

STEM-focused internships amplify career aspirations of SIUE students

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE - The themes of the summer for 14 Southern Illinois University Edwardsville students were continuous learning and educational outreach to youth

across Illinois and Missouri on the topics of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The freshmen and sophomore students participated in the Robert J. Noyce Scholarship Science and Math Grants. The grants are funded by the National Science Foundation and provide \$2,500 summer internships for 200 hours of in-service training for qualified SIUE freshmen and sophomores, and local community college students who are interested in STEM careers.

“My vision is to share my love for STEM not just with my hometown, but with the world,” said St. Louis native Christian Watts, a sophomore pre-pharmacy student who interned at the St. Louis Science Center. “The Science Center has visitors from all over the country, which is definitely a starting point for my vision to come true! Never did a day go by where I wasn’t able to teach my learners something new. That’s an impact all instructors should aim for daily.”



According to Watts, his experiences teaching science lessons at the St. Louis Science Center fueled his desire to work with children.

“My career aspiration is to become a pharmacist and a graduate level professor,” Watts explained. “After partnering with the Science Center, I developed a passion for children and may study pediatric pharmacy.”

Sophomore Ricardo Wells interned at Adler Planetarium in his hometown of Chicago. This was his second summer participating in the Noyce internship program, which has served to strengthen his abilities as an educator.

“My job duties at the Adler Planetarium were to do coding and programming to help make teaching astrometry to youth more efficient,” Wells said. “This internship has greatly enhanced my pursuit of a teaching career. I’ve learned a myriad of skills, like knowing how to read the behaviors of students to get knowledge through to them effectively.”

Wood River native Lauren Ratliff says the highlight of her summer was the opportunity to work with children and nature through her internship at the Watershed Nature Center in Edwardsville.

“My internship focused on educating local children and families about the environment and the abundance of plant and animal species in the area,” Ratliff explained. “This experience definitely reinforced to me that I belong in a challenging, people-oriented scientific field.”

A student in the School of Pharmacy, Ratliff says the communication and organizational skills she gained through her internship will significantly enhance her ability to achieve her career goals.

“I’m extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from great people at a wonderful organization dedicated to the cause of environmental education and conservation,” she said. “Although this job may not seem in any way similar to a job in the pharmaceutical field, the skills I learned can be easily applied to my future career. I hope to pursue a pediatric or oncology specialization after graduation.”

The Noyce internships are coordinated through the SIUE STEM Center, in partnership with faculty from the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Locations and programs for the 2016 cohort included the District 7 Summer Zone, SIUE’s Odyssey Science Camp, Watershed Nature Center, William Leonard Public Library, the Field Museum of Natural History, Digital East St. Louis, Madison County Housing Authority, the St. Louis Science Center and Adler Planetarium.

The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville [Center for STEM Research, Education and Outreach](#) comprises an independent group of researchers and educators, innovating ways to engage students and the public in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Within the SIUE Graduate School, the Center brings together research faculty, graduate students and practitioners to conduct education research. Center staff develop and teach hands-on STEM programming as well as online citizen science and astronomy initiatives. The Center contributes educational expertise to SIUE undergraduate classes and provides professional development for K-12 teachers. The Center boasts a significant library of equipment and resources, which are available for loan at no cost to campus and regional instructors. For more information, visit stemideas.org or contact STEM Center Director Sharon Locke at [\(618\) 650-3065](tel:6186503065) or stemcenter@siue.edu.