

Hundreds of regional students converge on campus for inaugural Science Olympiad

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Nemat Iddisah (center), a sophomore studying neuroscience, helped organize the first Science Olympiad at Tulane for middle and high school students. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Hundreds of middle and high school students from across the Gulf South converged on Tulane's uptown campus last month for the university's first Science Olympiad, a STEM competition organized and run entirely by Tulane students.

The invitational event brought 380 students from nearly 20 schools to campus for a day of team-based challenges modeled after the national Science Olympiad program. The competition aims to expose younger students to hands-on science,

highlight real-world applications of STEM and introduce them to what pursuing those fields in college can look like.

Competitors worked in teams to complete written tests as well as engineering- and lab-based challenges. The winners of each competition were recognized at a ceremony at the end of the day.

Many of the student organizers have participated in Science Olympiad or similar competitions themselves. For them, the best part of their work is sparking a love for science in kids.

"I think, definitely in high school, going to these events really helps you see a fun side of science, which many people think is all work," said Nemat Iddisah, a sophomore studying neuroscience who is also the social media manager of Tulane Science Olympiad.

"Our ultimate goal is to expose students to what it's like to pursue STEM in college and as a professional career," said Anthony Marshall, the founder and president of Tulane Science Olympiad and a sophomore studying cell and molecular biology and Spanish.

Marshall began planning for the event in his first semester at Tulane. As with any event, the team had to overcome many hurdles in putting together the competition, but he said, "I cannot overstate my gratitude for our faculty advisors, executive board and 150 volunteers who helped overcome each of these challenges through the past two years."

Iddisah was drawn to get involved as a way to give back and to pass on her love of science to the next generation, particularly in the local community.

"Going forward, we want to expand from just our one event and maybe do some continued support, especially for New Orleans teams, and give back to this community," she said.

The team prepared for the event by recruiting volunteers, reaching out to schools and writing tests. They worked with the Scot Ackerman MakerSpace to build materials for the engineering events, and they received help from professors in gathering materials for labs.

"It's really been a community-wide event," said Iddisah.