

PRINT-Scholarship Gives Pre-Med Student a Jump on Surgical Experience

Mackenzia Jackson had an “ah-hah” moment during a simulated heart valve replacement on a cadaver while participating in a first-ever OSF HealthCare Jump Simulation, University of Illinois College of Medicine (UICOMP) Pre-Med Surgical Immersion course.

Jackson is one of nine students selected for the one-week experience held in December for undergraduate college students interested in pursuing a surgery specialty. The students were exposed to a variety of roles in the clinical environment.

The Peoria native is a Biological Sciences major at the University of Illinois-Chicago. The college freshman wanted to be a trauma surgeon but after the Pre-Med course, she’s re-thinking that sub-specialty area.

“That kind of really made me interested in heart and all of cardiology and stuff like that. So that was really interesting. I’ve got to see when you cut into the skin, all the different layers and colors and just all of that was really, really cool to me,” said Jackson.

The focus of the Pre-Med Immersion at Jump was on neurosurgery, cardiovascular surgery, pediatric general surgery, and interventional radiology among other specialties and skills. UICOMP Professor Emeritus Dr. Rick Pearl, who directs Surgical Simulation Education says students observed surgeries at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center.

“After they saw it in the operating room, we took them down to the cadaver lab to mimic some of the things they saw in the operating room and do those skills themselves.” He described it as “a unique experience for them.”

Jackson was mesmerized watching a laminectomy, also known as decompression surgery which enlarges the spinal canal to relieve pressure on the spinal cord and nerves.

“We didn’t see the spine but we kind of seen the layers attached to the spine and that was really cool. I would never be able to be exposed to that right now and I’m glad I got to be exposed to that early too so I’m glad because I’m only a freshman and so I’m happy because I got to get my eyes open and see it,” she stated passionately while describing her experience.

The Pre-Med Immersion Scholarship from the [OSF HealthCare Foundation](#) Jackson received to attend the course requires students be highly motivated.

As a recipient from among 30 applications, Jackson is thankful because she believes the rare experience will improve her chances of getting into medical school. The daughter of a single mother says it would have been a challenge to pay for the program.

“I think I would really would have had to struggle to work a super lot towards the end of this semester that just passed and it would have gotten me off track towards finishing out my

finals out strong. And, I was able to finish out my finals strong,” Jackson said as she beamed proudly.

Dr. Pearl said the course is unlike anything else in the country and was possible because his colleagues volunteered to serve as mentors, instructors, and to participate with students in a final day filled with rounds and clinical immersion to give them a day-in-the-life experience.

The Jump Center is accredited by the American College of Surgeons and its Simulation Fellowship directed by Dr. Pearl is additionally accredited by ACS’s Accredited Education Institutes. The Jump STEAM program was recognized by the Society for Simulation in Healthcare as an “Exemplar” for simulation programs world-wide.

Several recent [studies have shown a drop in medical students pursuing a surgery specialty](#). The program is designed not only to generate interest in the surgery specialty but to expose pre-med students to the UICOMP facilities and instructors with an eye on recruiting them to study and then live and work in Central Illinois.

The program also helped a few students decide they are **not** cut out to be a surgeon.

“I think they thought it was spectacular but I think one of the students wrote down ‘I didn’t realize I had to do that much standing’ Dr. Pearl said recalling comments from a feedback survey.

He laughed and offered, “Well, you know you gotta stand a lot when you’re a surgeon but I think they all realize it was an incredibly valuable course.”

For Jackson, the course solidified her path. In the short term, she’ll become an emergency medical technician (EMT) plus she’ll take summer classes that will let her finish her undergraduate degree within four years.

“If I don’t become a surgeon, if anything, then I want to be around surgery because I don’t see myself really loving and enjoying waking up every day wanting to do anything besides something with surgery.”

The next UICOMP Pre-Med Immersion experience will be a two-week course with a wider medical focus and begins June 10 at the Jump Simulation Center. Details and registration are available [here](#).