

Professional Development at UPRM 2017 Summer REU ^[1]

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I have always been fascinated with the process of scientific development. This fascination lead me to major in a technical field; material science and engineering, and lead me to pursue exposure to research opportunities. My first true research experience is here, at the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez in soft matter.

As my first experience with real scientific research, I did not know what to expect. Not only did I have to adapt to the vastly different climate of Mayaguez from my home state of New York, but I also had to adapt to the highly irregular work involved in research. Irregular that is, in comparison to my last job; working at a restaurant where I knew each task I would perform every single shift for a set amount of time every time. Research, I learned, is not like that. There is long periods of waiting, reading up on previous literature, setbacks big and small that are unpredictable and need to be dealt with in novel ways. The bottom line is that in research, you are in a way your own boss, deciding how to go about the task at hand since by definition, you are working on something new; something that hasn't be fully studied in the way you are studying it before.

Being a part of this program has in just the first few weeks taught me more about research than I learned in my entire last year of college education. Lab safety, the importance of absolute accuracy and cleanliness in analytical chemistry, and an ability to extract information from scientific papers to name just a few areas. But I still have plenty to learn. Data analysis, report writing, and a deeper understanding of the science behind my specific project are some examples of what else I hope to gain professionally from the rest of this summer.

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