

First Round of Seniors Receive STEM Scholar Commendation

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Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

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In small and rural districts across the state of Florida, 150 high school graduating seniors were recently awarded the STEM Scholar Commendation from Florida's Commissioner of Education, in recognition of their completion of the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Program of Study. In order to achieve this distinction, students must meet rigorous academic requirements by successfully completing Level Three STEM Courses in Grades 9-12, earning a minimum of five to eight credits, based on the number of years they have participated in the STEM Scholars program.

Students must have also participated in a minimum of 60 hours of STEM-related extended student learning opportunities, such as internship/externship experiences, Summer Challenges, the University of Florida Immersion into STEM, Regional Forums, leadership development activities, and STEM-related volunteer and community service. Congratulations to all the STEM scholars who have achieved this honor!

Evan Grambling, Jamarcus Robertson, and Jessica Webb from Taylor County High School in Perry and Ashlin Morgan from Lafayette High School in Mayo are four of the exemplary STEM Scholars who received the Commendation this year. They were recently asked to share their experiences with the STEM Scholars program and their future plans.



Taylor County High School graduating seniors (L – R) Evan Grambling, Jamarcus Robertson, and Jessica Webb are pictured with their very proud STEM Mentor Teacher Mrs. Jesika Curry (second from left). They are among the 150 seniors statewide who recently completed the FloridaLearns STEM Scholars Program of Study and were the first to receive the STEM Scholar Commendation from Florida's Commissioner of Education.

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Ashlin Morgan recently graduated from Lafayette High School, and received her A.A. degree from North Florida Community College Summa Cum Laude at the same time! She also earned the STEM Scholar Commendation.



All of them recognized that their participation in the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project had made a major difference in their high school experience, and had influenced their future career choices. They expressed gratitude for the opportunity they had to participate in the STEM activities.

Evan talked about touring FAMU and FSU, attending Regional Forums at nearby colleges, seeing the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory in Tallahassee, and spending eight days last summer in an internship program at Georgia Pacific in Perry. He said, “I followed engineers and saw what they did on a day-to-day basis. It was fun.” When asked if the experience had influenced his plans for the future, he commented, “I was planning on being an engineer before I went there, but it definitely assured that I am going to be an engineer.”

Jamarcus mentioned many of the same STEM activities, and added, “I guess the most meaningful one for me was the summer Immersion Into STEM program at the University of Florida. I went to UF and stayed in the dorm for six days. We were able to visit different departments of the university and get a better understanding of each field of study. I actually learned a lot while we were there, and I was surprised about some of the departments’ research.”

He confirmed that this experience had greatly influenced his future. “I already had an idea that I wanted to be a bio-medical engineer, but I saw them doing some research that I’m very interested in. For example, one woman was working on a new type of brain surgery using mice. Another person was able to make organs look translucent. They were able to make mice glow in the dark! It kept getting more and more interesting.” Later he added that the experience had “narrowed down the areas I was looking at for research,” and now he definitely plans to go into bio-medical research. It also gave him an opportunity to meet one-on-one with a financial advisor while he was there, which eventually led to his being awarded a \$25,000 full scholarship at UF!

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Jessica agreed that all of the activities offered through the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project were interesting and helpful. She said, “I liked all of the FLSS activities. Going to the colleges shows you what you’re going towards. All of our Regional Forums were at colleges. And the Mag Lab was pretty amazing to see what they do with the magnets. I’ve always looked forward to going to college, and it kind of confirmed that. I’m going to be a surgeon, so I know I’ll be in college for a really long time. I think I can do it!”

Ashlin completed over 350 hours in STEM related activities, which included attending seven STEM Regional Forums, two weeklong summer camp experiences, and participating in a variety of leadership and volunteer services. She accomplished this while being immersed in her academic studies and a multitude of extracurricular activities.

In addition to receiving the STEM Scholar Commendation, each of these students has accumulated a long list of achievements, honors, and scholarships. Evan graduated with a 4.4 weighted GPA, 12 hours of college class credits, and AutoCAD Drafting and Design Certification. He has received a \$1000 local scholarship, \$4000 scholarship from North Florida Community College, and the Florida Bright Futures scholarship.

Jessica finished her high school career with a 4.7 weighted GPA, and completed 43 college credit hours, bringing her close to meeting the requirements for her Associate in Arts (A.A.) degree. She will be attending the University of South Florida (USF), and has received an \$8000 four-year scholarship from USF. She is also receiving the Florida Bright Futures scholarship.

Jamarcus completed his senior year with a 4.3 weighted GPA, while earning multiple college credit hours through his Advanced Placement (AP) classes. He also took a bio-medical course that gave him extra college credits. Just recently he successfully completed both the practical and written exams for industry certification in biotechnology, which will result in six additional hours of college credit at the University of Florida.

His scholarships include \$1000 from the Kiwanis Club, \$1000 from the Homer J. Smith Scholarship Fund, \$500 from the local Gator Club, the Florida Bright Futures scholarship, and a \$25,000 scholarship from the University of Florida that pays for a full four years of college, or until he completes his undergraduate degree. These achievements are particularly meaningful to Jamarcus and his family. He will be the first one in his family to attend college!

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Ashlin was Valedictorian of her senior class and received many awards, including the Vocational Completer in Business & Computers Business Award, 4-Year Awards in Drama, Social Studies, Science, Math, and English, Advanced Program Completer with High Achievement, Florida Academic Scholar, and “A” Honor Roll. She not only graduated from Lafayette High School, but also from North Florida Community College (NFCC) Summa Cum Laude with an A.A. degree. She is a member of the NFCC Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, and was recognized as the NFCC 2013-2014 Environmental Science Outstanding Student. She also earned a place on the NFCC President’s List. She will be attending Florida State University (FSU), and has received the FSU Freshman Scholarship, FSU Leadership Scholarship, University of North Florida Presidential Scholarship, Elk’s Lodge Scholarship, and a Coca Cola Scholarship.

What bright futures are ahead for these STEM Scholars! Evan plans to become a mechanical engineer and “return to Perry and work at Georgia Pacific.” Jessica is headed toward becoming “either a neurosurgeon or a cardiothoracic surgeon,” and Jamarcus plans to be “a bio-medical engineer specializing in tissue engineering, creating new organs.”

Coming into the FLSS project, Ashlin was planning on becoming a lawyer, but after attending a Regional Forum at the University of Florida’s Center for Precollegiate Education and Training, where she was introduced to the science of forensics, she made the connection between law and science, and decided to major in Criminology and pursue a career as a forensic scientist.

Mrs. Jesika Curry, the STEM Mentor Teacher at Taylor County High School spoke at length about the difference the *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* program had made for her students. “Not only does this program affirm what the students think they want to do. The variety of experiences they’ve had through STEM has exposed them to study and careers in science, technology, engineering and math in a variety of settings.”

She continued by sharing that another one of her STEM scholars had recently told her that a presentation about epidemiology at one of the Regional Forums had greatly influenced her future career choice. The student shared, “I was thinking about going into accounting, but now I’m thinking about epidemiology. Remember when we saw that lady speak? That was pretty cool!”

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Mrs. Curry added, “Not only does STEM confirm that they want to go into these careers, but it also opens the door to other STEM careers. So it’s going to increase our local talent in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and that will be a benefit to our community in the long run.”

Jamarcus, Jessica, Evan, Ashlin, and all the other STEM scholars, are well on their way to securing not only bright futures for themselves, but by keeping their amazing talents here and remaining in Florida for their higher education and future careers, they are also helping assure a bright future for Florida’s economy!

The *FloridaLearns STEM Scholars* Project is funded through the Florida Department of Education’s Race to the Top award and involves a partnership among Florida’s three educational consortia, which provide critical educational support services to Florida’s small and rural school districts. The consortia are Panhandle Area Educational Consortium (PAEC) in northwest Florida, Heartland Educational Consortium (HEC) in south central Florida, and North East Florida Educational Consortium (NEFEC) in the northeast part of the state.

The Project is focused on serving gifted and talented students in grades 9 – 12 who reside in the small and rural school districts served by PAEC, HEC, and NEFEC. It affords rich opportunities for the participants, including collaborative problem-solving experiences, leadership development, and information and experiences which ensure that the students and their families are well informed about STEM higher education and career options in Florida.