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Research project leads to Boston internship

Saharsh Dass, senior biology major and math/chemistry minor, participated in the prestigious all-expenses-paid Summer Institute for Training in Biostatistics (SIBS) internship at Boston University (BU) in the summer of 2015. This six-week internship is designed to teach undergraduates the principles of applied biostatistics from recognized experts in the field and enable interaction with award-winning faculty who make learning biostatistics interesting, relevant and fun.

“Shandelle Henson, my research advisor, sent an email to all biology and mathematics majors with information on eight summer internships in biostatistics,” says Dass. “I applied to all of them.”

Henson, chair of the Department of Mathematics, frequently involves students in various aspects of her research through the interdisciplinary Seabird Ecology Team, a research group funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). As an NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates Fellow on this team, Dass uses mathematical models to predict animal behavior.

“Although animal behavior is quite variable at the level of the individual,” explains Henson, “there are often clear patterns of behavior at the level of the group. Many behaviors can be predicted in advance with a high degree of accuracy if one knows the approximate state of the environment.”

Dass credits his work with Henson with providing him the SIBS experience.

“The research exposure that I had working on this interdisciplinary project was one of the main reasons why I was accepted,” he says.

SIBS interns were exposed to biostatistics, epidemiology, statistical genetics and clinical trials.



Saharsh Dass, senior biology major (far right), spent six weeks in a prestigious internship at Boston University last summer.

“We had lectures from faculty from BU and Harvard in the morning, and in the afternoon had hands-on training using the Framingham Heart Study dataset,” says Dass.

Framingham, near Boston, was the site of a longitudinal study started in 1948 which sought to discover why people died of various cardiovascular diseases. Dass was able to visit the center where this research took place.

He was able to connect with a vibrant Adventist church while in Boston and even met up with other young adult believers including recent Andrews University alumni living in the area.

“I want to give all the credit to God for helping me to connect the dots and showing me how I can multiply my talents by using them appropriately,” he says.

His professors are proud of Dass and his accomplishments, and are excited to see his skills developing.

“Saharsh is becoming a serious and skillful researcher,” says Henson. “I love to see his curiosity and joy in learning. I’m also proud of his character and integrity, his integration of his studies with his own deep faith, and his commitment to careful science.”

Dass looks to a statement by Ellen White for encouragement and hopes that it encourages others as well:

“The talents, however few, are to be put to use. The question that most concerns us is not, How much have I received? but, What am I doing with that which I have? The development of all our powers is the first duty we owe to God and to our fellow men. No one who is not growing daily in capability and usefulness is fulfilling the purpose of life” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 329–330).

Danni Francis is a student writer for Integrated Marketing and Communication.