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at CHAPEL HILL

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News Release

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Carolina DNA Day ambassadors reach out to North Carolina high schools

CHAPEL HILL – More than 100 biomedical graduate students and postdoctoral fellows from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill will visit more than 65 North Carolina high schools on April 25 for National DNA Day.

Through this visit, students in the classroom will have a chance to interact with people working on the front lines of genomic research. The UNC-Chapel Hill graduate students have developed hands-on science activities to share with the high school students. The DNA Day ambassadors will also discuss the latest scientific advances and career opportunities in genomic research. A list of schools is online at <http://www.med.unc.edu/pmbb/tibbs/dnaday.htm>.

“I think DNA Day is a wonderful opportunity to not only discuss aspects and implications of the genome project, but also to demystify the image of a scientist,” said Michael Johnson, a graduate student in the School of Medicine’s interdisciplinary biomedical sciences program. “We can show these students that we are not crazy people walking around with wild hair with beakers containing colored bubbling liquid that is about to explode, but that we are people who truly want to make a difference to help society, and hopefully, encourage some of them to join the cause.”

National DNA Day, begun in April 2003, commemorates the successful completion of the Human Genome Project and the anniversary of the discovery of DNA’s double helix in 1953. The event aims to engage and excite students about genomics and to inform them of career options in the genetics and genomics area.

In addition to the student ambassadors from Carolina, experts from the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), part of the National Institutes of Health, and the American Society of Human Geneticists will visit about 50 additional schools in North Carolina.

“The field of genomics offers extraordinary possibilities for our best and brightest students,” said Vence Bonham, chief of NHGRI’s Education and Community Involvement Branch. “Through face-to-face interaction with scientists and educators, the seeds of interest can be planted and grow beyond surface curiosity about this promising field. The next generation of genomics scientists will be making high-impact discoveries in a new era of genomics and personalized medicine.”

Students and teachers can also participate in National DNA Day through a live, moderated online chat with NHGRI researchers on April 25 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET. NHGRI experts will be on hand to field questions from students on a wide range of topics, including basic science, clinical research, genomic careers and the ethical, legal and social implications of genomic research.

For those unable to participate in the live event, a full transcript of the chat will be available on the main DNA Day Web page, www.genome.gov/DNAday, after the chat room closes. A variety of free, educational tools on genetics and genomics, including webcasts, podcasts and an online multimedia presentation are also available at the site.

The UNC-Chapel Hill visits are sponsored by the School of Medicine's Training Initiative in Biomedical and Biological Sciences (TIBBS), NC GlaxoSmithKline Foundation and Sigma Xi. The TIBBS program provides networking, training and outreach opportunities for graduate students in biomedical and biological sciences.

For more information, visit: <http://www.med.unc.edu/pmbb/tibbs/dnaday.htm>

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