



For immediate release — Wednesday, July 13, 2016

Young researcher summer program looks to expand through transition

Universities in Alberta will be taking over the popular Heritage Youth Researcher Summer (HYRS) program from Alberta Innovates Health Solutions (AIHS) during a three-year transition period.

“Now, the University of Lethbridge, the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary are all picking up the program and running it internally,” says Brett Weighill, a University of Lethbridge student and HYRS program co-ordinator. “And yet we’ve still been able to increase our intake this year to provide more students with this opportunity.”

The U of L will host seven Grade 11 students this summer and they’ll be working in the labs of six U of L professors in biochemistry and neuroscience. Five are from Lethbridge and two are from Medicine Hat.

“This is our first year accepting students outside Lethbridge,” he says. “There’s still room to grow in smaller communities and get the word out about the program.”

The geographic area for U of L HYRS students includes communities south of Claresholm. Plans for the future include putting the application process online, extending the application time period and expanding public and University collaborations.

The students are paid \$2,500 in a research stipend for the six weeks they are on campus. Also scheduled are visits to the Dr. Bertram cadaver lab at the University of Calgary, the Agriculture Canada research station, Animal Disease Research Institute, the Alberta Water and Environment Science Building, the health simulation lab and the Canadian Centre for Behavioural Neuroscience. They will also attend talks by U of L researchers like Dr. Roy Golsteyn, who will discuss his research on the cancer-fighting properties of the buffalo bean. The six weeks wrap up with a poster presentation and banquet.

Students who participate in the program learn about the kind of research work being done at the University and have the opportunity to meet like-minded people.

“The program helps the students know, going into Grade 12, more about what they want to do and what university is like,” says Weighill. “They become more comfortable with the transition from high school to university.”

The program runs from July 7 to August 18.

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