

An Even Broader Reach

THE JACKSON LAB'S SUMMER PROGRAM IS SERVING MORE HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS THAN EVER.



Built by a Princeton University professor in 1912, Highseas mansion is a short walk from Jackson Laboratory and temporary home for students in the lab's Summer Student Program.

LYNN M. RIDDIFORD CREDITS SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE—AND THE Jackson Laboratory—for launching her career in science. The then-16-year-old found an article about the summer research program at the venerable institution in Bar Harbor, Maine, tucked amid pages of 1950s fashion layouts and dating advice. Intrigued, she wrote to the laboratory, requested an application, and set about convincing her parents to let her spend her summer 1,500 miles away from the family farm in Illinois.

“It would have been the first year that I could have worked in the summer and it was going to cost them \$15 a week,” Riddiford remembers. Her parents agreed to let her go, and her experiences at The Jackson Lab sparked a lifelong love of science. Riddiford, recently appointed a senior fellow at the Janelia Farm Research Campus after 34 years on the faculty at the University of Washington, studies the hormonal control of insect growth, molting, and metamorphosis.

Since 1929, The Jackson Lab, known for its genetics research, has nurtured the scientific imaginations of thousands of students—many of whom have made names for themselves in the world of science.

Earlier this year, The Jackson Lab was one of 20 research institutions that received HHMI grants to reach out to their local communities to stimulate interest in science, particularly among young students. The Jax, as scientists worldwide call it, received \$749,000 from HHMI, which will be distributed over five years. Some of that money will support the Summer Student Program for high school and undergraduate students, where students come from around the country to conduct original research as part of a team.

According to Jon R. Geiger, who directs the Summer Student Program, HHMI's investment in

the program has already paid handsome dividends, attracting more women and minority students to the program each year. Since 2003—the year the lab began receiving HHMI support for the program—the program has enrolled about 72 percent women and 29 percent minority students annually.

And the number of high school students applying has increased dramatically. From 1989 to 2003, an average of 56 high school students applied each year. From 2004 to 2007, that number jumped to an average of 131 high school applicants. Geiger recruits through former students as well as a national network of contacts among scientists and high school and college teachers. “My recruiting is aimed at attracting applications from underrepresented students—minorities, first-generation college or college-bound, those from working class backgrounds, and inner-city students,” he says. “I want to be sure that more kids from those backgrounds hear about us.”

One of Geiger's pupils this summer was high school senior Seanna Pieper-Jordan, who is of Native Hawaiian and Native American descent. Just like Lynn Riddiford, Pieper-Jordan traveled thousands of miles—in this case, from Honolulu to Bar Harbor—to pursue her dream of becoming a scientist. She spent her summer doing research on muscular dystrophy in Gregory Cox's lab at The Jackson Laboratory.

A student at the Kamehameha Schools in Honolulu, Pieper-Jordan credits two teachers “who cared and encouraged me to look further into science,” she says. “I applied to The Jackson Laboratory Summer Student Program with a small hope that I would be given the chance to show the abilities of a student from an often overlooked minority.” Clearly inspired by her summer in the lab, Pieper-Jordan says she is now setting her sights on college and a career in the biological sciences. ■ —JIM KEELEY



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