Sixteen year-old Simon Beveridge isn’t washing dishes or mowing yards to make money this summer.

Instead, the Petal High School senior is working in the chemistry laboratory of University of Southern Mississippi professor Dr. Doug Masterson, with sponsorship through an American Chemical Society grant.

The grant, titled Project SEED, promotes the study of chemistry at the college level by giving high school students in their junior or senior year the unique opportunity to work alongside professionals for eight weeks in academic, industrial and federal research settings.

“It’s a great job,” Beveridge said. “I’ve really learned a lot by using new kinds of equipment and learning new techniques. It’s one of the best summers I’ve ever had.”

Beveridge is engaged in a laboratory project at Southern Miss that focuses on new ways to prepare better amino acids, the building blocks of life, by creating a synthetic version that could have new and interesting properties. He likens his work to preparing a meal in his kitchen. “It’s basically an advanced form of cooking, which I enjoy.”

He is the only high school student in the state awarded the SEED grant, coming highly recommended based on his sterling academic record. He ranks near the top of his polymer science class at Petal, made a perfect score on the Mississippi Subject Area Test in biology and scored high on the Subject Area Test in algebra.

Beveridge also had a combined score of 1390 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) - at age 12.

Masterson said that performance has carried over into his summer job in the laboratory. “To take a high school student and put him in a university setting like this is a challenge, but he’s up to the challenge. He’s definitely moving forward.”

As much as he’s learning about new technology and the inner workings of a university research laboratory, he’s also seeing how much teamwork makes any research project a success. “I’m just making one part of the entire process,” Beveridge said. “Everyone is depending on each other to do their part and do it right.”

Students who successfully complete the SEED program are eligible to apply for a college scholarship funded by ACS, which Beveridge intends to pursue. He is strongly considering coming to Southern Miss to study chemistry or polymer science, or both.

Whatever he decides to major in, working in Masterson’s lab has put his future more into focus. “Before this, I wasn’t sure about what I wanted to do, but this has inspired me to pursue a career in science,” he said.
Petal High School student Simon Beveridge, right, uses a chromatotron to clean impure compounds as Southern Miss professor Dr. Doug Masterson looks on. Beveridge is working in Masterson’s laboratory this summer as part of the American Chemical Society’s Project SEED. (Southern Miss Public Relations photo by David Tisdale)

About The University of Southern Mississippi
The University of Southern Mississippi, founded in 1910, is a comprehensive doctoral and research-extensive university fulfilling its mission of being a leading university in engaging and empowering individuals to transform lives and communities. In a tradition of leadership for student development, Southern Miss is educating a 21st century work force providing intellectual capital, cultural enrichment and innovation to Mississippi and the world. Southern Miss is located in Hattiesburg, Miss., with an additional campus and teaching and research sites on the Mississippi Gulf Coast; further information is found at www.usm.edu.