

URGO Student Spotlight

Maxwell Bannister '22



Maxwell Bannister '22 comes from a family of medical field professionals. But he didn't want to just go into the medical field, he wanted to find a subject that really interested him.

In his first biology course at Augsburg, he thought, "this is way cooler than my other courses."

Maxwell figured he would still end up in medicine, and knew medical school applicants need to do research, so he asked to be in Dr. Leon van Eck's lab.

"Then I fell in love with research."

His first summer of research with Dr. Leon wasn't part of the URGO program, but Maxwell and Dr. Leon quickly decided he should apply for an URGO research position.

Once accepted to URGO, Maxwell spent a full year in Dr. Leon's lab. He was looking at wild relatives of barley, trying to find a barley that was naturally occurring and genetically resistant to pests (aphids).

"I was screening strains of barley with a cool new instrument called an electrical penetration graph. It was kind of 'mad scientist' looking with wires everywhere, but it let us measure aphid feeding success on different barley strains."

Maxwell absolutely loved his URGO experience.

"It really changed how I studied and take my classes. When I was in Dr. Leon's lab, there were so many things that required expertise, so I started taking stats courses because I had all this data to analyze and didn't know what I was doing."

Maxwell won the prestigious national Goldwater STEM award and after he completed his URGO research, he began as a volunteer researcher in a cancer biology lab at the University of Minnesota. The following summer, he was awarded a spot in the Life Sciences Summer Undergraduate Research Program (the U of M's version of URGO). Maxwell is now a paid researcher in the U of M's lab. He plans to continue working here until he graduates in 2022 with degrees in biology and chemistry, then he hopes to win a Fulbright award to study at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne, Australia, where he will study improvements to existing cancer immunotherapies.

Maxwell also plans to pursue his Ph.D. and/or MD in the future.

"URGO helped me so much. Now I could see the practical importance of the material I was learning in classes."

