

High school students explore the possibilities of a future in healthcare during SIUE's Collaborative Healthcare Diversity Camp

June 28 2018 9:51 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Healthcare is an expansive and continuously evolving industry, which benefits from a diverse workforce. That's why Southern Illinois University Edwardsville hosted 32 high school students from Illinois and Missouri during its collaborative Healthcare Diversity Camp held June 18-22.

Campers explored career possibilities in a variety of healthcare fields through hands-on activities and mentorship sessions hosted by the SIUE Schools of Pharmacy (SOP) and Nursing (SON), the SIU School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) and the SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior's nutrition program. This year's camp was strengthened by a partnership with the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network of Southern Illinois.

"SIUE has a lot to offer through its topnotch healthcare programs," said Lakesha Butler, PharmD, clinical professor in the School of Pharmacy's Department of Pharmacy Practice and camp coordinator. "Due to our new partnership with the AHEC Network of Southern Illinois, we expanded our reach among SIUE programs to include nutrition, and exposed students to both traditional and non-traditional healthcare programs."

"We chose to partner with SIUE because it is a well-known university conveniently situated in a rural setting with great access to urban experiences," said Kayla Dunahee, director SCI-AHEC – Human Resources with SSM Health Southern Illinois. "We help cultivate healthcare students in high school, support their education with professional experiences through the college years and recruit students to come to or return to rural areas upon graduation."

"This camp exemplifies what we are trying to draw students to, while offering students a quality education in a wide array of healthcare careers," she added. "Its focus on diversity and inclusion for all students interested in healthcare is inspiring and aligns perfectly with the AHEC core mission."

Healthcare Diversity Camp inspired diverse high school students by introducing them to careers in healthcare and college life at SIUE. Campers engaged in interactive activities, learned about global opportunities, toured SIUE and its program areas, and finished the week with an ACT crash course.

On Monday, campers visited leaders from the SIUE nutrition program and learned how to become a registered dietitian. In the University's new nutrition lab, they read food labels, created meals based on certain dietary criteria and created and assessed products made with alternative ingredients.

“There are many career opportunities in the field of nutrition,” said Jen Zuercher, PhD, assistant professor and nutrition program director. “The younger generation has become more aware of the fitness and wellness side of nutrition, but often this only covers the people who are or have been directly impacted by a nutritional intervention.”

“Often the students that pursue SIUE’s nutrition program are from communities that would benefit from additional nutrition expertise,” she added. “If we can provide guidance and opportunities for the students, we’re not only helping them, but also their communities.”

At the SON on Tuesday, the high school students learned of the various roles in the field of nursing and participated in hands-on learning in the nursing simulation center.

“We are always excited to build relationships with the Healthcare Diversity Camp participants, expose them to our interactive activities in the simulation center and offer mentorship to help prepare them for careers in nursing,” said Jerrica Ampadu, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Primary Care and Health Systems Nursing and director of the Student Nurse Achievement Program (SNAP). “We also offered an introduction to nurse anesthesiology, and educated the students on the School of Nursing’s admission requirements.”

“This camp was a good opportunity to open my mind to different medical fields,” said Beyoncé Thornton, of St. Louis. “It’s been interesting to learn from all of these experts. At first, I wanted to be a doctor, but this camp opened my mind to being a nurse. I’ve always had a passion for kids, so pediatric care just feels natural.”

Wednesday’s activities revolved around dentistry, as campers traveled to the SIU SDM for a day of interactive experiences led by faculty and volunteer students. The day was organized by SIU SDM faculty members, including Drs. Anita Joy, Kathryn Carter, Donald Reed, Kevin Rowland, Cornell Thomas, Danny Welch and Joseph Sokolowski.

“Campers were exposed to the wonder and inner workings of the body on both a large scale and microscopic level,” said Kevin Rowland, PhD, associate professor in the SIU SDM Department of Applied Dental Medicine. “Attendees looked at a virtual human body on a state-of-the-art imaging computer, analyzed x-ray images of the teeth with current dental students and peeked at their own cheek cells under a microscope.”

Rowland emphasizes the value of interactive experiences in exposing students to in-depth knowledge of the body and introducing them to the necessary skillset. These opportunities, he says, reveal talents that students may not have realized they possess.

“Under a microscope, all of us look practically identical,” Rowland said. “But, on the outside, we all have unique personalities, skills and experiences that make us individuals. Those differences turn out to be assets, because a diverse healthcare team is better equipped to solve complex problems.”

“We all learn in a diverse environment,” added Cornell Thomas, DDS, SIU SDM assistant dean of Admissions and Student Services. “The campers are told they can achieve and must persevere. As health care providers, diversity and cultural competency are paramount in the workforce.”

“I came to camp so I could figure out what I want to do when I get older,” said Chelsea Ruffins, of St. Louis. “I was confused between nursing or dentistry, so I wanted to see the professions up close and personal. Our day at the SIU School of Dental Medicine made me realize I like dental care, primarily orthodontics.”

The SOP hosted the camp participants on Thursday. Students learned about global opportunities and the importance of communication through a patient counseling discussion and activity.

“Other hands-on activities included a pharmaceuticals lab in which students compounded a gel, filled pill capsules and drew up liquids in syringes,” Butler explained. “In addition, they rotated through learning stations demonstrating the physical assessments pharmacists participate in, such as checking blood pressure, and providing foot exams, inhaler education and heel scans for osteoporosis screening.”

“I thought the lab we did in the School of Pharmacy where we filled capsules was really cool,” said Jacob Miller, of Greenville. “SIUE’s campus is beautiful. During our stay, everyone was approachable and kind.”

“Before going to college, I know I had a lot of questions that I wanted to ask students who were actively pursuing a science program,” said Deja Finley, of O’Fallon, a third-year student in the SOP and Healthcare Diversity Camp chaperone. “This has been a great opportunity for me to be that kind of resource for these students. I was glad to provide answers and guidance for those that are still unsure about what they want to do professionally. Professional diversity improves overall patient care and makes people more willing to seek care. I’m happy to be a part of increasing diversity in healthcare.”

[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.