

A Year In Review

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2014 Edition

University of Cincinnati Honors Program



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 2014 Edition of my year in review, crafted for the University of Cincinnati Honors Program. This year was a year of new beginnings, new experiences, and new challenges. It was a year that high school life ended, and college life began. The foundation for my next four years at UC was laid during the last two semesters, and as I reflect now, the foundation is a sturdy one. Below, I shall attempt to review the most important parts of my year. If my description is even half as entertaining as the experience itself, I will consider this publication a phenomenal success. Happy reading, and Go Bearcats!

PAST

THE BATTLE OF THE SCHEDULE

One of the things people told me most when I set off to college was that I may have difficulty managing all of the free time that I was going to have. I don't know where this idea of free time came about, but within a week of stepping foot on campus, I saw that there was going to be a much bigger problem. I had a great deal of things to do, and a limited amount of time to do them. In addition to the course load (which I had grown accustomed to by taking many AP Classes in high school), I also had to manage every other aspect of my life that somehow hadn't been noticeable before. The small things started to pop up everywhere - running errands, haircuts, washing clothes (which I did in high school, but here it was a trek down 4 stories just to get to the washing machine that sometimes worked), and buying groceries. Alone each task seemed inconsequential, but combined, they began to take a great deal of time. In addition, one of the things that I held most dear at the beginning of the year (and still do, by the way) was the ability to go to the gym. It is a great way to relieve stress, and I had to build that into my schedule as well. What I began to notice was that I was being inefficient when it came to all of the little things that I needed to do. I quickly realized that, in order to get everything done (on time), I would have to rearrange my schedule. And so, I did...about five times. What I wound up with was a way of doing things that made me most efficient with my time. I was able to pack two or three errands into the space between classes that had previously been wasted time. Also, I realized that if I was to continue exercising, I would have to find a time reserved specifically for that activity. For the first month, I tried evenings, but what happened was that



homework ran over time, and I would have to start sacrificing my 'sane time'. Eventually, I found that going to the gym when it opens at 6 AM was the best option, and I stuck to that for the rest of the school year. In the long run, all of this fiddling impacted me by demonstrating (quite succinctly, may I add) that if there is a part of my life that is not working, or if things in general are not running as I would like them to, all I have to do is put forth the effort and proactively make changes. In the future, this will allow me to be more confident in all aspects of my life, including my schedule. I am now able to fit activities more tightly together and be extremely efficient with my time.

THE ORGANIC RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

I'm not going to delve deeply into the gory details of this experience, because they are outlined in more depth in the formal documentation¹. For now, it will suffice to provide a broad overview. In my second semester (Spring 2014) I was selected alongside a group of between ten and fifteen other students to participate in a research experience that took the place of the Organic Lab II credit. For the purposes of this year in review, the details are not as important as what lead up to the experience itself. About a month through the first semester was when I first heard that such an experience existed, and I instantly wanted to be a part of it. On almost every college application I had sent in during senior year, I had adamantly expressed my desire to participate in research during my college experience, and I saw this as my opportunity to get my foot in the door. I made it my goal to not let this opportunity pass by, and after months of hard work and sweating over pages upon pages of organic molecules, I was invited to join the lab. This was one of the proudest moments of my first year as an undergraduate. Not only was I allowed to complete an experience that focused on the subject upon which I will build the rest of my career (chemistry), but I also got to see the goal setting process in action. I never wrote anything down (this may disappoint many of the teachers I have had in the past - sorry), but I believe I followed most of the steps. I told myself where I wanted to be, reflected on what it would take to get there, made a plan for myself, and executed. When it worked, I wasn't surprised, but I wasn't totally expecting it, either. Looking back on this process, I can see for the future that since I am a goal (and list) driven individual, forming these types of plans for myself will be vital. Also, I have seen that if the goal is a serious one, I have no qualms to putting in as much effort as possible in order to achieve it.

STATICS AND BASIC STRENGTHS

If there was one class that threw me for a loop during my freshman year, it wasn't Organic Chemistry (that class was a treat), it wasn't Calc II or Differential Equations, and it wasn't any of my Chemical Engineering classes. It was Statics & Basic Strengths of Materials. I thought long and hard about why this class was so difficult for me, and towards the end of the

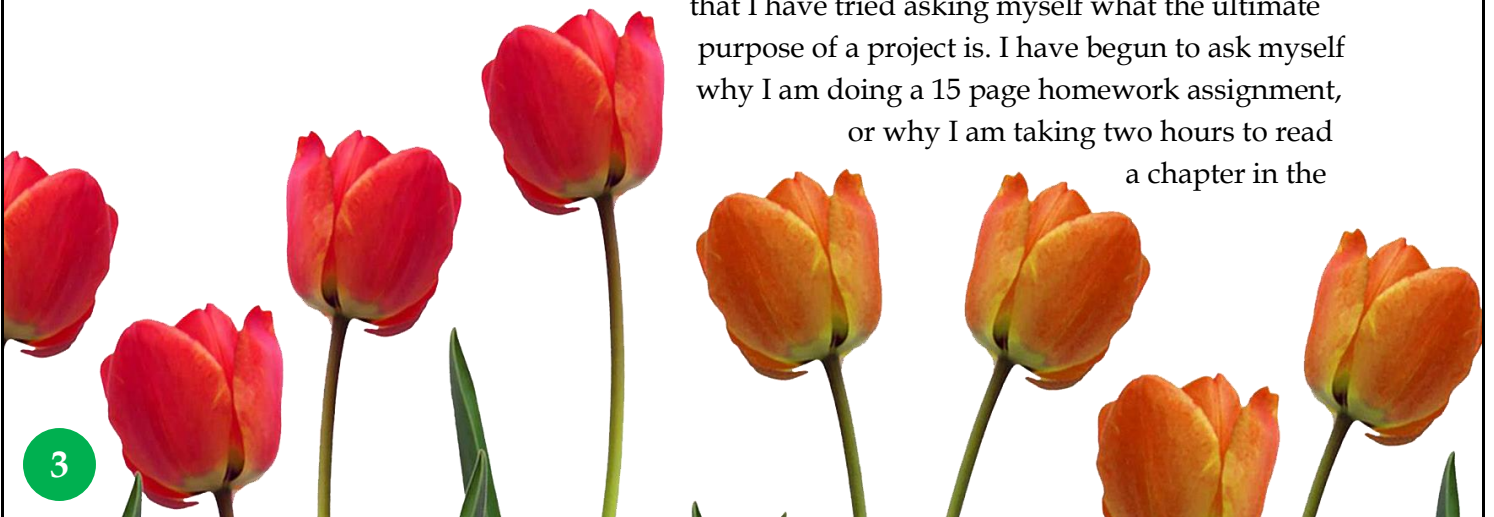
¹ See <http://carbotelluris.weebly.com/honors-organic-lab.html>

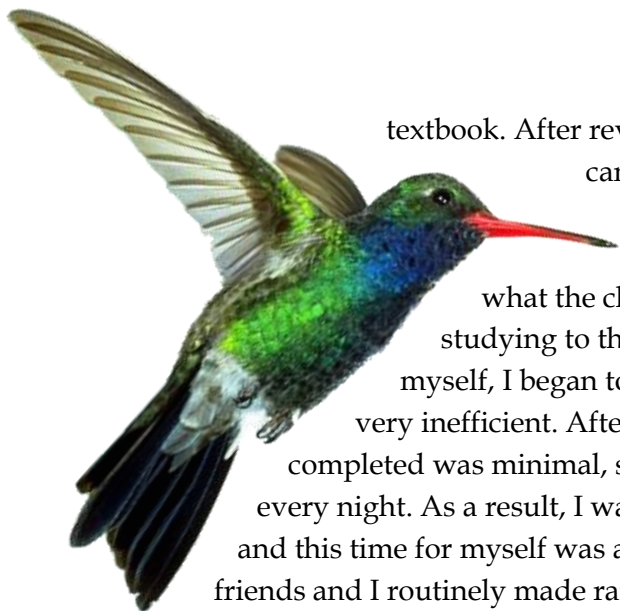
semester, I finally figured it out. One thing that I learned about myself during my experience at the LeaderShape Institute in the winter of 2013 (another honors experience, please see learning portfolio for more details) is that I have trouble focusing on things that seem monotonous or unimportant at first glance. The prime example that I use for this type of activity is scrolling through 30 e-mails every day. As I have eluded to in the beginning of this publication, I like to be efficient with my time, and in this regard e-mail is one of the worst 'time wasters'. At least, that was my opinion in the beginning of the year. Then I took Statics and Basic Strengths of Materials. This class was challenging not only because of the difficult grading scheme used, but also because, for the first half of the class, I didn't see the purpose of my enrollment. When, I wondered, as a chemical engineer would I have to calculate the stress within a beam or the net force on a particle? I didn't see how this class would ever apply to my discipline, and so my interest quickly dwindled. This fact coupled with the pace of the course and the time that I needed for my other classes meant that maintaining a good grade in the class for the first half was difficult. In order to refocus, I applied some of the concepts that I learned in LeaderShape. I asked why I was having difficulty, and I saw that it was because I didn't necessarily see the point to the class. So, I analyzed the class more critically, and I found that, while I may never use the exact information I was learning, the process that I took to solving the problems and to completing the homework assignments was what I was truly learning during class. Once I found this to be true, I had an easy time with the remainder of the course. I did the same thing with email, and found that the reason that I must email people is because it allows me to do the things that I love to do, like volunteer. In all, Statics and Basic Strengths taught me that when I lack motivation in a task, it is often times because I am having trouble seeing the reason for the task. I know now that in the future I should take the time to critically analyze what I am doing and ask *why* it is important. Once I do this, I am able to more fully focus on the task at hand.

PRESENT

When thinking about what ways I have changed the most since I attended UC, I see major strides forward in two areas - I've begun to look at the big picture, and I increasingly take time for myself. When I say that I've begun to look at the big picture, I mean that I have tried to look past individualized assignments and towards the overall learning objectives of my class, and

that I have tried asking myself what the ultimate purpose of a project is. I have begun to ask myself why I am doing a 15 page homework assignment, or why I am taking two hours to read a chapter in the





textbook. After reviewing the ultimate learning objectives of the course, I can better tailor the way I spend my time with these types of assignments. This has helped with studying, too, because I have become increasingly able to recognize what the chapter is truly about, and this allows me to focus my studying to the overarching themes. With regards to taking time for myself, I began to recognize that after a certain hour at night, I become very inefficient. After 11:30, I saw that the amount of meaningful work I completed was minimal, so I chose instead to simply go to bed around 11:30 every night. As a result, I was able to get up in the mornings to go to the rec center, and this time for myself was always a welcome break from my work schedule. My friends and I routinely made random day trips, we bought a basketball and played for hours, and we sat around and did nothing in particular. In high school, this may have frustrated me, because I saw random things like this as a waste of time. What one year in college has taught me is that I need these 'wastes of time' in order to stay on the top of my game. In other words, I had to be less productive now in order to be more productive later. I learned that I am more energized and refreshed when I take a couple hours for myself, and that is exactly what I did this year. While it may have meant that I had an hours more worth of homework to complete on a Sunday night, I was more up to the task because my break on Friday night and Saturday morning had left me refreshed and ready for a new week. These lessons I carry with me into the present, and I will also carry them with me into the future. I have applied these lessons to my life at work and at home, and as a result I see more clearly what I am doing, and that makes me better at my job. Ultimately, I believe that these two lessons are the most important things I learned my freshman year.

FUTURE

With all the things that I learned in my freshman year, I have been able to plan my sophomore year with more confidence, and have been able to put together a schedule that meets my needs but is also efficient. I applied the lessons that I learned about using time efficiently and setting goals in order to create a schedule that extends upon the basic requirements, but at the same time should still allow me an acceptable amount of personal time. For example, in the spaces that were hour breaks between classes, I placed a shift of work. I wouldn't get much done in these spaces anyways, so I fit work there. Now, I don't have to walk all the way back to campus for an hour in order to be a TA. I'm already there, I can get my time in, and I am efficient while doing all of this. The reason that I was able to put together a schedule such as this is because of the lessons that I learned my freshman year. Also, next year I will be partaking in another research experience due to my experience in the honors organic lab. It is my goal to be an integral part of the team (not just running spectroscopy machines), and it is my goal to further increase my knowledge of organic chemistry. Using what I learned about goal setting last year, these goals are now more approachable and within the realm of possibility. As I begin my next

semester, I will jump immediately into this new research project, into my new job as a TA, and into all of my engineering classes. Even though I still have 4 years remaining, I am certain that these will go by quickly, and I wish to squeeze out every bit of knowledge and life experience I can from my time at the UC.

CONCLUSIONS

My mother has a type of shirt that she prefers above all others. It is the 'Life is Good' brand, and their slogan is "Do What You Like, Like What You Do." This slogan I leave for myself in my coming years at UC. I am confident that the next 4 years will bring challenges and rewards, intense coursework and deep learning. I jokingly tell my friends that I would have dropped out of school by this point if I didn't love my major, and that has a ring of truth to it. If I didn't absolutely love chemical engineering, coping with the work and class schedule, along with all the extracurriculars, would be near impossible - I would have no motivation. It is my love of chemistry, math, and science that drives my ability to take on my schedule, and without it, I would be nothing. To myself, I say, study Chem E, because that's what you love. I know myself well from the trials and experiences of my freshman year, and from the personal exploration I completed at The LeaderShape Institute. I know what I am good at, and I have come to terms with those things that need improvement. I will improve what needs improvement, and continue to live with my strengths. Next year, I'll do what I like, and like what I do. And if I don't, the only thing stopping me from changing is, well, me. I was open to change last year, and it brought me everything I've just spoken about. I'll do the same this year, riding in full of enthusiasm, carried by the winds of change.

A NOTE ABOUT STYLE

I chose the growth theme for my year in review for two reasons. First, my freshman year was about growth, and I figured nothing was more appropriate than nature to represent growth. The second reason I picked this theme is because the environment is something I hold close to my heart, and I wish to tailor the rest of my education to that topic. In industry, I hope to complete work that will make the chemical processes we use every day more beneficial for the environment. Also, I hope to complete some type of elective that focuses on this topic. By choosing this theme, I have chosen to showcase to all who read that the environment is important to me, and I intend to help improve it.