Holland senior Kelsey Castillo had a goal of placing at the state meet this season. But another goal took precedence, and Castillo is working hard to reach that second goal.

Castillo took the summer off from swimming and worked at Hope College doing neuro research on Parkinson’s disease.

“It was a great experience,” Castillo said. “We made some interesting strides.”

Castillo’s study involved nutritional supplement resveratrol in treatment of Parkinson’s to see if it can aid deep brain stimulation. She will be giving a presentation on her research later this month.

“My counselor approached me about this opportunity because I have always been a science geek,” she said. “It was amazing. We got to do brain surgery on rats and go to an international conference at Michigan State.”
Castillo gave up a little of her immediate future in the pool for her long-term future in the lab.

“I want to continue doing research to help with neuro diseases,” she said. “I am planning to go to Hope next year in the neuroscience program.”

Castillo said she plans to swim at Hope, too.

But first she has some unfinished high school business in the pool. She leads the Dutch, ranked No. 2 in Division 2, into this week’s O-K Black/White meet at East Grand Rapids.

It begins Thursday with diving preliminaries. Swimming prelims are at 3 p.m. Friday, while finals are 11 a.m. Saturday.

“Last year, I qualified for state right away,” she said. “You can’t just take a year off and expect to be at your best.”

Castillo made the state meet in the 200- and 500-yard freestyles. This year, she is 13 seconds off her best time in the 500 (5:21) and four seconds off in the 200.

“The distance events are harder and my endurance is way down,” she said. “I am actually closest in the 100 backstroke. I am just a second off.”

Holland coach Don Kimble agrees it has been harder for Castillo as a distance specialist.

“The longer the event, the harder it is to get back,” he said. “It’s still possible, but you don’t see too many girls qualify for the Division 2 meet while only swimming during the high school season. She has the right attitude about it.”

Though it put her a little behind schedule in the pool, Castillo said she would make the same decision again.

“I took one for myself by doing the research but it’s going to be the best thing for my future,” she said. “I still try my hardest every day. I am confident I can get to state.”