rotations saw students examining real bacteria and several types of cancerous cells under a microscope.

Throughout each rotation, leaders in their healthcare fields at SLU actively engaged with students, giving details and insights about their careers and training paths.

Dr. Denise Hooks-Anderson, a Family Medicine physician, shared her story, what and who kept her motivated, and the obstacles that almost knocked her off her path. Hooks-Anderson was encouraged by the level of personal engagement she saw from the youth.

Two student comments: “I enjoyed this experience, and I hope it furthers my medical career” and “the activities were really fun, and I can’t wait to go home and tell my parents about what I did and learned.”



A student from Collegiate School of Medicine and Bioscience (a St. Louis Public School District magnet school) during the Biomedical Laboratory Science rotation.

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