Weekend program.preps.high.school seniors for health careers

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Forty fortunate high school seniors will get the chance at a free college experience (plus a little pocket money) thanks to a grant given to the Indiana University School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences in downtown Indianapolis.

The federal funds are being used for the IU Health Careers Opportunity Program (IU-HCOP) to provide disadvantaged students with the academic and social skills to graduate from health programs. IU-HCOP targets Indianapolis-area veterans, adult/non-traditional learners, minorities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

"The main goal of the program is to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups to consider going to school to earn a degree in one of the health professions — particularly occupational therapy, physical therapy and physician assistant," said Austin Agho, dean of the IU School of Health and Rehabilitation at IUPUI and IU-HCOP director.

One of the first IU-HCOP initiatives to launch is called the Saturday Senior Academy, a 20-week program designed for Indianapolis Public Schools high school seniors.

The academy will offer interactive hands-on lessons in math, science, language and creative writing, plus college-prep workshops. Students will also complete research projects in small groups and will have opportunities for field trips and to shadow health care professionals.

IU-HCOP project manager Karen Duncan said the program is working closely with Crispus Attucks Medical Magnet High School to recruit talented students, but it's also reaching out to other schools.

Duncan, who started as a biology major in undergrad and later got a master's degree in clinical psychology, said the program is ideal for students who have already chosen a college or major, not just for undecided students.

The health care industry in particular is a great space for exploration, Duncan said.

"The health care industry is really a vital employment opportunity across the board for people. So the earlier we can help prepare students to enter the health care industry, the more competitive they're
going to be, the more they're going to know about what kind of careers are out there, besides just nurse and doctor, or dentist," she said. "There are so many other health careers out there that students could enter and consider, so I really am excited about that career exploration part of this program."

Duncan said the academy will show students the difference between classes they had in high school and what's available in college.

One aspect she mentioned is the school's Math Assistant Center (MAC), which offers one-on-one or small group tutoring.

"It's just a very synergistic, energized, really exciting way to learn math," she said.

Agho said three to four faculty members, plus some graduate students, will ensure students in the Saturday academy get personal attention and stay engaged.

Students who complete the academy can earn a stipend up to $1,240, but Duncan said it won't be easy money.

"They certainly are going to earn it," she said.

The Saturday Senior Academy will be divided into six-hour sessions on Saturdays Jan. 23-June 11 on the IUPUI campus.

To be eligible, IPS seniors must have a grade point average of 2.5 or higher and must have completed two science classes, one math class and one English class with a grade of C or better.

The deadline to apply for the academy is Dec. 16, and accepted students will be notified by Jan. 6.

For more information or to apply, visit shrs.iupui.edu/about/IU-HCOP and click "Saturday Senior Academy."