“We are always evolving into new, better versions of ourselves. The comforting news is that we are never finished. The idea of being unfinished is nice, for it always leaves room for improvement. For trying new things, for developing new hobbies and making new friends. Being unfinished means we can cry today, and next week or next year we won’t cry for the same thing, because we are moving, evolving. Becoming better versions of ourselves.”-Rachel Dowda
Becoming a better “Me”

Dave Anians, Community Leadership and Civic Engagement major

Through my college experience and personal life, I feel I am always growing and learning how to be a better person. My major—Community Leadership and Civic Engagement—has brought me into the community through volunteering and working with local nonprofit organizations. These experiences have helped me see the importance of individual involvement in local communities. It is easy to think that the parts you play in your community are small and insignificant, but they really do help the world in a way that would not be realized without your contribution.

I believe a better "version" of someone comes down to a person's realization of their place in the world and their efforts to work for a better community. Being a college student at NIU gives us opportunities and recourse that many individuals are not fortunate enough to have. I have seen how education, ethnicity, and gender leave many individuals at a disadvantage throughout their lives; thus, such inequalities are a problem for which I am helping to address to ensure an equal society for future generations.

Growing Up and Out

Kristen Roenfranz, Senior Psychology & Spanish major

View from the Cathedral Tower in Salamanca
I am not who I was yesterday, or a year ago. I am not who I will be tomorrow, or twenty years from now. My life and my soul are subject to the experiences that I’ve had and that I will have. I believe this with all my heart: every decision I make, every person I meet, and every taste I savor has an everlasting impact on my life. These moments leave indelible marks on the lives of everyone. And this is what is so remarkable about the great human experiment: we are never done growing up or out.

About two years ago, I answered a phone call that changed my life. A man I had never met was telling me that I had been accepted to my study abroad program in Salamanca, Spain. I had been waiting and waiting for that call. My mind was racing, panicking, imagining. I would be leaving to live my new life, for eight months, with people I had never met. It was going to be my first time out of the country. It was going to be my first time out of my parents’ house. It was going to be an adventure. And it was.

I think I always knew that this experience was going to change me. I just didn’t realize how much of an influence that decision, those people, and the food would have on my life. Then, I had never traveled or seen myself in a life full of traveling abroad. Now, I am constantly picturing my next trip. Where will I end up next? Maybe the banks of the Mississippi River in Tennessee. Or Machu Picchu just outside of Cusco perhaps. I have no idea, and I love that. It is a completely liberating feeling. I hope that in every facet of my life I can adopt this attitude. Not knowing who will walk into my life next or what will happen around me is terrifying and exciting and life-affirming. I love the idea that whoever or whatever happens, I will keep on changing. At one time in my life, I was terrified at the prospect of leaving the country. Now, it seems so wonderfully adventurous and necessary to my happiness. I want to see as much of the world as I can with as many new friends as I can. I want to learn as much as I can about the people that live in this world with us. What once made me feel anxious now makes me feel exhilarated.

Becoming Involved To Grow

Dan Jeffries, Sophomore, Biochemistry major

Growing and evolving, by definition it is something we all do. Since our lives first started we all have grown. Physically, of course, is usually the first type of growing that comes to mind. Surely everyone looks much different now than we did on our first birthdays. Even more important though, everyone has grown mentally since his or her first birthday. Or at least that is the hope. After all, isn’t that what college is all about, growing mentally and explore academics in an environment that breeds academic existence so well? Countless financial supporters of students in college certainly believe so. In my relatively short time here at Northern Illinois University I can say I agree with them. However, college is so much more than just exploring academics. Taking your studies seriously is a major part of the college experience, and it certainly will lead you to grow mentally. From my experiences here so far I can say it is the people you meet and
the things you get involved in that allow you to grow and evolve into a person that
classes alone cannot create.

I remember going on the University Honors retreat last year as a freshman. It was
such an exciting experience to meet all my peers, and a few of which have grown to
become my best friends. During the trip I remember hearing a story about another student
who went on the trip the year before me. This student asked the bus driver to pull over so
he could see the corn on the side of the road. This seemed so funny to me when I first
heard it. Corn is not rare, has nothing visually appealing about it, and I could not
understand why someone would stop a bus to look at it. But it was this story that really
started to get me thinking. It’s not that I never thought corn was important but I never
thought people would never have seen corn.

Now I grew up in a southern suburb of Chicago. To see corn I would have to
drive south on the highway for a few dozen miles. I still knew what corn looked like
though, and so did everyone else in my 50,000+ people town. Everyone in that town, for
the most part, shared the same experiences, childhoods, and major life events. So many
people yet we were all so similar. It was the corn story that slowly started to make me
realize that not everyone thinks or acts like they would back home. This is something
that many people realize before they go to college yet it is something you can’t truly learn
in class. Because of this, I have evolved into a more personally aware student.

Something that other students dismissed as just another funny story I took to
heart. Imagine if I gained that much in my first day of being in the University Honors
Program, then how much I have gained in the last three and a half semesters. It wasn’t
just the University Honors Program either. While my foundation was laid with the
program I built a lot of what I have today by reaching out and becoming involved with
other people and organizations. The leadership experience and other skills I gained by
doing so are invaluable, and I firmly believe that no class can teach you them. While my
physical growth has more than likely stopped I can take solace in knowing my mental
growth is nowhere near complete. For that, I can equally thank classes and the numerous
opportunities I have taken while here at NIU
Becoming Better Versions of Ourselves

Elaine Rodriguez, Sophomore, Pre-physical therapy major

The Society For Advancement in Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) gave me the opportunity to present my research at their national conference called “Science, Technology, and Diversity for a Healthy World” in Seattle, Washington this past October. I attended with four other NIU students. It was a one of a kind experience that has made me grow as a student and a future professional in the field of physical therapy. As a first generation minority college student, this experience will allow me to persuade and reach out to others to engage themselves in research. I hope to set an example to future students at Northern Illinois University to challenge themselves by taking on a different approach of involvement on campus. At the conference, it was great to see students just like myself who were participating in research which made me glad I decided to submit my abstract.

I presented my research finding for my project called Researching the Factors involved with Hispanics in a Computer Training Program. I loved speaking about it to all the different other researchers who presented at the conference. This was not the first time I presented my poster at a conference which was a relief because the first time I was quite nervous. This trip to Seattle was an opportunity to leave my comfort zone and shyness to the side and network with other students and administration from various fields. I was able to speak to representatives from various universities that I plan to apply for graduate school. I am currently working on applications for Summer Research Opportunity Programs for the summer in different universities. I would have never known about them if it wouldn’t have been for this conference.
Experience in the Fall 2012 Calculus 1 (MATH229) and Physics 1 (PHYS253) TLC Program

Nick Clouston, Freshman, Mechanical Engineering

Do you plan on taking Calculus I and Physics I in the near future? If you intend to enter a field of study with even the smallest bit of math involved, you will more than likely enroll in these two courses; most people will even choose to take them simultaneously simply because the concepts in Calculus coincide with those in Physics and vice versa. Taking the similarities in Physics and Calculus and manipulating them in a way that accelerates learning in both of the courses—rather than dwelling on the workload—is the essence of the TLC program. The Calc I and Physics I TLC branch is fairly new, and now is the time to get involved! Enrolling in the TLC program is more than just filling two spots on your schedule with one click; you are enrolling in a combination of two courses that will make the understanding of both classes come more naturally to you and will help you to develop a social network in your field of study between students and staff alike. These two perks of the TLC program are amongst the most valuable pieces of growing up. They will help students to better themselves and evolve, and inspire them to stay on the fast track of growth and do the best that they can to succeed.

You still don't know me! My name is Nick Clouston. I am a second semester freshman majoring in Mechanical Engineering. Math and science have always been my area of interest in school. The Calc I and Physics I TLC program was perfect for me, but it would also undoubtedly benefit others that may not be similar to me! Whether you were born a mathematician or you cannot wait to get your required physics course over with, the TLC will help all sorts of students to better understand both classes and how they relate to each other. This application will both allow you to apply math and physics to real life situations by using them simultaneously and will help you through the challenging courses with more prestigious academic results. For example, if a student understands how to prove a derivative but not what the derivative truly means in a realistic scenario, they will get a second chance to pick up on the more abstract meaning of a derivative in the physics portion of their TLC. The idea of having two teachers discussing strategies to help their students learn together is very powerful because they can both build on one another's lessons and this helps students learn the information by faster and much more natural means. The reapplication and reiteration makes all the difference when attempting to conquer difficult subjects that may be new to students.

If enhanced learning wasn't enough to catch your attention, perhaps forming a social network that could help you both during and after your college experience will. Over the course of your TLC involvement you will have two professors who are working together to benefit you that collaborate to make lesson plans that fit together and make the most of your time in class. During your TLC learning experience you will receive several opportunities to make yourself heard and get to know your professors due to the small class size; this will help you develop a social network among NIU staff which is extremely important when attempting to find a career in the future: having extra resources is always beneficial. Whether you can get your professors to point you in the
direction of a career that suits you or you can acquire a letter of recommendation based on their remembrance of you, having their help in the future can make all of the difference. In a normal lecture hall-sized class this student-teacher connection may not be as easily reachable. Aside from the student-teacher connection, you will have the opportunity to build a network of peers that will help you through your academic career during and hopefully after your experience in the TLC program. Being that the classes are small, I was able to form this network fairly quickly and I still talk to peers that I met via TLC on a daily basis. Since we were all in similar fields, my TLC friends and I have classes together and we even study together which is enormously effective in aiding my learning process particularly in Physics 273 and MATH230. These two separate but equally important social networks I have formed have proven to be extremely valuable to me and I am certain that they will continue to benefit my education as I further pursue my degree. In taking a TLC course you will have this opportunity, and I encourage you to take advantage of it.

At the end of my first semester as a freshman there were very few decisions that were more beneficial to my educational career than enrolling in the Fall 2012 Calculus 1 (MATH229) and Physics 1 (PHYS253) TLC Program. The program was very effective in aiding me to understand the real concepts behind both physics and calculus and it allowed me to form a very helpful social network within my major that I am very confident will be there for me when I need it. The TLC program was undoubtedly a success story for me and most likely for many of my peers that I met in the program and I encourage new students to further investigate the TLC program and everything it has to offer. The program has truly inspired me to do my best to grow as an engineer and I have no doubt in my mind that it will encourage the evolution of students to come as they learn to think by a whole new means and form their social networks that will carry them to new heights.

Becoming Better Versions of Ourselves

Interview with Professor Tim Pierce, Interviewed by Dana Lebrecht

Professor Pierce is a professor at NIU who teaches many courses. He teaches COMS 100, 360, 309, and 630, which focus on public speaking and business and professional speaking. This past fall was his first time teaching a standalone honors course, COMS 100. Professor Pierce started off his education at University of Illinois and later transferred to Northern as a junior. Initially, his major was computer science and math education; he then decided to switch is major to speech education. From a young age he says he always wanted to be a teacher. He started his teaching career at DePaul University in 1993; three years later he transferred to Northern Illinois to teach here. He started teaching his first stand alone honors course last semester. He had the opportunity to teach the stand alone honors course because he was among the most senior people in his department. He says he likes teaching honors because of the intellectual curiosity of the students, they ask a lot of questions and he says he can go more in depth
with the information and take different approaches with the material. Pierce says he is having a great time teaching honors and next year the department is planning on creating a Health and Human Sciences TLC including both COMS 100 and PSYC 102. Teaching, specifically honors, has shown Professor Pierce how important audiences really are. He can see the difference in his students and he appreciates it. He is looking forward to the coming changes to his department and is honored to have this opportunity.

**Becoming a Better Version of Myself: Birthday Boxes**

**Jacqueline Beck, Senior, Nursing major**

Birthday Boxes is a long-term community service project that the University Honors Program has been doing for two years. The program was started as a way to give back to the children within the DeKalb/Sycamore area. It was a way for University Honors students to give back to their community, while trying to put smiles on children's faces. Honors students work to collect donations, assemble boxes, and visit local organizations to deliver the boxes as well as host monthly birthday parties. Our Mission is that we aim to bring cheer to the lives of DeKalb County area youth (ages 1-18), that are designated as “in need,” through the creation of birthday boxes and by hosting monthly birthday parties at local agencies. We are currently working with two local organizations: Hope Haven and Safe Passage. Birthdays are such an important part of a child’s life and we are honored to celebrate their birthdays with them. I would like to leave you with a quote from John Wooden who once said, “You can’t live a perfect day until you do something for someone who will never be able to repay you.” These children will never be able to repay us for the gifts we bring them, but I do hope that they do become inspired to pass along the kindness throughout our community. Please feel free to contact jacquie.beck@sbcglobal.net with any questions or more information on how to get involved!
Tanzania Development Support

Interview with Dr. Sandra Dawson, History Department. Interviewed by Ron Leonhardt, Junior, History and International Politics major.

Q: How did you initially become involved with Tanzania Development Support?

A: As a member of TeachGirls Global, NIU professor Kurt Thurmaier gave a presentation explaining how Tanzania Development Support (TDS) is working towards providing the children of Nyegina with an education that will raise their future income levels, create professionals who will reinvest their time and energy into Tanzania, generate respect within marriages, and help resolve the widespread gender inequalities. Currently, the average age at marriage for Tanzanian girls without a high school education is between 14-18 years, the average age a Tanzanian girl without a high school education gives birth to her first baby is 14-18 years, and over 75% of Tanzanian girls without a high school education who marry before the age of 18 report domestic abuse. Many of the girls also experience complicated births and die or their babies die since many of these adolescent girls are not fully capable of delivering a full-term infant. My involvement with TDS is to help ensure that Tanzanian children will receive a secondary education that will help lift Tanzania out of poverty and ignorance. Moreover, I have worked with University Honors Program students on honors projects designed to help promote TDS and organize fundraising opportunities to help TDS fulfill its primary objectives.

Q: What is the current project being undertaken by Tanzania Development Support in conjunction with this summer’s NIU study abroad program, Experiential Learning with NGOs in Tanzania?

A: This summer Dr. Thurmaier will be leading a study abroad program that will consist of a Kiswahili intensive language study, an exploration into the roles of NGOs in developing countries, further construction on an all-girls dormitory, and an assessment as
to the needs of the small library at the school. An elementary school education is provided to children through the Tanzanian government, but secondary school is expensive and often unfeasible. A secondary school education is especially uncertain for young girls as they are more unlikely to succeed in elementary school due to such social constraints as the expectation that young girls will run the household whenever they are needed and the likelihood of families sending their sons to school rather than their daughters since males are likely to make more money upon graduation. Thus, the dormitory helps ensure that young girls will be able to attend school without succumbing to the social pressures of traditional Tanzanian culture. The current library in Nyegina has only two bookcases for more than 800 students; by providing the library with a more complete collection of books as well as internet access for a Teacher Resource Center, it will help the teachers become better teachers, students become better students, and, overall, proliferate the spread of knowledge throughout Nyegina and the surrounding communities.

Q: What fundraisers are being held in the DeKalb area to help TDS reach its primary goals?

A: There are two yard sales—one at the end of April and one at the beginning of August—that will raise money for TDS. In the past, each yard sale usually brings in over $2,500, and is a good opportunity for graduating students to donate old furniture in April and for incoming students to buy new furniture in August. The “Walk With Water” event, which will function similar to a Relay For Life events, is a way for small teams to raise money for TDS by asking sponsors to donate based on the number of laps completed. The “Walk With Water” event will be held in early April; the event is meant to signify the extreme hardship undertaken by Tanzanian girls who walk nearly eight miles every day carrying as much as five gallons of water in order to provide for the needs of the household. Participants in the “Walk With Water” event can, but are not required to, complete as many laps as possible while carrying up to five gallons of water.

Q: How has your association with Tanzania Development Support contributed to your personal growth? How has it changed your perspective of the world and different cultures?

A: Since my primary profession is as an educator, being involved with TDS has helped me see how school systems halfway across the world function and how truly precious an education is even in areas where a quality education can be scarce. My association with TDS has given me a heightened desire to be the best educator I can be and to enrich the lives of as many students as I can here at NIU and abroad. It is often the case that when books, libraries, internet access, and high-quality educations are abundant, they are often taken for granted. Many students in Tanzania will never own a single book in their lifetime and will never have access to the knowledge, creativity, and culture that are afforded to students in more privileged countries. Working with TDS has helped me realize this startling reality and helped me to hone my abilities as an educator in order to facilitate the academic growth of students who are fortunate enough to have access to the tools essential to a well-rounded education.
Becoming Better Versions of Ourselves

James Gorman, Freshman

A small, squishy, golden star rests on the desk in my room; emblazoned across the front of this star are the words Northern Illinois University---University Honors Program. Though this star is likely just one in a horde of mass-produced compressible stars, it means something more to me than just a stress reliever or something to set on a fluttering stack of papers. This squishy star, along with the kind letter that accompanies it, represents my participation in something far more important than the accumulation of all the squishy award stars in the world; it represents the Honors Program’s dedication to the community by giving back through a remarkable program called Birthday Boxes.

After hearing about Birthday Boxes from an honors fellow at the Lorado Taft retreat last semester, I attended the first event not quite knowing what to expect. What I found was a group of people as dedicated to their community and to the service of others as I hoped to be, and so began my enduring membership. Once a month, a few extraordinary volunteers gather in the Honors Office to piece together some packages and cards for children living in shelters around the area. Over the past semester, I have been fortunate enough to be counted among their ranks, though I am by no means as extraordinary. However, even more exciting than fondling candies, mulling over the perfect toy to package, and writing kind wishes for an hour of this evening are the thoughts of how excited each child must be to receive a present for his or her birthday. It has come to my attention that these children have even taken to calling the members of the University Honors program the “Santa people.” My dreams of amassing an armada of squishy memorabilia aside, these feelings of inspiring hope and making a positive impact where it is most needed compel me to come back each and every month to contribute a little more, and convince me of the immense value this program holds in the community our University so readily gives back to.

Becoming Better Versions of Ourselves

Interview with Dr. Emily Prieto, Interview by Hector Alvarado

NIU takes much pride in its many different honors programs for students. It would be hard not to find an honors program that a student can relate to. From a very early start of a college career we are told to join as many extracurricular activities as we possibly can. Honors programs serve as an excellent form of support and guidance for students through their academic years. One for those many different honors programs is the Adela de La Torre honors society.

The Adela de la Torre honors program (ADLT), was created by Dr. Emily Prieto and Vanessa Segundo in 2011. This honors program is a program that is geared towards the Latino population at NIU. This honors program serves as a support system for the Latino students to get encouragement to be the best students that they can possibly be. The program was made for the purpose of having a program that Latinos find other
students that have similar backgrounds, and educational goals. ADLT honors program is a way in which we students can be rewarded for our excellent scholarly work.

Dr. Prieto chose Adela de la Torre as the face of the honors program because she serves as an excellent example of educational merit, and leadership. Adela de la Torre has served as Dr. Prieto’s mentor for when she was pursuing her Ph.D. degree. Adela de la Torre received her Ph.D. in agricultural and recourse economics from the University of California, Berkeley. She also has the position as director of Chicana/o Studies at the University of California, Davis. Her extensive research has focused on financially issues that affect Latinos, as well as border health issues.

Dr. Prieto believes that it is very important for Latinos to pursue higher level degrees in many different fields of education. This honors program helps flourish leaders in the community and helps members connect with a broad range of faculty. The honors program also informs students on different other programs that will get students involved in academia, everything from research, scholarship, and internships.

The Loggia is my Sexuality

Joshua Nixon, Sophomore, Energy and Environmental Technology

Looking at you on my bed as I sit at
my work chair from across the room
makes me feel sorry for you.

You’re propped and presented but
sadly, possibly for us both, I am not as willing.
There’s a loggia in the drawer of my nightstand.
A sleepless child roams in its the electric
smog. That awkwardly placed thick ribbon
that’s tied to the middle of his left forearm scares him.

The ribbon is dull silver with brilliantly pink side fringes.
From the boy’s perspective, the ribbon began with him
and loosely reaches through the smog till its other end
disappears. He fears the horror the other end might have
sewn into it.

It’s a lil hard to see in there, almost impossible sometimes.
The loggia is split into sections that offer different satisfactions.
   The child looks for his section.

   As of now, he’s in the twilight between the wall and
   where the ribbon leads: the center.

   On the wall, there are flood lights gleaming down social norms
   for sexuality on a cream colored guardrail and a carpeted walkway
   with floor lights that guide a path friends say they follow.

   Looking toward the center while at the wall is like
   trying to see thru a window of a lit room at night.
   Curiosity grabs his heel and leads him past that invisible glass.
   A step off the carpet and toward the center leaves you
   nearly blind and wheezing.

   This loggia is nature.
   This light is nurture.

   In the middle, the air is almost black. The ribbon
   dances like a flag in a gale. Breaths shocks down
   his throat and thunders in his belly.
   It scares him and he thinks about the carpet.

   The ribbon starts to straighten and it tugs
Till his arm is extended in front of him.
An identical arm wrapped in an answer is
at the tip of his reach.

You look partially pleased putting on that
thin white jacket. I’ll walk you home.

Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU)

Justin Durancik, Senior, Biology/Pre-Dentistry

“The research focus of the NIU REU program, Operation ETank, is in areas of energy and the environment, with aspects of ethics and economy (the 4 Es) incorporated into broader problems and related to the broader issue of sustainability. Students involved in the program will be mentored by faculty members having wide-ranging backgrounds in relevant research areas.”

2. Where did you go for the REU program? When?

My REU program was at the University of California Riverside. The program was 9 weeks long. It started on June 18th and ended August 17th.

3. What was the research project you worked on? What were your findings?

My project focused on inhibiting the production of aflatoxin in fungi of the Aspergillus genus. Aflatoxin is a chemical, synthesized by some Aspergillus fungi, that is known to be carcinogenic. For this project, I used the model filamentous fungi A. nidulans. Specifically, I screened for chemicals inhibiting a specific protein-protein interaction. This interaction is known to increase toxin production. Therefore, inhibiting this interaction would have the affect of decreasing the toxin produced by the fungus. I was able to screen over 12,000 chemicals and found one chemical that was particularly interesting. I am continuing to characterize the effects of this chemical on A. nidulans. I was given a lot of autonomy with my project, but worked mainly under a PhD student. Each step of my project was guided by Dr. Calvo (my faculty mentor at NIU) and Dr. Borkovich (my faculty mentor at UCR).

4. Is this the first time you have done research? What were some of the highlights and/or challenges?

I previously participated in the Research Rookies program over the 2011-2012 academic year. Since I commute to NIU, one of the biggest challenges was living so far away and not knowing anyone from the area. However, after meeting everyone in the program, I quickly go used to it. One of the biggest highlights was being able to explore southern California. The biggest challenge with my project was knowing that even after screening
thousands of chemicals it was possible that none would give the result I was expecting. This also led to the highlight of my trip, which was finding out that there was a chemical that showed strong inhibition of the interaction.

5. How has the experience helped you grow as a researcher and individual?

Since I had a strong background from my previous experience as a Research Rookie, the autonomy I was given allowed me to grow greatly as a researcher. Critical thinking is a major part of research and I was able to make many decisions on my own, although any major decisions were made in consultation with mentor. I was also given a great deal of responsibility as I was working with very sophisticated and expensive equipment to carry out my project. I was not only able to learn new techniques and work with new equipment, but I learned how other labs in my field are organized. Although there were many subtle differences, I was surprised how similar things were to Dr. Calvo's lab here at NIU. I believe my greatest growth was as an individual. As I said before, this was my first time living on my own and with people I had never met before. Although challenging at times, I had a great experience with my summer research program at UCR and would highly recommend taking advantage of any summer research opportunities.

“Evolving Into Better Versions of Ourselves”: The Impact of Undergraduate Research

Interview with Sarah Stuebing, Junior, Biology major. Interviewed by Natalie Cincotta, Sophomore, History major

Not everyone can say that the highlight of their summer was researching and taking care of Black Howler Monkeys in Argentina.

All except for Sarah Stuebing, who in Summer 2012 spent 6 weeks in La Cumbre, Argentina, researching the facial expressions of Black Howler Monkeys, as well as volunteering to care for animals at an animal rehabilitation center.

Stuebing studied the monkeys’ facial expressions as they interacted during meal times, and filmed them for analysis.

While Stuebing enjoyed the experience, she did face some challenges. The living conditions took time to get accustomed to, as there was no running water, Internet, or satellite reception.

This type of field research was quite different to working in a controlled lab environment. “This taught me to be independent, how to deal with tough situations, [and] how to be resourceful,” said Stuebing. “It taught me how to think on my toes, and how much hard work is important.”
Reflecting on her research experience over the last year, Stuebing said “it’s amazing when you step back and look at the big picture... [this] helped me grow more than any experience that ever helped me grow.” Stuebing worked with anthropology professor Leila Porter, and is applying for another USOAR grant in hope of returning to Argentina.

The USOAR program accepts proposals twice a year, and a faculty member mentors selected students. If accepted, the student can receive up to $2,500 in research funding.

“Evolving Into Better Versions of Ourselves”: The Impact of Undergraduate Research

Interviewee Evan Wittke, Junior, Biology and Anthropology major. Interviewed by Natalie Cincotta, Sophomore, History major

“There’s a reason it’s called research,” said Evan Wittke, two time Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research (USOAR) grant recipient.

Starting out in the Research Rookies program as a freshman, Evan is working with biology professor Barrie Bode on ground-breaking cancer research.

Now, the junior biology and anthropology major has been able to continue to make an impact in his field through the USOAR program. Last year, for his first USOAR grant, Evan set out to evaluate the metabolic profiles of different kinds of human liver cancer, using proteins. Now, with funding from a second USOAR grant, Evan is evaluating how liver cancer impacts protein expression, which could lead to early testing methods.

Evan has had the opportunity to present his research at conferences, including the American Association of Cancer Research (AACR) Annual Meeting in Chicago last year. Evan said these conferences are a great opportunity to “see where your research fits in with everyone else.”

“The most meaningful thing I got out of the research experience so far is the relationships that you have with your mentors and the other people with your lab,” said Evan. “There is a familial atmosphere, I consider them a second family,” said Evan.

Evan said research opportunities, such as the USOAR program, have helped him develop an understanding of what it means to be a researcher. “When I first started as a freshman, I had a very primitive understanding of what research involved. It presents you with a reality check. It might knock you down for a little bit, but it honestly is an exercise in learning to be patient.”

“[Research] forces you to take a more adult stance on learning how to work within the parameters,” said Evan. “If it was so easy to come by we wouldn’t necessarily have to research.”

The USOAR program accepts proposals twice a year, and a faculty member mentors selected students. If accepted, the student can receive up to $2,500 in research funding.