

High schoolers discover careers in medicine

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Twenty-two high schoolers gasped and jumped in unison as the Human Patient Simulator blinked its unseeing eyes at them.

Drew Gonsalves, a simulation engineer for the UF College of Medicine [department of anesthesiology](#), then explained how the standard man, or “Stan,” replicates human functions such as maintaining a pulse, exhaling CO2 and responding to medical techniques. Gonsalves gestured to Stan’s pulse points as the high schoolers crowded around the prone simulator, feeling for the rhythmic thumping of Stan’s automated heartbeat.

The demonstration in the simulation lab was one of the final exercises of the Health Care Summer Institute, a monthlong program designed to introduce high school students to health professions as a precursor to college life. The [Office for Diversity and Health Equity](#) and UF Health co-sponsor the program. Students from Florida’s panhandle to the northeastern coast got a taste of college life for four weeks beginning June 15.

The program accepts students from cultures that are underrepresented in the medical field, such as African-American, Latino, Native American and Pacific Islander students. Additionally, people from rural areas, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, qualify as underrepresented populations in medicine, said [Michelle Jacobs-Elliot](#), M.D., the assistant dean for diversity and health equity and HCSI program director.

Six college students or graduates work as counselors to mentor the high school students. Counselor Janet Lopez, a rising college junior, attended HCSI when she was a rising high school junior.



Morgan Jones, a high school senior, practices listening to a patient’s heartbeat in the anesthesiology simulation lab. Photo by Mindy Miller



Twenty-two high schoolers shadowed physicians, learned in a simulation lab and experienced college life at the Health Care Summer Institute.

Originally from Pierson, Florida, a small, one-traffic-light town west of Daytona Beach, Lopez grew up surrounded by Caucasian and Latino populations but experienced little in terms of cultural diversity. Lopez took it upon herself to research summer health care camps and attended one at Florida State University before discovering HCSI.

“When I came as a camper, I was really nervous because I was going to stay a whole month away from home. I was really culture shocked, because in my town, there are mainly Caucasians and Hispanics,” Lopez said. “When I came here, the majority of our group was African-American. Everybody was nice, and I got

Summer Institute. Photo by Mindy Miller

along with everybody. It was a great experience before college.”

Lopez originally thought she wanted to become a doctor who worked with minority populations, but her month at UF changed her focus.

“When I was here, I shadowed different doctors. There was a nurse practitioner who changed my life,” said Lopez, who recently was accepted into the UF College of Nursing. “When I shadowed here, I really liked the fact she took her time and got to know her patients. That made me want to be a nurse. Now I’m here at UF and I’m pursuing to be a nurse practitioner.”

The students lived in Beaty Towers on campus and woke up around 6 a.m. each day to get ready, eat breakfast and begin shadowing physicians by 9 a.m. After lunch, they attended a three-hour SAT preparatory class followed by an Introduction to Health Professions course. After dinner, they worked on homework to prepare for classes the following day.

Morgan Jones, a rising high school senior from Jacksonville, listened to the Human Patient Simulator’s heartbeat through a stethoscope while her fellow campers checked vital signs. She said she hopes the relationships she has made with other students will last a lifetime. The impact of the HCSI program, however, has made a lasting impression.

While shadowing UF physicians, Jones observed two brain surgeries, a back surgery and an open-heart surgery. Before attending HCSI, Jones only had one health care path in mind.

“Before, I’d only been working in the pharmacy with my aunt, so that’s where my mind has been,” Jones said. “Now that I’ve come here, it’s opened my mind up to other options I have in medicine.”



High school students from rural Florida areas learn about the medical field through simulations with a human-patient simulator. Photo by Mindy Miller