

High School Students Explore Career Possibilities at SIUE Healthcare Diversity Summer Camp

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE -Southern Illinois University Edwardsville returned to its summer tradition of welcoming high school students to explore its facilities and connect with faculty experts to enhance their interest in healthcare-related fields at the annual Healthcare Diversity Summer Camp.

Approximately 20 students from across Illinois, including East St. Louis, Chicago, Collinsville, Bolingbrook, Chatham, Gillespie, Glen Carbon, Granite City, Alton, as well as St. Louis, Mo., attended camp in June.

The Healthcare Diversity Summer Camp is a collaborative effort organized by the SIUE Schools of Pharmacy (SOP), Nursing, the SIU School of Dental Medicine and the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior's nutrition program. It focuses on experience and enrichment as students gain an understanding of the ample opportunities that exist within each healthcare field, through interactive lessons and activities.

"The camp's purpose is to expose high school students who are underrepresented in the healthcare fields to careers in pharmacy, nursing, dental medicine and others," said Camp Coordinator Lakesha Butler, PharmD, clinical professor in the SOP's Department of Pharmacy Practice and director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. "It is recognized that diverse representation of healthcare students translates into diverse representation in healthcare which is vital to meet the growing needs of our local community, region, country and world."

The camp experience enlivens campers' interest in pursuing and graduating in health-related fields. An example is SIUE alumnus Christian Watts, PharmD, who began his pharmacy journey by participating in the camp nine years ago.

According to Watts, an alumnus and former president of the SIUE chapter of the Student National Pharmaceutical Association (SNPhA), "The beginning of my exposure to pharmacy occurred when I attended SIUE's Healthcare Diversity Camp. The camp informed me of several careers offered within the pharmacy field."

This summer, Collierville, Tenn. native Chibulke Azogini's mother signed him up for the program due to his growing interest in the healthcare field.

"Being in labs synthesizing molecules that may be useful to help the world today is interesting," said Azogini. "I've learned that pharmacists do more than just dispense drugs. There are hundreds of jobs in the field."

Paulina Gutierrez, a senior from Collinsville, heard about the opportunity through the SIUE East St. Louis Center's Upward Bound program. She attended to help narrow her choice of a college program. The camp helped her discover the broad nature of the healthcare field.

"Faculty offered us tips and advice regarding what we should be doing to prepare us for our chosen course," she shared. "My camp experience has helped me navigate what I plan to study."

Maya Tolentino, of Chatham, came across the program due to her interest in the healthcare field.

"The faculty were engaging and interactive," said Tolentino. "An interesting moment was when we were in the School of Nursing's lab and they showed us a labor and delivery simulation."

The Healthcare Diversity Camp broadens SIUE's reach throughout Illinois, as evidenced by the number of high schools represented by this year's participants. Above all, Butler noted, "Not only does the camp provide opportunity and exposure, but it also provides a network of peers with similar interests that can serve as motivators and mutually beneficial friends."