

Fort Lewis College Undergrad Prepares for Medical School Using Mentored Research Experience



Above: 2023 Beckman Scholar Savannah Jones. Photo credit: Fort Lewis College

“Having a mentor is extremely helpful and gives me someone to bounce ideas off of and guidance on conducting research more effectively,” explained Savannah Jones, a junior at Fort Lewis College and one of the institution’s first students to be named a Beckman Scholar. Jones works in the lab of Dr. Jeffrey MacFarlane researching polyamine biosynthesis by human gut microbes, a project that will span two summer terms and an academic year. Mentorship is a central part of the undergraduate research experience through the Beckman Scholars Program (BSP).

In 2023, just 14 colleges and universities nationwide were selected as BSP awardee institutions by the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Foundation. As a finalist, Fort Lewis College receives funding to support six Scholar-Mentor pairs over a three-year period.

“One of my professors told me about the program,” Jones shared, “and I was interested in starting research early, as it would look good on my medical school and graduate school applications.”

Jones is from Denver, Colorado, and her parents are both alumni of Fort Lewis College. Interest in STEM and specifically the medical field began when she was a student at Dakota

Ridge High School. Now, she’s a biochemistry major working toward graduation with a bachelor’s degree in December 2025.

“It is very entertaining. I am always learning something new, using fancy equipment that makes me feel like a real scientist,” shared Jones. “I have enjoyed traveling to the [Beckman] symposium over the summer and learning about what people nationwide are doing in the scientific field.”

The Beckman Symposium is an annual conference of Beckman program awardees who present their research as poster and oral presentations. It is unique in that attendees at different stages of their careers, from undergraduate to postdoctoral fellows to young investigators, are assembled into one event to network and collaborate together. Beckman Scholars attend twice, first during the initial summer term of their award and again in the second summer term of their award, when they present their own research findings.

Reflecting on the potential impact of her research project, Jones is hopeful about a particular result: Getting a potential inhibition to a gut bacteria that could lead to a new antibiotic treatment or drug therapy for colon cancer. There have been trials thus far, which she doesn’t see as negatives



*Above: 2023 Beckman Scholar Savannah Jones works in the lab of BSP Mentor Dr. Jeffrey MacFarlane at Fort Lewis College.
Photo credit: Fort Lewis College*

but rather as learning moments.

"I have had a lot of challenges, such as working to develop a working kinetic assay and trying to crystallize proteins," she said. "I have found what does not work more than what does, and I hope to implement some small changes to gather better results."

The plan is to continue research through graduation. As the project she is working on in the MacFarlane lab is relatively new, there is ample

work to be done and more to learn about proteins – and Jones is holding close to a future goal: Attending medical school. ■

As a Beckman Scholar, undergraduate researcher Savannah Jones is studying polyamine biosynthesis by human gut microbes, mentored by Dr. Jeffrey MacFarlane at Fort Lewis College.

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