

A Reflection on my Experiences here at Iowa State University

Marek Jablonski
10/25/2024

Entering college after the slow COVID years of high school felt like a huge step forward in life. Here at Iowa State I have been able to grow and practice my passion for all things engineering through class projects and extracurriculars. The most important part of my non-academic education has been my extensive involvement on the Solar Car. As part of the PRISUM Solar Car team I have gotten experience in the field of systems design, integration and project management. These skills have already proven themselves before I have even graduated in my experiences as an electrical engineering intern and in various group projects.

A major aspect of this in both academic projects and in Solar Car was being able to pull in outside information. I never started a project knowing all I needed to know, but I knew I would be able to figure it out. That information often came from classmates or peers who had gone through the same struggles and had pointers on how to proceed or helpful answers. Online resources became both increasingly critical and increasingly difficult as projects progressed into more niche topics that are seldom covered in public circles, but still offered many quick solutions to routine problems. As part of the solar car team I also had the opportunity to present my work to alumni and peers in formal reviews, a great experience in preparing me for "real world" engineering.

As mentioned previously, a significant portion of my learning has taken place outside the classroom as part of the Solar Car team. Before College I had several personal projects, and while I have continued these, the majority of my personal time has pivoted to the team. As part of the team I have held many roles, electrical board member, Motors Manager, Systems Director, and my current role as Project Director. As I became more intertwined with the project and the team I was forced to grow in both my technical and interpersonal skills. Nearly daily I am required to deploy these skills in managing the vehicle development from the high level timelines to sitting down with individual team members and making sure they're on track for success. I have no doubt in my mind that the experiences I've had here have set me up for success after graduation.

I have been fortunate in being able to "coast" my way through most of my academic career, but here at Iowa State is what taught me how to buckle up and dig in when something wasn't going well. One of my favorite, but most time consuming, courses I have taken, Embedded Systems Design, was that way. The first lab we had was incredibly challenging in a way I had never experienced with schoolwork before. That lab taught me a lot about that specific field in Embedded Systems and how to take scattered bits of documentation and put it together into a functioning system. Another example of this would be the U.S. Diversity elective I took, Aesthetics of Consumer Experience. I am an engineer by heart and knew absolutely nothing about this, every single example was foreign to me. Every minute in class was one of learning and taught me a lot about how to work with people that are very different from me in an area I know absolutely nothing about.

Looking back at my undergraduate experience there isn't much I would change. I have learned so much both in classes and out with very little regret besides a few minor class choices. Quite simply the biggest thing I would change would be to attempt to procrastinate less and start assignments earlier. I look forward to continuing my adventures here as I work towards my master's degree.