

USU Engineering Undergrads Selected for Competitive Research Programs

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News Release — April 15, 2022 — Two Utah State University undergraduates will travel to Maryland and Iowa this summer for a unique training experience at two of the most advanced research organizations in the country.



Biological engineering undergraduate Lexi Phillips was selected for a competitive summer research internship with the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland.

Lexi Phillips, a biological engineering junior from Provo, Utah, was selected for a spot in the highly competitive Biomedical Engineering Summer Internship Program with the National Institutes of Health, or NIH. The 10-week program will take place in Bethesda, Maryland, and give Phillips an opportunity to work alongside world-class scientists and bioengineers on biomedical research.

“I was super excited because at first I was selected for the alternate list,” said Phillips. “A week later I learned I was selected for an in-person position in Bethesda. I’m really excited to go.”

Phillips will work with NIH scientists to study cancer cells. Such high-stakes laboratory work doesn’t intimidate Phillips who has spent the last two years working at USU’s Institute for Antiviral Research. As a research technician, she works on experimental compounds and drugs designed to combat SARS CoV-2 and other coronaviruses.

Phillips is one of just 17 students nationwide to be selected for the internship. Under the direction of mentor Professor David Britt, Phillips is also working on a senior capstone

project that may one day lead to improvements in dialysis equipment.

Dallin Fairbourn, a biological engineering junior from Denver, Colorado, was selected for the Computational Bioengineering Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates at the University of Iowa in Iowa City. These prestigious programs, known as REUs, are funded by the National Science Foundation. The 10-week experience immerses students in real-world biomedical challenges and covers the fundamentals of computational bioengineering.



Dallin Fairbourn was selected for a competitive summer research experience sponsored by the National Science Foundation at the University of Iowa.

Fairbourn says he likes learning about bioinformatics and sees a bright future combining the principles of biological engineering and machine learning.

“I like the computational side of things,” he said. “Machine learning and bioinformatics are about using computers to interpret data for a number of applications like developing new drugs.”

He said he was thrilled to be selected for an REU.

“My expectations were kind of low when I applied,” he said. “I didn’t think I’d get it, but at the same time, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself if I didn’t try. So I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity and make the most of it. I feel very honored and lucky.”

Like Phillips, Fairbourn also has an on-campus job related to his future career. His role with the university’s IT department gives him the hands-on experience necessary for a career in bioinformatics. He is mentored by Professor Britt and Associate Professor Elizabeth Vargis.

With a competitive research experience on their resumes, Fairbourn and Phillips will have a competitive edge in the job market and when applying to graduate programs.

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