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Scholarship Committee Update: Research Apprentice Program at the University of Illinois

Marla J. Todd, Ed.M.
Associate Director of Advancement
University of Illinois

The Research Apprentice Program (RAP) conducted by the University of Illinois College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) is a career exploration and academic enrichment experience uniquely designed to expose high school students from ethnic minority and low-socioeconomic backgrounds to educational and professional opportunities in the food, human, and environmental sciences.

The main goal is to proactively work with both rural and urban school systems throughout the State of Illinois and other key states to create trends resulting in an increasing number of traditionally under-served ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups pursuing fields of study in professions requiring knowledge and skills in math, science, and engineering.

RAP I - Aimed at students in their first two years of high school, the Research Apprentice Program (RAP I) focuses on the applications of math, science and technology, and utilization of computers in the food, human, and environmental sciences. During the four-week on-campus experience, students are actively engaged in mini laboratory sessions, and attend career seminars and science demonstrations.

Participants visit business and industry professionals at their workplace, where they gain a more in-depth understanding of the application of math, science, and technology through a set of learning activities. These experiences have been designed by a team of ACES faculty, students, consulting high school teachers, and representatives from industry. The program emphasizes those team skills and critical thinking skills important to success in college and business.

RAP II - A more in-depth experience is provided to those students who express an interest and demonstrate advanced skills in math and science through the Research Apprentice Program II (RAP II). These students are placed into a laboratory setting where they conduct small individual projects designed to continue to build interest and success in their ability to pursue undergraduate studies in majors that require strong



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math, science and engineering skills within the food, human, and environmental sciences.

Under the supervision of a faculty member or lab assistant, each student conducts a small laboratory project; then writes a paper; develops a poster and gives a brief oral presentation of that project. Examples of laboratory placement include areas such as genetics, food chemistry, plant tissue culture, animal physiology, human nutrition, agricultural marketing, food engineering, and water quality.

Of specific note, there are four food science and human nutrition-focused RAP I teams, including 16-20 students. These teams are sponsored by Kraft and Pepsico. In 2012, nine students participated in the FSHN RAP II program.