Clinton High grad completes 'Discovery U' at UMC
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When Clinton resident Kelli Hartman gets the inevitable question asking what she did last summer, she can say she worked to find a cure for cancer.

Hartman finished a summer biomedical research program Aug. 2 at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. Later this month she'll begin her freshman year as a chemistry major at Mississippi College.

She was among more than 60 undergraduates from around the state who enrolled in Discovery U programs this summer sponsored by the School of Graduate Studies in the Health Sciences at UMMC.

Through various programs, Discovery U exposes K-12 and undergraduate students to biomedical research. In its Summer Undergraduate Research Experience, or SURE program, Hartman and 37 other students got 10 weeks of hands-on biomedical research and training on laboratory techniques and equipment.

They attend Friday-lunchtime discussions on science-career paths, hosted by Medical Center faculty and post-doctoral fellows. And, as participants in the SURE program, they each received a $3,500 stipend.

“The SURE program not only gives undergraduate students hands-on research training, but opens up a world of career possibilities that they can pursue with a master’s or Ph.D in basic sciences. In fact, SURE is the main way we recruit for the graduate school,” said Dr. Joey Granger, UMMC distinguished professor of physiology and graduate school dean.

This year’s SURE program closed Aug. 2 with a half-day symposium where each participant presented his or her research in front of the other students, laboratory technicians, mentors and faculty members.

Dr. Michael Ryan, associate professor of physiology, co-directs Discovery U along with Dr. Michael Garrett, associate professor of pharmacology.

“In my view, one of the major benefits is giving students these opportunities is they can see how research is important to human health and disease,” Ryan said. “A lot of times students aren’t familiar with biomedical research so by bringing them in and going out to their classrooms, we build pipelines for the next generation of scientists.”