

Research is a Journey of Self-Discovery

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In this issue of *Eureka*, I am proud to share with you the exciting and innovative research projects that are being lead by undergraduate students at the University of Alberta. While I will let their work speak for themselves, I also would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the beginnings of my research career and the broad reaching effects I have found research to have.

I first became involved in research in the second year of my undergraduate studies, simply because I wanted to have a summer job that I could learn from, rather than a more mundane one like stocking shelves in a store. I approached several professors and found a particularly good match with one and ended up starting as a volunteer research assistant right away. At the time my plan was to apply for medical school after my undergraduate, but that was a bit ill-conceived since I have found that I dislike dissection labs and do not take well to raw memorization, both of which are important skills in succeeding in medicine (among many other necessary skills). During my undergraduate program, I took several research courses and worked in the lab over the summers and found that my personality and aptitudes fit well with the lifestyle of a researcher. A few months ago I completed my Ph.D. in Psychology. I didn't know that I wanted to be a researcher when I started my undergraduate, but now I couldn't be more sure that this is the path for me. Soon I move to Boston to start a position as a postdoctoral research fellow.

Throughout my research career thus far, I have met many students who have taken to research. Some wanted to work in a research lab to gain experience and a reference letter for medical or law school, or other programs like occupational therapy or speech-language pathology. Some have been graduate students with a vision of the type of lab they hope to eventually lead when they become a professor. Others yet have been required to take a research course as part of an honors program and were unsure what to expect. Regardless of the reason, I have found that being involved in a research project is also a process of self-discovery.

In any good research project, the outcome is unclear. There should be hypotheses to constrain the possible outcomes, but we do not know which will occur. Even with a good research question, many important nuances need to be determine, such as what are the potential confounding variables that need to be controlled for, and how to best control for them. Reading all of the prior studies in the world will not give you definitive answers to these questions, since every project is a little bit different and scientific fields are always evolving. In my opinion, these skills that need to be developed to undertake a research project are very similar to those needed to succeed in life: You need to be able to learn what you can from books and the experiences of others. You need to learn to adapt unforeseen circumstances. You need to learn to work well both independently and in teams – being able to both solve problems on your own as well as communicate your ideas effectively. I have found that research has given me an opportunity to discover myself better, what I am good at and what situations I find challenging, and to observe others doing the same and see how they act under similar circumstances.

Research is more than just a university course you take or a project you work on with others.

Research is a way of life.



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