

One Month In, Halfway Through ^[1]

Submitted by [Milan T Brown](#) ^[2] on 28 June 2016 - 11:18am



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I have been in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico for about a month now working for the National Science Foundation's Research Experience for Undergraduates program. Honestly, I had no idea I would end up here but I'm glad it's here instead of Minnesota. The purpose of the program is to give undergraduates research experience at a university they would otherwise never attend, as well as preparation for graduate school. We are paired with a graduate mentor and a professor and work in the labs for about an average of 40 hours a week. After the 40 hours, we are free to explore Puerto Rico and do whatever legal activities we desire.

Most weekends, we rent a car and travel to various beaches or attractive spots in Mayaguez. I have tasted multiple Puerto Rican dishes, and interacted with people on the island. So far, my favorite place that we have been was Crash Boat Beach, and my least favorite Steps Beach in Ricon.

So far, the pros of this program are:

Being in Puerto Rico (and the legal drinking age of 18)

Getting to work in a lab

Learning more about graduate school opportunities and deciding if I want to go or not

the small size of the program group

Some of the cons, for me, of the program this year are:

Housing conditions

Being the only Black person in the group

Being "Thrust in the wind" regarding social activities, food options, and getting around the island

I'm pretty homesick actually. I would love to go home but there's nothing really for me there, so I'll keep pushing. I keep in contact with friends from home and update them about the ridiculous things that go on. The walk from Hotel Colegial to work is very long and I think that if the program housing was moved to the off campus apartments near the brewery that not only would it be easier for the students, but more cost effective for the program.

On being the only Black person: Most times its not that bad, but a lot of times theres microaggressions that slip up and its hard to correct people on them because you're the only person who sees a problem with it. I realize that acceptance to this program is not based on race but there should be some attempt to diversify the program a little more (increasing program size etc.)

Overall, the program is very good and very well organized. It'd demanding, but still allows the participants to have their freedom. Overall I'm happy I picked this REU program and am excited to complete my research and poster presentation.

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