Georgia’s premier high school internship program celebrates 25 years

Young Scholars, Georgia’s premier high school internship program, is celebrating 25 years of pairing students with agriculture, food or environmental sciences faculty at the University of Georgia to conduct hands-on research projects in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES). Program participants attend workshops aimed to foster personal and professional development while exploring agricultural-related careers and research opportunities.

Beginning with four students in 1989 as the Georgia Research Station Mentor Program at the Griffin campus, Young Scholars has grown to the placement of approximately 70 high school students each summer with faculty at Athens, Griffin or Tifton. Since its humble beginning, the program has facilitated providing over 900 summer internships in STEM laboratories across the three campuses. Students primarily work in CAES labs, but faculty mentors have come from the College of Pharmacy, School of Forestry and Natural Resources, School of Ecology and College of Veterinary Medicine. Nearly 200 Young Scholars decided to attend UGA and 43 percent of those have chosen a major in CAES.

Inaugural pre-collegiate research conference a success

The Young Scholars Program hosted its first pre-collegiate research conference during the 2014 program on the Athens Campus July 9 through 11. It provided an opportunity for Young Scholars from Griffin, Tifton and Fort Valley State University to share their research and visit the main UGA campus. While in Athens, students toured CAES departments, experienced living in a college residence hall, toured the historic campus and met CAES faculty, staff, students and administrators. Judges for the poster and oral research categories included CAES faculty and staff and USDA Agricultural Research Station scientists.
Office of Diversity Relations
and Multicultural Affairs Updates

Former Young Scholars meet with Dean Angle

Alumni from the Athens, Griffin and Tifton campuses were invited to meet Dr. Scott Angle, Dean and Director of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences in September. Students greeted Dean Angle in the new Office of Diversity Relations office and presented him with an official UGA Young Scholars Program shirt to say thank you for supporting the program and providing them the opportunity. When speaking to the students, the Dean reiterated the goals of the program—expose high school students to research and careers in agricultural and food related sciences while encouraging them to attend college at the University of Georgia and ultimately choose a major in CAES.

MANRRS club promotes diversity

The Office of Diversity Relations supports the UGA chapter of the MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences) student organization. MANRRS is a national organization that fosters support for agricultural sciences and related fields among all students, with a specific aim to ensure that ethnic minorities are involved, engaged and included in agricultural leadership and career development opportunities. The UGA chapter has proven successful in the advancement of its members and maintains a high success rate of student internship placements and career/graduate school readiness among students after graduation.

Mentoring Among Peers Program kicks off

Fall 2014 marked the beginning of the MAPP peer mentoring program sponsored by the Office of Diversity Relations. MAPP pairs experienced third and fourth year CAES students with freshmen and transfers (including former Young Scholars) in CAES to provide guidance and support during their first year at UGA. MAPP mentees meet with their mentors once per week and all participating mentors and mentees meet in the Office of Diversity Relations one evening per month to reflect on the program and hear speakers scheduled to discuss the transition from high school to college, how to survive midterms, undergraduate research and other important topics essential to promote inclusion and foster a successful first year in the college.
Around the Athens Campus

Student spotlight: Ayodele Dare

Young Scholars Program alumnus Ayodele Dare credits the internship for his transition from Lovejoy High School to becoming a biological science major in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. During the program, Dare was engaged in research projects with faculty including: Dr. Steven Stice in the department of animal and dairy science; Dr. Jeanna Wilson, in the department of poultry science; and Dr. Nancy Hinkle, in the department of entomology. Dare is proof that the ‘third time’s a charm’ — in the pre-collegiate research competitions, he earned honorable mention in 2012, third place in 2013 and first place in 2014. Dare also traveled to Costa Rica in 2013, experiencing agricultural research abroad.

Why pursue a Young Scholars internship?

“You are given the great opportunity to go on campus and get an experience of what college is like. You get a chance to meet new people and make important connections that you need in life. These connections will take you far and you will do many great things.”

Young Scholars alumni entering the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences 2013-14

Alexis Barnes
Food Industry Marketing & Administration
Jean Beacorn
Applied Biotechnology
Courtney Clarke
Biological Science
Ayodele Dare
Biological Science

Thomas Gottilla
Applied Biotechnology
Charles Orgbon
Environmental Economics & Management
Haley Throne
Agriculture & Applied Economics

Mentor spotlight: Leticia Sonon

Dr. Leticia Sonon is the director of the Agricultural and Environmental Services Laboratories at CAES. Sonon holds a B.S. in Agriculture and M.S. and Ph.D. in Agronomy and has served as a Young Scholars mentor for seven years. She and her lab mentored Phyllicia Thomas during the 2014 summer. Thomas won 1st place in the poster presentation of her pre-collegiate research with the project, “Quality Analysis of Commercially Available Extra Virgin Olive Oils.”

Why serve as a Young Scholars Mentor?

“The CAES Young Scholars Program provides an avenue to help nurture outstanding high school students, give them the opportunity to work with researchers and professionals, and allow them to discover their passion for science so that when their college education comes, they can engage in areas that hone skills in science and technology. As a scientist and a mentor, I feel privileged to pass on the torch of knowledge to the young group who is the future of this country.”

Athens cohort 2014:
24 Young Scholars
14 in-residence
10 commuters
19 high schools represented
Jazmine Brantley’s eye is on the ultimate prize — becoming the first African-American female Secretary of Agriculture for USDA. The former Griffin Young Scholar got focused on her goal about 10 years ago when she was selected for the Young Scholars Program. With no agricultural background, she found herself working on research projects with Dr. James Buck, plant pathology; Dr. Jerry Johnson, crop and soil sciences; and Regina Cannon, former campus librarian. Brantley went on to graduate from Alabama A&M University with a degree in agricultural business and management. She then began to work for the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) where she became a farm loan officer.

Brantley continued to move forward, attending Harding University where she earned her Masters of Business Administration and Management with a concentration in International Business. She is currently working toward her doctorate in economic development at New Mexico State University, where she serves as a research assistant.

Her advice to Young Scholars: “PLEASE go into the Young Scholars Program with an open mind and take FULL advantage of all the program offers. The opportunities and benefits it poses to one’s academic career abound!”

Dr. Paul Raymer directs the turfgrass breeding and genetics research program at the UGA Griffin campus. He teaches an undergraduate course in research methods and a graduate course in plant breeding. Raymer also trains and directs graduate students in turfgrass breeding and genetics research.

Raymer has been a mentor for the Young Scholars Program since its inception on the UGA Griffin campus. He finds working with the students very rewarding. “I still keep in touch with many of the students I’ve mentored through the years,” he said. A big UGA “thank you” to Dr. Raymer for being a dedicated mentor to the program for more than two decades!

The UGA Griffin campus hosted 27 bright, eager students representing 17 high schools. Several college preparatory workshops were offered including: SAT/ACT prep provided by a KAPLAN representative; college skills — how to survive in college — provided by a former Young Scholar; and financial planning provided by a local county Extension agent.

Students gained insight into the world of research during a ‘lunch and learn’ series which featured world renowned scientists sharing their research in food safety and climate change. The interns also traveled to the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services facility and Dauset Trails Nature Center to learn about the importance of perpetuating native plants. This summer was packed with fun, opportunities to meet new people and explore new things, and learn more about the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.
Tifton 2014 program overview

The UGA Tifton Campus Young Scholars Program involved a whirlwind of activities and learning experiences. From late May when the interns met their mentors until the final days of the program in Athens, the scholars from the Tifton campus were actively engaged and enlightened.

While most of the days were spent working in labs and fields, there were also opportunities to give back to the community through volunteer efforts. If students were not working with mentors or lab techs, you just might find them in the student center challenging each other to a match of ping pong during the lunch break. An evening at the Black Shank Pavilion offered food, fun and some rather competitive corn hole and volleyball. A field trip to an alligator farm and a tour of the Sunbelt Agricultural Expo highlighted CAES alumni and the active daily applications of research and technology in our own backyard.

Needless to say, these fourteen young people (and their young at heart leaders) felt mixed emotions as their summer days together came to a close during the Graduation Ceremony at the conclusion of three exciting days on the main campus of the University of Georgia.

Congratulations to the Tifton program’s high school graduates!

Connor Barnard • Valwood School
Dacee Blawn • Irwin County High School
Elizah Huff • Tiftarea Academy
Jeaneva Illas • Tift County High School
Dillon Kemeness • Tift County High School
Geeta Kuntawala • Westover High School
Olivia Lewis • Tiftarea Academy
Rachael Lovett • Tift County High School
James Ni • Tift County High School
Shiv Patel • Tift County High School
Vishal Patel • Tift County High School
Katie Russell • Colquitt County High School
Young scholars completing a second internship placement visited Costa Rica for a ten-day, faculty-led, global agricultural and cultural immersion trip. It aimed to expose students to real world issues regarding the increasing complexities of global food production and security. Eleven students, three UGA faculty and staff, and one USDA partner traveled to Costa Rica to visit Earth University, the UGA Costa Rica campus and Rancho Margot — a sustainable ‘eco-lodge.’ The learning objectives of the trip were to strengthen students’ cultural values and perspectives, apply research outcomes to real world issues, and connect agriculture related STEM disciplines to global challenges. Students participated in home-stays with local residents, visited coffee and banana plantations, and observed sustainable agriculture practices through a global lens.
About the Young Scholars Program

The Young Scholars Program is a paid six-week summer internship for high school students interested in agricultural, food and environmental sciences. Organized by the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES), selected students work 30 hours a week on the UGA Athens, Griffin or Tifton campus, actively engaged in research under the guidance of a faculty mentor.

Returning program participants have the opportunity to spend 10 days at the UGA Costa Rica Campus after their internship. Students are immersed in the culture and interact with faculty who conduct research in agriculture and ecology onsite.

Annual Timeline:
- Application open for submissions: October 15
- Application deadline: January 31
- Notification of selected interns: April 1

Eligibility Requirements:
- Completion of sophomore year and be 16 years old by program start date
- Ability to work at either the Athens, Griffin or Tifton campus
- Commitment to the full six-week internship
- Sincere interest in scientific exploration in agricultural, food and environmental sciences, math or technology
- Completion of at least one high school science course (including a laboratory class) and one semester of algebra
- Acceptance to the University of Georgia for graduating seniors

Note:
- Returning candidates must submit an application each year
- All eligible students are encouraged to apply regardless of race, gender or background

Application Requirements:
- Completed application form
- Campus selection (Athens, Griffin or Tifton)
- Short essay questions
- Two letters of recommendation from science or math teachers
- Official school transcript
- Applications MUST be submitted online. Create a CAES account and login at: https://secure.caes.uga.edu/CAESScholarships

Potential Department Placements:
- Agricultural and Applied Economics
- Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication
- Animal and Dairy Science
- Crop and Soil Sciences
- Entomology
- Food Science and Technology
- Horticulture
- Plant Pathology
- Poultry Science

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