

FVSU's Center of Biotechnology receives grant of nearly \$200,000

A major grant from the U.S. Department of Agricultural will help Fort Valley State University students continue training in the field of agricultural biotechnology.

The program "Enhancement of Minority Student Recruitment and Retention in Agricultural Biotechnology" recently received a USDA capacity building grant for \$199,334. The project is part the Center of Biotechnology in the College of Agriculture, Home Economics and Allied Programs.

"This is the sixth year we've offered biotechnology scholarships to more than 35 students through the capacity building grant," said Dr. Sarwan Dhir, director of the Center of Biotechnology and an associate professor of plant science-biotechnology.



The grant provides a dozen scholarships of \$2,000 each for students annually. In addition to the scholarship, the grant pays for student travel to professional conferences, lab supplies and equipment. The grant also pays students a stipend for working in the laboratory, according to Dhir.

Dhir encourages these hands-on experiences.

James Morgan, a senior from Thomson with dual majors in plant science-biotechnology and biology, said he decided to study biotechnology because of the expected growth in the field. He credits the USDA capacity building grant with providing students exposure to state-of-the-art laboratory facilities at the Center for Biotechnology.

"Some of the equipment and techniques are rather new," Morgan said. "Most were invented in the 21st century. We have to be able to adjust to these new experiences."

Betsy Ampofo, a senior plant science-biotechnology major from Macon, considers social aspects.

"The grant gives you the opportunity to visit graduate schools," she said. "It also enhances your communication skills. You're able to meet students from other schools and share experiences."

Originally from Ghana, Ampofo is idealistic about the possibilities of biotechnology.

"I want to work around the world," she said. "I want to enhance life for the whole human race. With biotechnology you get to enhance crops. With those enhancements, you can enhance agriculture and medicine."



Ampofo plans to attend graduate school and then work in industry or a world organization, such as the World Health Organization.

For now Morgan has his sites set on graduate school. He plans to earn a doctorate in genetics so that he can work with rare molecular genetic disorders.

"This program gives students a direction they can get their heads into," Morgan said. "Some people in other majors never have these experiences."

With the emphasis on hands-on learning, Morgan has already completed five internships; Ampofo has completed four.

"Dr. Dhir represents the finest traditions of academics and of Fort Valley State," said Dr. Larry E. Rivers, FVSU president. "A gifted teacher and researcher, his heart of gold never stops trying to identify ways to make his students' lives and this university better."

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