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## Why Research?

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# Why Research?

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**M**y first foray into research came as a high school student, when I was required to complete a research project for my biology class. At first, I regarded the project as a necessary element to succeed in my class. After beginning the project, though, I found the entire research process to be quite interesting. I was able to design a project based on a question that I was genuinely curious about. After spending some time on a lake and noticing a surprising amount of boating oil on the surface of the water, I began to wonder how the organisms were affected by human interaction. In the kitchen of my parents' home, I set up a homemade laboratory, and worked diligently to find an answer to my question. The experiment investigated the effects of boating oil on "elodia densa". I measured the amount of growth



of the "elodia densa" at varying levels of oil contamination to see if the pollution caused any negative effects. Not only did this experience allow me to foray into the field of research, but also allowed me to discover what was required to make a scientific presentation both in a written and verbal presentation.

While this experiment was very simplistic compared to the in depth studies I now conduct, this was the first time that I regarded science as truly exciting. Working to find the answers to my questions became like a puzzle. While I had all of the pieces in front of me, I had to fit the pieces together to be able to understand and see the larger picture. The experiment actually made all the concepts that were just words in a book, come to life. The

newfound excitement that I experienced when looking at my data and seeing the results of the hard work that I was doing, allowed me to be able to make successful research presentations at local, regional and international levels.

periments, the work in the lab has allowed me to be exposed to other biologists working in the same field of research. I am working with a lab in Texas to process some of the tissue samples. Also, I was fortunate to be able to attend an International Echinoderm conference and have corresponded with biologists

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In the summer of 2003, I was awarded a research internship with UAB as the result of winning a regional science fair. I started work in Dr. Stephen Watts' biology lab, studying the effects of crude oil on sea urchin embryos. The eight weeks that I spent under his tutelage were invaluable. I finally realized that conducting research was my passion. In addition, I was introduced to research equipment and procedures that I previously did not have access to, such as procedures for spawning and conducting histology on the sea urchin gonads. Work with the sea urchins involved areas such as collecting samples from Florida, reproduction, caring for the embryos, monitoring their growth and the necessary dissections. The collection of sea urchins also sparked an interest in scuba diving, something that I hope to incorporate into my future career. I realized that additional coursework such as cell biology and invertebrate zoology would be necessary to enhance the understanding of the research results to the full extent. I have since continued my work in his lab, though my area of expertise has changed over time. In addition to the actual ex-

specializing in sea urchin research as far away as Japan.

Apart from my love of research, I have found a new appreciation for science as a whole. Growing up, I had a difficult time in science classes. I was never able to visualize what the teachers were talking about. Now, I find the classes that I am taking to be incredibly exciting because I can use my hands-on experience to garner a better understanding of the written material. The research experience has also fostered a deeper passion for caring for the environment and the true impact of the coexistence between wildlife and humans. These are areas I hope I can continue and expand upon in the future.

The first dabble into research changed my future. Before research, my goals were to become a lawyer, and now I see that there is nothing more perfect for me than to be a scientific researcher. I highly encourage those students with an inquisitive mind to try research. If nothing else, it will open your mind to appreciating the vast and amazing world of science.

