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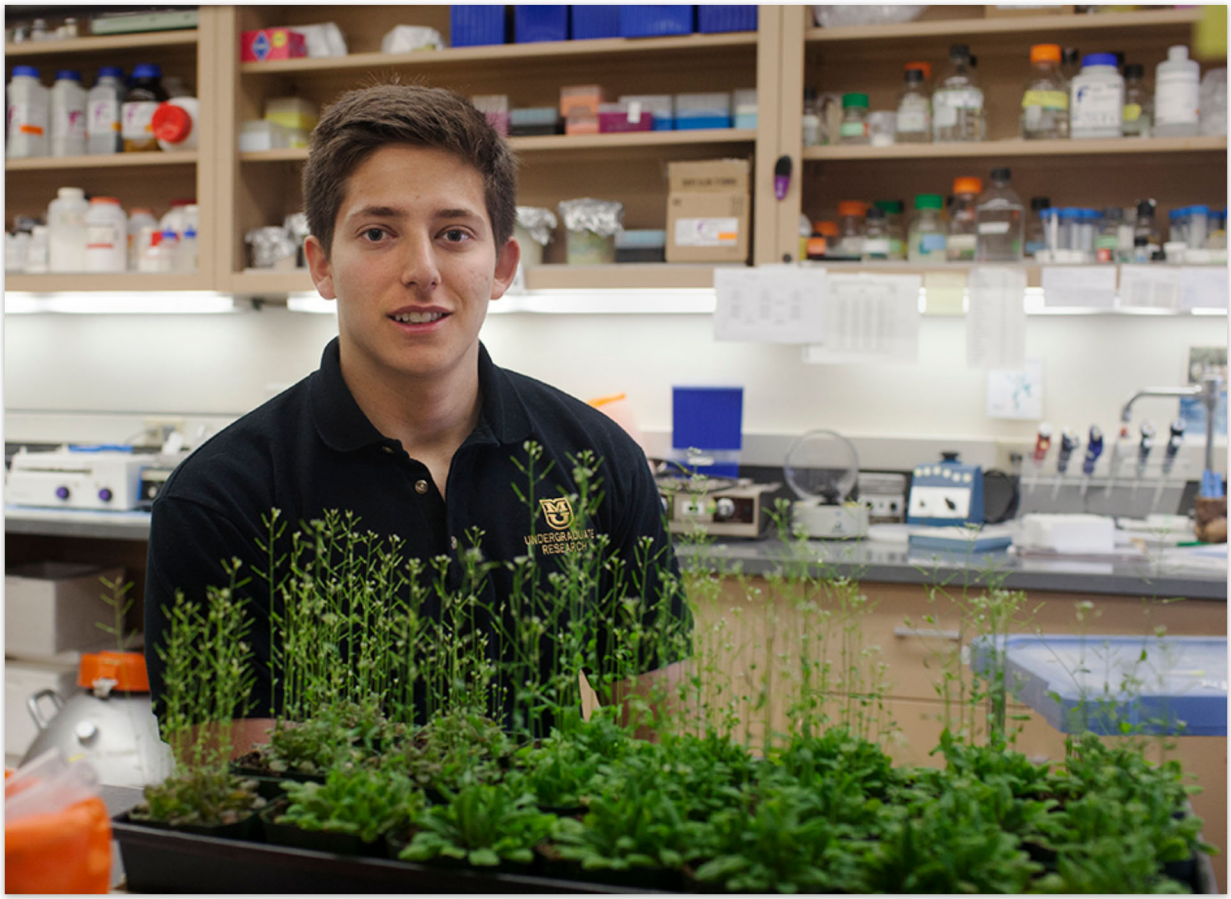
MIZZOU

Discovering Research

Chris Peritore started in the lab digging up plants. He ended up finding his future career.



MU senior Chris Peritore found his love for plant science research working in the lab of Professor Emeritus Doug Randall. Photo by Rob Hill.

Story by Erik Potter

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Chris Peritore liked science in high school. He was good at it, too. His thought process coming to college was simple. “I thought if you liked science, you should be a doctor,” he says, so he started at Mizzou on a pre-med path. But he got sidetracked by some roots, dirt and leaves.

As a freshman, Peritore was accepted into the Exposure to Research for Science Students (EXPRESS) program, funded by the National Institutes of Health, which encourages underrepresented minority students to pursue a career in biomedical research, chiefly by assisting them in finding undergraduate research opportunities and funding their work. When he started working in the lab of Doug Randall, professor emeritus of plant science, he started to see a new world of possibilities.

At first, he merely harvested plants grown for various studies. “I had [only] a basic understanding about the research,” says Peritore, a senior from Columbia. “It took a while for my classes to catch up to what I was doing in lab.” But when they did, he was hooked. Nothing against medicine, he says, “but I find the discovery aspect [of research] more interesting.”

He landed an EXPRESS Fellows paid internship in summer 2014, which put him in the lab 40 hours a week. The everyday immersion caused his lab skills and confidence to soar. “I learned how to work on my own, how to read papers — that helped move me to

independence in the lab," he says.

At the start of the summer, Peritore formed his own research proposal, studying the three enzymes that make up one of the components of pyruvate dehydrogenase complex (PDC). By the end of summer he wrote up a research abstract and poster describing his results. Using the plant *Arabidopsis*, he investigated the unique roles the three enzymes play in PDC's production of a key ingredient plants need to make energy.

"Doing this basic research allows us to, down the line, increase the production of food crops," he says.

After graduation, Peritore plans to continue with plant science in graduate school. He hopes to earn a master's degree at Sussex University in England and later a doctorate.

Topics: Agriculture and the Environment, Research, Web Exclusives

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