



Let's Talk Science | Ottawa

Helping students look beyond the lab coat

Young scientists volunteer to motivate and inspire Ontario's youth

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Eric Karmouch
Computer Science Doctoral Candidate
University of Ottawa

Many Ontario high school students have a poor idea of what careers in science and technology have to offer. Several surveys suggest they envision a lonely life in a lab coat with little social interaction. Others think the technology sector is over-saturated and not worth pursuing.

Such skewed perceptions lead to declining interest in post-secondary programs in science and technology. Let's Talk Science (LTS), a national charity committed to improving science literacy, is determined to set the record straight. And with support from Ontario Centres of Excellence (OCE), thousands of Ontario students are making a strong connection to science.

“Look at the political issues being debated right now,” says Bonnie Schmidt, President of Let's Talk Science. “Health care, climate change, energy and the environment—today's political issues are based in science and technology. Their importance to our economy and our future can't be stressed enough.”

Working together, OCE-supported graduate students volunteer to speak to kids in Ontario schools as part of LTS's Partnership Program, providing engaging scientific demonstrations and showing exciting career possibilities within science and technology.

Eric Karmouch, a computer science doctoral candidate at the University of Ottawa, is one of many volunteers students can look up to.

The students are thrilled to have an opportunity to interact with a ‘real scientist.’ “I go into detail about how the knowledge students learn in their classes is being applied in the real world,” says Karmouch.

Karmouch is also involved in OCE's Value Added Personnel (VAP) program—an initiative that helps student researchers develop business skills. He intends to apply these skills en route to a career in the high-tech industry, with a long-term goal of returning to academia as a professor.

He's eager to give back to the community and show students that studies and careers in science offer limitless possibilities. “This type of work makes me feel alive, productive, and involved,” says Karmouch. “There is no better way to make a difference than to interact with and guide future generations.”

For Schmidt, partnering with OCE and working with volunteers like Karmouch is a tremendously successful formula. “The kids learn about different career options, science at the post-secondary level and they learn about leading edge research,” she says. “And just as important, the kids see people in their mid-twenties like Eric who are fabulous role models doing fabulous science.”

