

SIUE offers enriching mentorship to NAACP ACT-SO program participants

April 11 2018 11:31 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville faculty, staff and student volunteers provided expert knowledge, confidence-boosting encouragement and inspiring advice to 32 of the 54 students from St. Clair County participating in the NAACP's East St. Louis ACT-SO ([Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological, Scientific Olympics](#)) program.

Known as the “Olympics of the Mind,” ACT-SO is a yearlong achievement program designed to recruit, stimulate and encourage high academic and cultural achievement among African American high school students.

“We, the East St. Louis ACT-SO Committee, know that it is important to invest in our youth,” said Ronda Franklin, ACT-SO chair. “This program promotes academic and artistic excellence, and provides enrichment opportunities and mentorship for high school students. These experiences can be used throughout their life and educational career.”

SIUE’s involvement in the ACT-SO enrichment sessions marks the start of a new partnership in which academic experts are serving as volunteers, coaches, role models, professors and mentors who nurture student talent through interaction and direction.

The East St. Louis Local competition was held Saturday, March 31, with 12 gold medalists advancing to the national competition being held July 11-16 in San Antonio, Texas. Volunteering SIUE faculty members and students coached the students on their projects in health sciences, entrepreneurship, writing and the arts.

“These high school students bring a lot of talent to their projects, but most are nervous about being judged in a competition,” explained Paul Rose, PhD, interim dean of the SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior. “SIUE volunteers offered good advice about competing under pressure, thereby helping the students achieve success. We are proud of all the student participants and excited for those who have advanced to the national competition.”

Volunteer mentor Shadrack Msengi, PhD, associate professor of clinical literacy in the SEHNB Department of Teaching and Learning, prompted and encouraged students to creatively engage in the writing process of short stories, poetry and original essays.

“My original essay is titled *Redefining Representation* and is about the importance of diversifying the media and Hollywood to include more ethnic minorities,” said one of Msengi’s mentees Lauren Evans, a sophomore at Belleville East. “Dr. Msengi helped me add crucial ideas to my essay to further emphasize my point.”

“I enjoyed working with these young adults, as they were anxious to search, discover and utilize their potential through writing,” Msengi said. “Participation in the ACT-SO program offers students a platform and unique opportunity to express ideas, not only to peers, but also to a large audience at the local and national levels.”

“These students have tremendous academic potential,” he added. “They are diligent, dedicated and extraordinarily gifted. They fundamentally need someone to ignite and treasure their intellectual light, and guide them on the right educational path.”

After successfully advancing to nationals last year, Belleville West junior Dominick Oranika entered two categories in this year’s local competition: engineering and photography.

“Science and technology are a real passion of mine, so this year I created a MIDI (musical instrument digital interface) controller,” Oranika explained, while meeting with three SIUE mentors. “I’m also competing with multiple pictures that I took last summer. Last year, I just turned my pictures in a week before competition and went. This year, I wanted to utilize these mentors’ expertise by attending an ACT-SO enrichment session.”

Faculty volunteers embodied the University’s core values of diversity and inclusion, and emphasized how mentorship and community engagement practices such as this provide valuable recruitment opportunities.

“As director of SIUE’s Student Nurse Achievement Program (SNAP), I am dedicated to mentoring and recruiting minority and disadvantaged students who are interested in nursing,” said Jerrica Ampadu, RN, PhD, assistant professor in the School of Nursing. “The students who participated in the ACT-SO program were enthusiastic and curious about the nursing profession. Participating in this program reinforces the need to continuously engage high school students in intentional learning, as it improves student outcomes.”

Community support and engagement are critical to ACT-SO’s success, according to Franklin. Its mission includes:

- Mobilizing the adult community for the promotion of academic and artistic excellence
- Recognizing creative talent and academic achievement
- Providing and assisting students with the necessary skills to establish goals, and acquire the confidence and training to make a successful contribution to society

“I would like to personally thank SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke, Erin Behnen in the Office of the Provost and University faculty, as well as SIUE East St. Louis Center Executive Director Jesse Dixon and his staff for the help they provided in supporting the efforts of the ACT-SO program,” Franklin said.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 14,000.