

## Richter Scholar Program: Independent Undergraduate Research at Lake Forest College

### Ashleigh Porter

Department of Biology  
Lake Forest College  
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045



Biology Research Students from the summer of 2008

A select few of Lake Forest College freshman are given the rare and unique opportunity to conduct independent research with their professors for ten weeks after the end of their freshman year. The Richter Scholar Program offers a paid summer internship for approximately 30 students each year. Students have the option of applying before the start of their freshman year or mid-way through their freshman year. If accepted, students go through an interview process, in which they are permitted to meet with faculty members whose research projects interest them. Once a faculty member and student are matched up, plans for the summer begin. Most Richter Scholars live on campus and bi-weekly meetings are held with Davis Schneiderman, Chair of the Richter Scholar Program. One meeting per week is dedicated to 'Professors on Parade' in which various professors talk with the Richter Scholars about their unique career path and what led them to Lake Forest College. It is in this way that the Richter students and Lake Forest faculty form a type of close-knit community of curiosity, intellect, and motivation.

The Lake Forest Biology Department offers a plethora of interesting topics for Biology Richter Scholars to get involved in. I had the opportunity of working with Dr. Smith in his Developmental Biology Lab. I was paired up with a recent Biology graduate of Lake Forest College, Andrew Ferrier '08, to further his senior thesis research on a specific group of *C. elegans* blunt mutants. Another Richter Scholar, Liza Pahomov '11, was matched with another senior thesis student in Dr. Smith's lab, Alexandra Charron '09, to work on developing the basis of her senior thesis. Entering a fully functioning biology lab was intimidating, but Dr. Smith and the other lab members were patient and welcoming. To help Liza and myself become more knowledgeable about the research we were conducting, 'Journal Clubs' were held weekly on various topics relevant to the research we were conducting. Much advancement was made on Andrew and Dr. Smith's previous research over the course of the summer, and it all culminated for Liza

and I at the Richter Symposium, in which we were given the opportunity to give a presentation to Lake Forest students and faculty about our summer research.

For the first time, I saw in both myself and in my peers in Dr. Kirk and Dr. DubBurman's research labs, a spark being ignited. That spark was our curiosity finally being validated through hands-on experimentation. That is why the Richter Scholar Program is so fantastic. It gives curious and motivated students the opportunity to explore what stimulates them intellectually. It helps students visualize goals and decide on a specific career path. This program may answer many students' question of 'Is this something I really want to do?' That answer is valuable at any time, but even more so when it can be made early on in a college career. Even if Richter Scholars only make minimum wage, the experience is genuinely priceless.

*Note: Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.*