

# Seeking Experience, Discovering Possibilities

April 13, 2005

So, what exactly is a polymer?

Unlike most of us, three science students from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), can do more than just define the term.

Thanks to a recent internship at Tufts University in Massachusetts, they now know how to form and manipulate polymers used for product development, such as stronger plastics.

The students gained experience crystallizing and melting polymers—which are substances consisting of large molecules made of many small, repeating units—interacting polymers with X-rays and light, and observing the effects of heating and cooling on the polymers. “It was a great experience and has helped improve my skills,” said Matthew Jenkins, a biology major. “I learned how to work as a team with others and present my findings.”

Jingjing Pan, a chemistry major, said “I’m lucky that I already took related courses at RIT so I knew the basic information.”

After returning to NTID, two of the students, Jennifer Buckley, a biology major, and Pan, had the opportunity to present their Tufts internship experience at the Northeast Regional Meeting of the American Chemical Society (ACS). They, along with some 40 other deaf and hard-of-hearing NTID students, attended the conference.

“This conference provided a mechanism for deaf and hard-of-hearing professionals and future professionals to gather and share experiences, get advice, and ask questions about their field,” said Todd Pagano, assistant professor in NTID’s Laboratory Science Technology (LST) program. “The students got a taste of the many resources, benefits, and professional development opportunities that a professional organization like the ACS has to offer.”

“I learned how deaf people, like myself, can become scientists,” said LST student Jake Canter of West Middlesex, Pa. “I also learned how to seek jobs in the science field, and I met a lot of well-respected chemists from all over the United States. It was a fun and moving experience; it made me feel like I was a scientist.”

The purpose of encouraging NTID students to attend the conference was to involve more deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the fields of science, technology, and engineering. For the three students who had the opportunity to work in the lab at Tufts University, their experience has made a lasting impression on their lives.

“I learned how to work as a team with a variety of people from different backgrounds,” said Buckley. “I also enjoyed learning how to operate the equipment and handle the materials.”

“I’m really excited to see what else I can do related to science,” said Jenkins.

The Laboratory Science Technology (LST) program at NTID prepares deaf and hard-of-hearing students for employment as laboratory technicians. Graduates are prepared for work in a broad range of fields, including chemical, biological, biotechnical, environmental, industrial, and food analysis.

The first and largest technological college in the world for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, NTID offers educational programs and support services to the 1,100 students from around the world who study, live, and socialize with 14,400 hearing students on RIT’s Rochester, N.Y., campus. NTID’s web address: [www.rit.edu/NTID](http://www.rit.edu/NTID).