SURE program preps freshman

Written by Dustin Barnes

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In two weeks, Jeremiah Reese will start his freshman year at Belhaven University, where he plans on majoring in biology.

He’s one of thousands of Mississippi students starting their college careers later this month, but already the Brandon native is starting with an advantage over his fellow scientifically inclined classmates.

While other incoming freshmen spent the summer planning for a big move to a campus or getting the last bit of high school out of their system, Jeremiah was researching catfish immunology at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

“I was working at research in UMC, working specifically in microbiology,” said Reese. “We were studying the catfish immune system and what we were doing was working on treatments for infectious diseases in the catfish.”

Before starting the program — the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience, or SURE — Reese said he didn’t have a specific interest in catfish or microbiology. “But it ended up, I enjoyed it a lot, and it really helped me appreciate biology a whole lot more.”

The program didn’t offer college credit, he said, but it would look good on his resume. And it’s also another step on his way to medical school.

“And also (the SURE program) has a $3,500 stipend, so that was nice,” Reese said.

This year, UMC offered SURE, one of its Discovery U programs, to 38 students. The program runs for 10 weeks, focusing on biomedical research and training on laboratory techniques and equipment.

“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, a UMC physiology professor and graduate school dean.

Overall, the Discovery U programs brought in more than 60 undergraduates from around the state.

Reese was among the youngest in the program.

And Mary Canterbury, Discovery U program administrator, said the caliber of students keeps improving.

“This year we had undergraduates from colleges all over Mississippi and from Harvard, Carnegie Mellon and Notre Dame,” she said.

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