



Freshmen 'FIRE' up their Clemson University journey

Paul Alongi, College of Engineering, Computing and Applied Sciences

July 14, 2016



2

Share

When class ended, John McAdams packed his computer into a backpack and joined a group of students who were filing out of Freeman Hall and heading to Palmetto Ballroom for lunch.

McAdams and the other incoming freshman in his class had begun their Clemson University education more than a month before the official start of the fall semester.

They were part of a three-week summer program, FIRE, aimed at giving underrepresented engineering and science students a head start on math, research and campus life in the summer before their freshman year. They also had an introduction to careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Lisa Jackson, who oversees FIRE, said the hope is that the participants will begin to look beyond their bachelor's degrees and start to plan for master's and doctoral degrees.

"We're looking at the future scientist who may have the cure for Alzheimer's or breast cancer," she said. "We open that idea now and let them see the possibilities. We want to plant that seed now."

This summer marked the second year for FIRE, or Foundations In Research Experience. Students live in dorms and go to class for two weeks. When they return home, they have another week of class online.

The 25 students who participated this year had a jam-packed schedule that included research experiences taught by Clemson faculty members, opportunities to talk with graduate students and a new pre-calculus class encouraged by Duke Energy.



Students participated in a bioengineering activity taught by Melinda Harman as part of FIRE.

Participants earned two college credits and began to develop friendships they will have the opportunity to continue while at Clemson and after they graduate. Through FIRE, they also began to learn about the resources available to them through two Clemson programs, PEER and WISE.



Melinda Harman talks with a student during her FIRE presentation.

McAdams attended FIRE little more than a month after graduating from TL Hanna High School in Anderson. He said that he planned to start off in General Engineering and was considering a major in mechanical engineering.

“FIRE was unlike any other summer experience I have had,” McAdams said. “Nobody was doing room checks or making sure I was on time to places

FIRE is sponsored by the Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation, Duke Energy and Clemson Online. It is run by the Clemson program, PEER, which stands for Programs for Educational Enrichment and Retention.

FIRE started in summer 2015 to replace Math Excellence Workshop, which was cancelled due to a decrease in funding.

Serita Acker, the director of PEER and WISE, said the pre-calculus class was added to FIRE this year to help students prepare for the intensive math they will face as engineering and science students.

“We desire to have students expand on their problem solving skills and collaborative learning as they begin their journey through STEM,” she said. “Strong math skills are critical in STEM majors.”

Categories: [College Of Engineering, Computing And Applied Sciences](#), [University Feature Stories](#)

Tags: [PEER](#)
