

Michigan State University

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Lazarius Miller '17

From where will the next generation of chemists, physicists, astronomers, and mathematicians emerge? Lazarius Miller '17 hopes it'll be the high school science classroom.

"I'm currently researching science education," he explains. "Specifically, high school students' perceptions of evolutionary science and their motivation to pursue careers in science." Now more than ever, our economic competitiveness depends in part on expanding the number of students who pursue careers in "STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) (<http://www.stemedcoalition.org/>) fields. Science teachers have a critical role to play in encouraging students to explore their interests in this area, and Lazarius plans to do his part. "As a secondary science major, I will be teaching students in grades 7 through 12. Knowing how they feel about science and what motivates them to study could help me to stimulate their interest in STEM fields as a career option."

Lazarius is a Charles Drew Science Scholar (<http://drewlab.msu.edu/index.html>). The Drew Scholars program provides academic and social support for high achieving students pursuing science and math degrees at Michigan State. Drew Scholars are matched with advisors who help them to leverage the opportunities available to them through involvement in the program. "I mentioned my interest in education research to my advisor," explains Lazarius. "He introduced me to a professor, Dr. Louise Mead. Dr. Mead agreed to be my research mentor, and together we came up with a research project that I could likely finish before I graduate."

Lazarius created and administered a survey. "The survey requested information about a student's educational background, their religious affiliation, and their responses to specific questions about evolution." His mentor and he then used a statistics program to analyze the data and identify trends or patterns in student responses. Lazarius greatly enjoys his working relationship with his research mentor. "Dr. Mead has been great. She's always looking out for different talks that I might have an interest in attending: from educational administration to Evolution in Action seminars. I can tell she's making an investment in my future and I'm grateful for her efforts."

Lazarius says his research experience has deepened his passion for science. "I have an even greater intrinsic motivation to learn as much as possible about science -- not just evolutionary science, but chemistry, physics, earth science, and astronomy. This research project has been an amazing stepping stone in helping develop my interest in teaching science in middle and high schools."

Originally attracted to MSU for its highly ranked programs in education (<http://education.msu.edu/about/distinction/>), Lazarius soon found many other reasons to choose State. "When I came to campus for the M.A.G.I.C. (<http://ocat.msu.edu/e-pre-college/magic-maximizing-academic-growth-in-college>) program and A.O.P (<http://www.orientation.msu.edu/>), I discovered that Michigan State brings together people from an array of countries and cultures, and offers lots of great academic support programs. As a first generation college student, it's helpful that MSU has so many support services and programs in place to help ensure that I graduate." Lazarius has thrived since arriving at State, so much so that he plans to one day earn his doctorate as well. "Getting involved in research has helped me to build personal and professional relationships with the faculty here. These relationships have provided me with both a wealth of knowledge and a network of established professionals that will help me to one day call myself Doctor," he says.

Any advice for peers considering involvement in research? "Reach out to your academic advisors, graduate students, and your professors. Most professors at State are involved in ongoing research projects, or might know someone who is."

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Questions? Contact the Undergraduate Research Office at 517-355-7635 or ugrsrch@msu.edu

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