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## 'Age of Biology' dawns at UA for high schoolers

By Evan Pellegrino

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Hundreds of high school students from throughout the state visited the University of Arizona on Saturday to learn about biology-related research and education.

The annual event, "The Age of Biology: Opportunities in Biochemistry," serves as a strong recruitment tool for the UA and has resulted in increased enrollment in science programs.

"It's a way to bring in students, introduce them to UA and get them excited about science," said Olivia Mendoza, program coordinator for the UA's biochemistry and molecular biophysics department.

Since the program began six years ago, Mendoza said, she has seen about a 40 percent increase in undergraduate enrollment in her department.

Professors showed off their laboratories and research projects, hoping to enhance students' interest in a degree in science.

"Science is something we do well in this country, and we need to build that up and keep people interested," said Vahe Bandarian, assistant professor in the department of biochemistry and molecular biophysics.

"I hope to show students that life is full of things left to discover and that they themselves can get involved as university students."

Shiana Ferng, 17, said she enjoyed seeing the labs because she's interested in the process behind scientific results.

"I love research," said the University High School senior. "It's the research of the small things that make up the big picture."

Current UA students served as ambassadors at the event, giving tours and sharing their experiences with potential students and their families.

Matthew Grimes, a UA senior majoring in biochemistry and Spanish, has been an ambassador for three years.

"It's exciting for kids in high school to see the level of research they can be doing in a couple of years," he said. "And if they decided to come to the UA, they'll have some familiar faces to point them in the right direction."

Grimes, a Tucson native who graduated from University High School, said he never realized how much scientific research went on at the UA until he became a student.

"Parents and kids get to see the potential of the UA. The science they can do here will get them closer to med or grad school," said Grimes.

Kammy Willems attended the event with her son, Collin, and said it was her first time on campus besides attending a football game.

"I had no idea this place was so full of labs and professional equipment," she said. "It's amazing."

Collin Willems said he was impressed with the labs and the type of hands-on work that can be done as an undergrad.

Jessika Thornes, a 17-year-old senior at Catalina Foothills High School, said she first gained interest in science through classes with hands-on activities. She said she is considering attending the UA to study medicine.

"Seeing the labs was really cool," she said. "One lab was doing all of their research on computers. I didn't know labs could be like that. There's so many options in science."

Mendoza said this year's group was the largest yet, about 200 students and 200 family members.

"Our future is in technology," said Mendoza. "Some of these kids will end up being our future doctors, dentists, pharmacists and researchers."

### **A thumbnail look at 3 who were there**

Three questions for three high school students who attended "The Age of Biology":

Jessika Thornes is a 17-year-old senior at Catalina Foothills High School.

Q: What interests you the most about science? A: There's so much to science. It's everywhere and in everything.

Q: What type of career are you interested in? A: I want to go into medicine as a pediatrician, specifically in treating premature babies.

Q: What is one of your hobbies outside of science? A: I play sax in the marching band.

Shiana Ferng is a 17-year-old senior at University High School.

Q: What type of career are you considering? A: That's tough. I have a lot of ambitions. I would like to be a family doctor or a teacher. I also like to write. I'm interested in foreign politics, too.

Q: What do you enjoy most about science? A: I love the research, the innovation and the process of learning how things work.

Q: What is one of your other interests? A: I play the piano.

Collin Willems is an 18-year-old senior at Sabino High School.

Q: What are you considering studying in college? A: I want to do premed or something in science.

Q: What kind of career are you interested in? A: A physician or an optometrist. Or maybe something in engineering.

Q: What is one of your hobbies outside of science? A: I play lacrosse on our school's club team.

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