

Case Study

University of Kansas Medical Center



Allison's been a great addition to our laboratory. She's motivated and gets very excited about the work we do. And that's always great because it's going to feed everybody else—myself as well as my other lab partners.

*Lauren Aleksunes, Postdoctoral Fellow
University of Kansas Medical Center*

Exposing Students to New Career Paths

Aspirations to become a doctor or nurse are fairly common among today's students. But it's rare to hear students mention "toxicology" as a career option. That's because most students have never heard of the field.

However, this could begin to change soon, thanks to the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC). Through its participation in TeacherTech, KUMC is exposing students to the numerous medical careers, including toxicology.

"We have a big interest in our laboratory in training graduate students and medical students," said Lauren Aleksunes, postdoctoral fellow at KUMC. "When we heard about the TeacherTech program, we thought it would be a great fit for our laboratory to expand our horizons when it comes to training different individuals and exposing them to the field of toxicology. It's not an area that's routinely discussed at the high school level, and not even so much at the undergraduate college level. But it's a career option for those who are interested in biology and chemistry."

Last summer, KUMC hired TeacherTech extern Allison Johnson to work in the Kansas Life Sciences Innovation Center. A biology teacher at Blue Valley West High School, Johnson possessed the background and skills necessary to assist with research programs in the laboratory. Her responsibilities included measuring gene expression, mainly in the liver.

The experience was challenging and rewarding for Johnson. She was able to work in her career field with a staff of

researchers, and had access to sophisticated lab equipment that she's only dreamed of using.

"The scientists at KU placed a lot of confidence in me and showed me what a scientific community should be," Johnson said. "Only with TeacherTech could I get the experience that I've had and be able to show my kids some of the new science technology and how things are progressing in the field of toxicology."

This was KUMC's second year of participation in TeacherTech and Aleksunes had high praise for the program.

"I would definitely encourage my colleagues and those in other universities and businesses to get involved in TeacherTech," Aleksunes said. "Not only did it help us to advance our research project, but it also allowed us to give back to the community and to stimulate local interest in our program."

*TeacherTech
Extern Allison
Johnson from
Blue Valley School
District with
TeacherTech
supervisor, Dr.
Lauren Aleksunes
the lab at the
University of
Kansas Medical
Center.*

