SHU Geneticist to Participate in Program to Help Improve Genetics Education in U.S.

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A Sacred Heart University geneticist and a local science teacher from Central High School in Bridgeport, CT are participating in a collaborative network of scientist/teacher teams working to improve genetics education for high school students around the country.

Sacred Heart University genetic scientist Dr. Suzanne Deschenes and Marilyn Pearson, a science teacher at Central High School, were selected last fall by The American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) to be partners in the Geneticist-Educator Network of Alliances Project (GENA). The GENA Project--funded by a $1.1 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and sponsored by the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) and the National Science Resources Center (NSRC) was established to develop a nation-wide network of 70 partnerships between geneticists and educators. Each pair designs teaching plans that address state science curriculum standards, misconceptions in genetics, and effective teaching methods. Some of the partnerships also involve students in educational research about genetics.

Dr. Deschenes and Ms. Pearson have worked together since last fall to develop curricula using novel techniques and to assess student understanding. As part of their lesson implementation, Ms. Pearson will now visit Dr. Deschenes’ lab at Sacred Heart University so that her students can experience an authentic research lab and further explore concepts in genetics. The results of Dr. Deschenes’ and Ms. Pearson’s partnership work will be disseminated nationally through various channels, and it will serve as a unique and valuable resource for students and teachers to better understand the nature of genetics.

"Dr. Deschenes and the GENA project are enabling Ms. Pearson's high school students to experience a university research lab and learn cutting-edge content--opportunities that most students miss," said Dr. Michael Dougherty, director of education for the American Society of Human Genetics. “Although it may seem minor, these types of experiences often have a profound effect on helping students see that a career in science is possible. If more students had
similar opportunities, more students would choose careers in science, which would enhance our country's competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-based economy."

After Dr. Deschenes’ and Ms. Pearson’s teaching plans have been fully tested, they will be made available online for other geneticists and science educators to use. Detailed teaching strategies and case studies are being disseminated nationally through current Math and Science Partnerships (via MSPnet) and a publicly accessible Web site sponsored by ASHG. To access this information, please visit: http://www.ashg.org/education/gena.shtml

To learn more about the GENA Project, please visit the “Education” section of the ASHG Web site at: http://www.ashg.org/education/gena.shtml

ABOUT THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HUMAN GENETICS

Founded in 1948, The American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) is the primary professional membership organization for human genetics specialists worldwide. The nearly 8,000 members of ASHG include researchers, academicians, clinicians, laboratory practice professionals, genetic counselors, nurses and others involved in or with a special interest in human genetics.

The Society’s mission is to serve research scientists, health professionals and the public by providing forums to: (1) share research results through the Annual Meeting and in The American Journal of Human Genetics (AJHG); (2) advance genetic research by advocating for research support; (3) educate future genetics professionals, health care providers, advocates, teachers, students and the general public about all aspects of human genetics; and (4) promote genetic services and support responsible social and scientific policies. For more information about ASHG, please visit http://www.ashg.org/.