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1st Year-in-Review

The first year in college: a daunting experience full of transitionary angst matching even the infamous high school freshman year. However, there exist certain key differences that make this time around both beautiful and horrifying like never before – both a distancing of the parental oversight and a nearing of the professional world. This middle quagmire has been an exhilarating encounter, and the University Honors Program has largely helped me through the ride.

Most notably, UHP provides connections and experiences that allow the student to exceed the usual college grind. It is a certain enrichment that benefits mostly from connecting the academic to the personal. On one side of the spectrum, there are classes, exams, projects, deadlines, and every other important task that constitutes the professional preparation that makes university profitable for the student. Then, there is also the personal development that comes through relationships, hardships, memberships, and other potential ‘ships’ of the college experience. The way UHP has married these two aspects of college life has led to me, a freshman, diving in to some amazing opportunities not even a year into my college career. First semester a friend of mine and I applied to be a part of a research extension for a class we were taking. This took a subject pertinent to our field and provided depth. We were able to work collaboratively in a small group, four students and one professor, and develop a research problem from scratch to then apply this subject of MATLAB to. With no shortage of roadblocks along the way, we finally came to a point of decision on our topic and have since been hammering through the details. As someone with little research background, this allowed a glimpse into an entirely new world and growth of skills to listen, compromise, and execute to solve a problem.

After some time going through our first research project, my friend and I decided to see what else we could find. Through UHP, we were connected personally with a professor overseeing the Protégé Undergraduate Research Program. We decided that while our chances might be slim, it would be worth it to at least apply and talk to the professor about it. Next we knew, we were connected with professors to be one-on-one protégés in their respective labs – which happen to be next door to each other. Here I have worked closely with the Laboratory of Advanced Healthcare Technologies on various projects and learning a plethora of new skills along the way; these includes both technical skills as well as skills applicable for a completely different research environment than my first experience. With both experiences, however, I can say with certainty that most valuable are the relationships I have been able to develop with peers, graduate students, and even professors. Seeing my own passion for research and technology reflected in them is exciting and invigorating, and it takes this whole learning experience that is college to a deeper level by immersing me in the culture of engineering.

Going forward with my academic career, I hope to continue being curious and adventurous. I feel a lot of what I have accomplished so far, particularly through UHP, has been to my own benefit. I have developed exciting relationships and skills rarely achieved by freshmen. Now, I would like to give back. I plan to accomplish this by joining an Engineers Without Borders excursion and make an Honors Experience out of it to add that layer of reflection and introspection. My goal for next year is to further discover my path, be that major choice, relationships, or involvement. The advice I would give future me to this end is this: do not become complacent and remember that there is much more to the college experience than just textbooks and exams.