

Whitehead Institute Hosts CampBio for Middle School Students

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In August, Whitehead Institute joined with *Science from Scientists* to host the first *CampBio*, a week-long science program bringing local middle school students to Whitehead Institute to learn first-hand how researchers answer biology's most challenging questions.

Twenty-six 7th and 8th graders attended the program, participating in hands-on activities, laboratory demonstrations and discussions with scientists. "We were one of the first research institutions in the area to invite high school students into our labs," says Amy Tremblay, the Public Programs Officer in charge of

education and community outreach at Whitehead Institute. "We wanted to offer outreach programs to middle school students as well."

It's a niche that needs to be met, Tremblay says, given the nation's increasing commitment to STEM (for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education. Such is the credo of *Science from Scientists*, the leading in-class science/STEM enrichment program in Massachusetts, and co-designer of *CampBio*. This spring, Tremblay and her team worked with the Boston-based non-profit group to bring the summer program to life.

"We're on the cutting edge of biomedical science," says Tremblay, "so what better place to introduce kids to research?" She says the students were surprisingly unfiltered during the week's activities, unpressured by their peers and unafraid to ask questions about complex subjects. "They were engaged and wanted to know more. It was refreshing to see their excitement."

Various demonstrations highlighted the research of Whitehead Institute Members Harvey Lodish, Susan Lindquist and others. The students also attended scientific modules, one of which explored the inner workings of a cell. During the presentation, one student suggested representing the inner components of a cell with candy, then presented a list of some candies that might work. At the MIT Museum, the students learned about DNA by creating a double helix molecule out of LEGOS, which when built stretched as long as the kids standing shoulder-to-shoulder (see picture).

"It was all about opening their eyes," says Tremblay, "and showing them what science is all about." This included careers as well. The summer program gave the floor not only to bench scientists, but also to those who had pursued alternative careers in the sciences, such as teaching, communications, and even art.

Tremblay says, "Showing the kids different careers in science breaks down stereotypes, including the idea that researchers are just mad scientists at their desks." All this, while having fun. "If they walked away from *CampBio* loving science, they may be less intimidated about taking a science class in the future, or perhaps even pursuing a career in it."

Tremblay sees the first *CampBio* as a soft launch of sorts, but would like to continue the collaboration with *Science from Scientists*, perhaps expanding the program to twice a year or adding additional topics and speakers. An enthusiastic supporter and an advocate for *CampBio* was faculty Member Susan Lindquist, who gave a talk at the closing luncheon.

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“They were such a great group,” says Tremblay. “They formed friendships, got to know each other, and most importantly, they learned that science can be cool and fun. It was great event to be a part of.”

If you are interested in learning more about *CampBio*, or how to support this exciting new program, please contact Lauren Gilbert at lgilbert@wi.mit.edu.”

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