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STIMULATING MINDS

By Emilie H. Wheeler

Scrolling through a computer presentation program, Hayden Griffiths summarized his past four days at chemistry camp.

The project he worked on during the week-long workshop series on Utah State University's campus has to do with making an iron zinc complex and the possibilities that kind of research has in making cancer obsolete.

At just 16, Griffiths can definitely speak the chemistry language. But the punch link to his presentation was an off-hand comment about his experiences with one of the machines used for his project.

"If you wear anything metal, you'll be stuck to that," he says to a roomful of laughter, before moving on to other project details.

Griffiths is one of five InTech Collegiate High School students who participated in the department of chemistry and biochemistry's first-ever summer high school camp. A Thursday afternoon presentation to their parents illustrated what they picked up academically throughout the week (think quantum chemistry and electron density calculation processes), but that they also had fun.

After his presentation, Braxton Shumway said the hydrogen balloon explosions were a high point of the week, but also added foosball games to his list.

Ellie Edwards, whose project studied molecules in crystals, was thrilled for the opportunity.

"I had a really great time and I think this is a great program," she said.

Faculty members wanted the soon-to-be high school juniors to have fun, but they also wanted to give the kids a glimpse into how life in the sciences could fit into their future.

"Part of this is to get these students really interested in science," department head Steve Scheiner said.

Getting really interested involves more than just reading a from a book or watching other people conduct lab work, the professors say.

It's important for the high school students to be involved in a hands-on way, chemistry and biochemistry professor Alvan Hengge said.

"That's what stimulates interest," he said.

InTech is a North Logan charter high school meant for teens especially interested in math, science, and engineering. Its doors opened in fall 2006 to about 120 ninth- and 10th-graders and will expand to 11th grade this fall.

The students there already have a close relationship to the chemistry and biochemistry department, since many InTech students have made weekly field trips to USU's campus for science workshops.

Hengge said many of the students at InTech will be taking concurrent enrollment classes, linking them further to the university.

About a year ago, USU faculty members started talking about such a camp.

"It took about a year for us to get this in place since we'd never done anything like this before," Hengge said.

The department-–and the College of Science—doesn't have the capability to expand the week-long summer camp to high school students across the county, but would like to see it continue next year with more students.

The five who attended this year (Griffiths, Shumway, Edwards, Aaron Hooper, and Camellia Williams) had to apply to attend the camp. They were guided through the week by the department's faculty members and undergraduate students who served as chaperones.

The college students were also beneficial for the high school students, professor Lisa Berreau said, because they were able to talk about college life.

Berreau hopes the teens also took away a knowledge of university life from an academia perspective, as well—learning about the daily life of a science professional and the teamwork and camaraderie involved at a university.

Griffiths, who wants to someday enter a scientific field, said he was grateful for even just the opportunity to work in a lab.

"It's the actual experience, not just demos," he said of what he'll remember from the experience. "It's not the glamorized chemistry, it's just the true stuff."

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