

Kids Get "Behind the Scenes" Glimpse of Science

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Engaging interactive demonstrations varying from regenerative medicine to assistive technology that helps disabled persons, 86 students from 16 New Orleans-area middle schools discovered the world of biomedical engineering with a visit to Tulane University.



Donald Gavett, right, professor and chair of biomedical engineering, explains lung function to Emma Benson and Kaitlyn Calabresi of St. Paul's Episcopal School. (Photo by Cindy Stewart)

The middle school students are participating in FIRST Lego League robotics teams. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) embraces a grand challenge for its annual competition. In the 2010 Body Forward Challenge, 9- to 14-year-old students from more than 17,000 teams in 50 countries must select a body part, system or function; identify a problem and an expert in the field; propose a solution; and share it with their community.

To provide these young students with a jump-start on their research, Tulane faculty and students from the biomedical engineering and chemical and biomolecular engineering departments recently gave 20-minute interactive demonstrations to the young students, sharing their research and passion for their fields.

Tulane students participate in FIRST Lego League through two service-learning courses offered in conjunction with the Tulane Center for Public Service by Annette Oertling, professor of practice and assistant dean for [K-12 outreach](#) in the School of Science and Engineering. The lower-tier course involves mentoring a team at one of the eight middle schools partnering with Tulane in this project. The upper-tier course fosters leadership, with Tulane students serving as team leaders or technical experts for multiple schools.

After their Tulane visit, “my students unanimously agreed that science really is cool,” writes Theresa Saacks, a teacher at St. Dominic School. “FIRST Lego League promotes that discovery is more important than winning. My students learned this important lesson, and they believe they are winners because of this experience [at Tulane].”

[Oertling](#) seeks volunteers in the Tulane community to participate in [FIRST Lego League](#) at the Louisiana state competition on Nov. 20 in New Orleans.