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EDITOR'S PICK

Limestone student attends summer program at MIT

The News Courier   Oct 3, 2019

West Limestone High School senior William Blankenship displays the award he received during the Beaver Works Summer Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Courtesy photo

While some Limestone County teens spent their summer sleeping late or brushing up on their gaming skills, William Blankenship was still in school — at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Blankenship, a gifted student, completed the four-week MIT Beaver Works Summer Institute, or BWSI. He was among 240 students from high schools across the country participating.

BWSI is a summer engineering program for talented rising high school seniors. Blankenship is a senior at West Limestone High School. He is a second-year Model UN delegate and a four-year veteran of FIRST Robotics Competition Team 34, where he serves as team captain and a member of the student leadership team.

From July 8 to Aug. 4, students worked on hands-on projects, took online courses and attended lectures presented by leading scientific researchers.

The program is hosted by the MIT Lincoln Laboratory Beaver Works Center, a research center in Cambridge jointly chartered by MIT Lincoln Laboratory, the MIT School of Engineering and the MIT Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

Students are placed into one of 10 courses that involve project-based learning in a team environment. The diversity of the courses is intended to appeal to a wide variety of students.

One such course was called Hack-a-3D Printer. Students were required to assemble a 3D printer from a kit and test its capabilities while also learning the design software so they could 3D print designs they created. The final challenge was to "hack" the printer to give it special capabilities, such as printing multiple objects at the same time, and then present the results at BWSI's final event.

BWSI held its final competition and closing ceremony Aug. 4 at MIT. Teams raced their self-driving model cars through an ice rink-sized course modeled after a Grand Prix racetrack. In nearby buildings, drones flew through elevated hoops, followed tracks marked on the floor and produced images using radars, while some students presented their projects in a symposium-style venue.

Blankenship was presented with a Best Overall Award for his performance in the Hack-a-3D Printer competition.

"It's amazing to see these students who are ready to participate and who really become engaged in these projects" said Andrew Fishberg, outreach coordinator for Beaver Works. "I'm inspired by the solutions to real problems the student teams show off on the final day. These students received a transformational experience that's life changing for many of them."

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