

I have always been interested in the biological world, how intricate interactions on various scales produce such a vast amount of variety, so I pursued a degree in science. I transferred to Oregon State University, where I decided to pursue a degree in botany. I chose OSU, a Research I University, because I knew it would provide me with more research opportunities. My first mission after moving to Corvallis was to find a lab and continue working in a lab learning environment. I was introduced to Dr. Jeff Chang by my advisor after I told him I was very interested in an undergraduate research learning experience. I went to Dr. Chang's office on numerous occasions to assure him that I was very motivated to become a member of his lab, and was subsequently offered a volunteer trial position. I met his expectations and have been working in his lab for the past 14 months.

The lab is structured to promote an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Currently there are three postdocs, two graduate students, and five undergraduates I am expected to participate in collaborative learning and respect all, regardless of their life histories. The undergraduates have formed a tightknit group and help each other out in understanding laboratory and classroom learning. I assisted a postdoc in a summer STEM camp where I helped guide high school students in infiltrating plants with *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* to learn about genetic modification. I attend and present at weekly lab meetings. These meetings require me to learn about the work being done by others around me, and I am encouraged to ask questions to help me understand and learn. I cherish these opportunities, and have discovered how much I enjoy being around a diversity of motivated researchers.

Now that I am more comfortable with the scientific process I try to seek out answers to problems by examining primary literature. This has introduced me to various methods used in research, as well as the importance of repeatability of results. To better prepare myself for graduate level research I have made it a goal to be more comfortable in reading primary literature and understanding the data and figures of a paper. This practice has also enhanced my ability to design experiments while incorporating the appropriate controls.

My research experience has given me other benefits that will contribute to my success in graduate school. I have attended various research conferences, where I have met researchers from numerous fields of study. I have presented my work at poster sessions and research symposiums. Public speaking engagements allow me to improve my skills in communicating complex scientific data to people from various backgrounds. In preparation for these events, I worked closely with my mentors to refine my skills. These frequent interactions with experts to learn skills cannot be had in the classroom setting. Additionally, these learning and networking opportunities would not have been available to me if I were not engaged in a research experience. These experiences have given me valuable insight into the academic research community, and only strengthened my drive to become a part of it.