Hands-on experience is one good way to learn science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects), according to the UWM Division of Global Inclusion and Engagement. That’s how students in the Wisconsin Alliance for Minority Participation (WiscAMP) program learn, working with local companies and UWM researchers.

WiscAMP helps prepare students for the STEM areas by involving them in undergraduate research and internships, locally and nationally. One of those students, Juan Orjuela, a UWM sophomore, has always wanted to be a veterinarian. His research work with Gerlinde Hoebel, assistant professor of biological sciences, has given him a head start on that professional goal. Orjuela studied the reactions of male and female frogs to certain calls and vibrations, and how these affect the way frogs mate.

WiscAMP helps prepare students for the STEM areas by involving them in undergraduate research and internships, locally and nationally. The WiscAMP program is part of a UW System initiative that also works in partnership with a number of private institutions.

The program is designed to encourage students from groups underrepresented in the STEM disciplines by offering opportunities that will help them continue in these fields, says program coordinator John L. Baker Jr. His office reaches out to recruit students through Facebook,
Twitter and STEM-related listservs. The program has 64 students this year, a 52.4 percent increase over last year, according to Baker.

The undergraduate research part of the program – in which students are paired with both faculty/graduate student and peer mentors – is funded by the National Science Foundation. The mentors are trained by WiscAMP and UWM Student Success Center staff and meet regularly with the students.

The program also provides tutoring in conjunction with departmental and Panther Academic Support Services, if needed, and stipends for the summer so students don’t have to try to hold down a job while doing internships or research.

“The most interesting part of my research internship was when we would go out for our field days,” says Orjuela. “We drove to the UWM Field Station late in the night, put on our waders and headlamps, and penetrated the ponds in search of frog pairs to catch and later test in the lab.”