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From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

### **AHEC Career Enhancement Scholars Program Identifies and Prepares High School Students for Future Health Careers.**

In 2001, the Missouri AHEC regional centers launched a unique program for students interested in health careers. ACES (AHEC Career Enhancement Scholars) is a longitudinal program designed to give students a competitive edge when they apply to health professions training programs. Applicants are selected for the program based on GPA, career interest, personal essay and letters of recommendation. Once chosen, students receive individual career counseling and attend activities that focus on career exploration, college preparation, networking with health professions students and healthcare providers, volunteering/shadowing, service learning and more.

Regional ACES activities focus on core programming that includes HIPAA training, cultural competency, professional skill building, and program admissions information, in addition to the hands-on skill-building activities such as learning to take vital signs, dissections, and suturing. Students see benefits from their experience in the ACES program through summer internships, early admittance to pre-health and health professions programs, community or school-based scholarships for example.

Students also develop service-learning projects ranging from healthy lifestyle activities for kids, organizing and preparing homelessness awareness presentations for schools and churches, and teaming up to offer free ACT tutoring for low socio-economic status students. These projects often encourage collaboration, community assessments, and leadership development for students.

On yearly evaluations, a student was quoted as saying:

*“The ACES program reaches out to all types of learners. I have gained more experiences in the health field and a better understanding of how the body works due to dissections. It has been really nice to have a program that is more personal and able to guide me through school and prepare me for the medical school application process. I have been able to get more opportunities that would have been hard to do myself.”*

Finally, collaboration between AHEC regions allow students to stay involved while in college. This is an important aspect of the pipeline... keeping students involved with AHEC not only in high school, but also during college, health professions training, and then as a provider in the community when they come back to help the next generation of students interested in health care. Many ACES are now part of the Missouri healthcare workforce in a variety of health professions, and many more are in the pipeline.

***MAHEC: Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health***



*Former ACES student Amanda Arnold, RN/BSN, (right), assists at ACES workshops*

*AHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.*

*The MAHEC partners include:*

- A.T. Still University –Kirksville
- University of Missouri – Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC - Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC – St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC– St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC– Springfield