

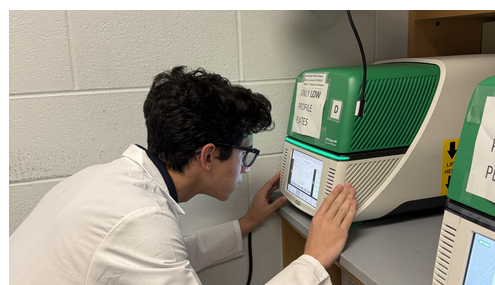


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Photo: Erin

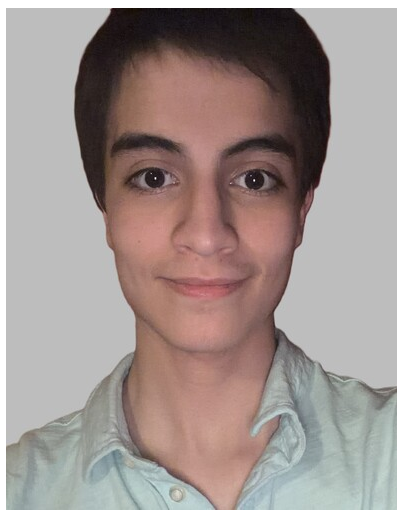
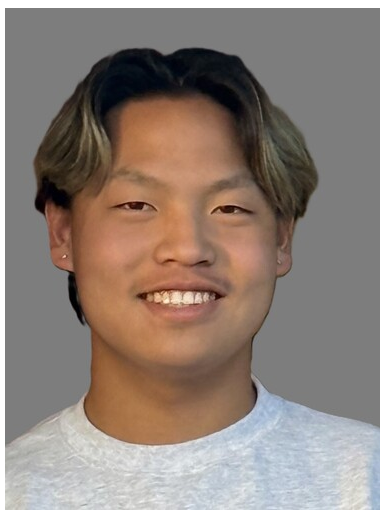
Welcome, 2026 Aspironauts!!

We are excited to welcome the next group of exceptional Aspironaut™ Summer Research Interns. They include 19 Lu-Springer High School Research Scholars from 8 states and 17 undergraduates from 11 states and Myanmar. They will engage in discovery science with 31 mentors for a research experience enhanced with professional skills development and wellness training.



Meet the 2026 Lu-Springer High School Research Scholars

**indicates returning Aspironaut™



Micah Adame-Howard
Rogers, Arkansas



Dhamihan Agredano-Villanueva
Franklin, Tennessee



Scarlett Hale**
Crockett, Virginia



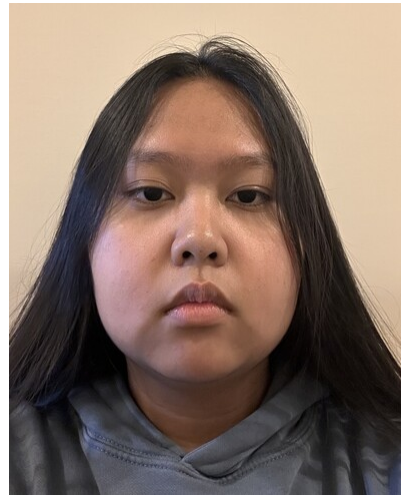
Peyton Hall
Wynne, Arkansas



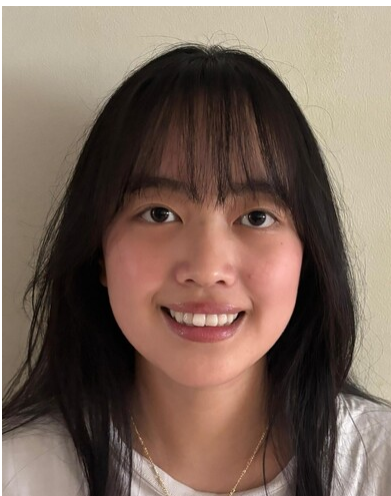
Alexis Hamlin
Hampshire, Tennessee



Daylynn Harper
Batesville, Mississippi



Kaydence Howes
Ashland, Maine



Jemal Janyyeva
Bentonville, Arkansas



Chelsie Khim-Ok
Wynne, Arkansas



Selina Lee
North Saint Paul, Minnesota

Qiaden Lindsey
Houghton Lake, Michigan

Precious McGee**
Marks, Mississippi



Russel Paulino**
Wynne, Arkansas

Emmerson Swenson
Oneida, Tennessee

Kishi Truong
Talbot, Tennessee



Ava Wahn
Aurora, Colorado



Simeon Xiong
Saint Paul, Minnesota



Songmee Yang
Saint Paul, Minnesota



Thornpe Yang
Saint Paul, Minnesota

Meet the 2026 Undergraduate Research Interns

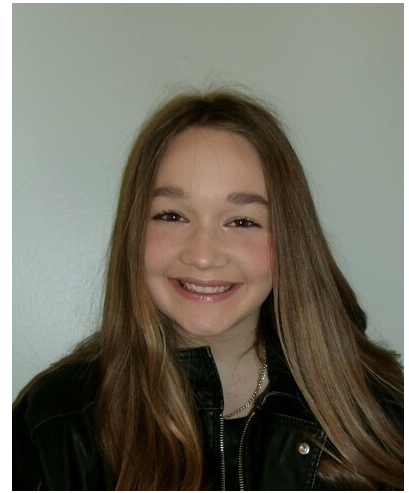
**indicates returning Aspirnaut™



Cori Baker-Batson
New Orleans, Louisiana
Xavier University of Louisiana



Paden Bennett
Wynne, Arkansas
Vanderbilt University



Heather Buffalo
Glenwood, Arkansas
Henderson State University



Pierre Diatta
Berea, Kentucky
Berea College



Zeynep Dibi
Collierville, Tennessee
Rhodes College



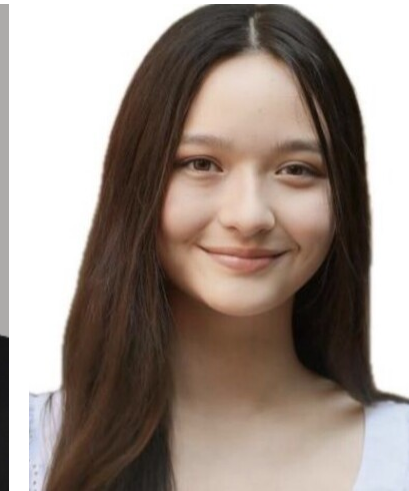
Abbie Grant**
Milton, Vermont
Cumberland University



Xin Yi He Cen
Brooklyn, New York
Johns Hopkins University



Mena Makar
Nashville, Tennessee
Fisk University



Allel Mar
Yangon, Myanmar
Berea College



Karis McGowan
Jackson, Mississippi
Tennessee State University



Olivia Mehofer**
Columbia, South Carolina
Columbia University



Colton Miller**
Wynne, Arkansas
Belmont University





Raoul Mukiza**

Fredericksburg, Virginia
Berea College



Daisy Nguyen

Antioch, Tennessee
Belmont University



Farid Saldivar**

Lebanon, Tennessee
Cumberland University



Fantasy Wang

San Francisco, California
University of California,
Berkeley



Junior Yovo

Cleveland, Tennessee
Berea College

Congratulations on your Fellowship!

- **Hanna Abe, Ph.D.**, a 2015 Aspirnaut™ participant, was awarded a postdoctoral research fellowship in the Department of Genetics and Genomic Sciences at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. She is a graduate of Berea College and Vanderbilt University's Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Human Genetics.
- **Sariah D'Empaire-Saloman**, a 2021 Aspirnaut™ participant, was awarded a prestigious and competitive 2026 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. The fellowship provides three years of stipend and educational expenses for graduate students pursuing full-time research doctoral degrees in a STEM field. Sariah is a Livingstone College graduate and majored in biology. She is currently in the Vanderbilt University School of Engineering Ph.D. program in Interdisciplinary Materials Science.
- **Madison Yarbrough**, a three-time Aspirnaut™ participant, was also awarded a prestigious and competitive 2026 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. Madison

is a graduate of Central Arkansas University, where she majored in psychology. She is a Ph.D. student in the Quantitative and Chemical Biology Program at Vanderbilt University.



Hanna Abe, Ph.D.



Sariah D'empaire-Saloman



Madison Yarbrough

Congratulations on Your Thesis Defense!

Monica Moran is a six-time Aspirnaut™ participant who completed her Ph.D. in Immunology at The University of Alabama at Birmingham. Monica's research focused on the contribution of IgE:FcεR1α axis in macrophage-mediated inflammatory responses. She earned her undergraduate degree in biology from Berea College in 2018. She plans to pursue a postdoctoral research position.



Medical School Matches

- **Courtney Browne**, a 2019 Aspirnaut™ participant, graduated from the Loma Linda University School of Medicine and will begin her residency at the Kettering/Soin Medical Center in Family Medicine.
- **Quincy Gragg**, a 2017 Aspirnaut™ participant, graduated from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and will begin his residency at the University of Texas Southwestern in Internal Medicine.
- **Seth Reasoner**, a three-time Aspirnaut™ participant, graduated from Vanderbilt University School of Medicine's Medical Scientist Training Program and will begin his residency at Case Western University Hospital, Cleveland Medical Center in Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology. (see featured story below)



Courtney Browne, M.D.



Quincy Gragg, M.D.



Seth Reasoner, M.D./Ph.D.

Featured Student: Seth Reasoner

Seth Reasoner is a three-time Aspirnaut™ Summer Research Intern from Brownsburg, Indiana. He is a graduate of Berea College, where he majored in chemistry. Seth went on to Vanderbilt University School of Medicine to obtain his M.D./Ph.D. degrees and matched to the research pathway for internal medicine/gastroenterology at Case Western University Hospital Cleveland Medical Center. His wife, Claire, also matched at the Cleveland Clinic for a cardiology fellowship.

1. You and your siblings have had remarkable academic careers so far. What do you think is the biggest influence that led to your success?

I think that my siblings' and my unique educational and career journeys are a testament to our parents. Our parents encouraged us to explore things that were interesting to us and prioritized our learning. My siblings and I owe our curiosity and drive to our parents.

2. You participated in Aspirnaut for three years. What kept you coming back, and what benefit do you see from participating for multiple years?

I thoroughly enjoyed my summers in Aspirnaut™. I was learning a lot in my research laboratory and learning how to operate in a large academic medical center. Aspirnaut™ is unparalleled in the breadth of activities throughout the summer for professional and personal development. Throughout the summers, I was able to establish connections with many people who continue to be mentors to me.

3. Is there a particular moment during your summers with Aspirnaut™ that stands out as a pivotal moment of your education pathway?



Seth Reasoner with wife, Claire Lo Reasoner, and Chloe.

I can't think of a singular moment during my Aspirnaut™ summers. I think it was a series of events that led me to recognize that I really enjoyed scientific research, and that the setbacks and uncertainties of research were motivating to me. Obtaining an advanced degree takes a while, and so it was important to recognize that I enjoyed the process, even when it was not necessarily easy.

4. Obtaining an M.D./Ph.D. is no easy feat. What advice would you give to students entering this pathway?

There's a natural temptation or tendency to put your life on pause until you finish school or training. I often hear people say "I'll wait until I'm done with med school before I do that..." or "I'll start a new hobby after I finish school...". I would encourage others to prioritize continued growth in all areas of life and avoid abandoning your passions while in school or training.



5. What has been your biggest challenge throughout your journey? What has been the best part?

The biggest challenge that I have faced is learning to balance different parts of my life. Besides work and educational responsibilities, we all have responsibilities as family members and friends. I'm still learning how to balance these responsibilities and be present in different areas of my life.

The best part of the journey is the variety. Doing both research and medicine allows me to use different parts of my brain and do different tasks on a daily basis.

6. What drives your success in life?

I am motivated by a love of learning. Both science and medicine require constant learning and that makes every day different and exciting. It feels rewarding to be constantly learning and to be in a position to help others.

7. What are your future goals and aspirations?

As a physician-scientist, I will split my time between patient care and laboratory research. My long-term goal is to run a research lab that studies the bacteria that live in the intestinal tract and how those bacteria impact human health and disease.

Thank you to our generous investors whose support makes this program possible.

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If you would like more information on how to get involved with Aspiring™, please contact Rachel Baugh @ rachel.baugh@aspiring.org

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