

Asher Williams, August 2016 Update

The aspects of my internship experience that I find to be most beneficial currently are the laboratory skills and techniques I learned, data analysis and presentation practice, and tips that I gleaned from experienced PhDs based on their personal experience. I worked very closely with Dr. Kagawa in particular, and often when I am in the lab I find myself remembering her words of warning or advice and putting into practice her clever tricks for increasing productivity.

While at Ames I was able to observe the collaborative nature of research, something that I am now employing as I work on developing a joint project between my current lab and my undergraduate laboratory. Working in the bioengineering branch gave me exposure to other initiatives that were underway throughout the building and helped instill in me a better appreciation of biotechnology as a valuable tool in research. My current research projects are within the same field, focusing specifically on the areas of metabolic engineering and protein engineering.

There is a steep learning curve when moving from an undergraduate environment to a PhD program. After completing the research internship at Ames I definitely felt a greater sense of confidence and preparedness for graduate school. Although my first year was challenging, I was able to successfully complete all my mandatory classes while making progress on my research projects, pass the PhD qualifying exam, and receive a Presidential Graduate Research Fellowship award after being nominated by my advisors. I now have the opportunity to mentor undergraduate students in the lab, a task that I feel like I can effectively execute because of my positive experiences as a mentee at NYU and NASA Ames.

The research internship was a unique experience, which I had the opportunity to share with my lab mates and advisors during our group meetings. It is also good to know that I have friends at NASA and that I can shoot an email to Dr. Kagawa or Dr. Hogan if ever I need their advice or just want to say hello and update them on my progress. Regarding future plans, I am still open to either industry or academia, but I am ultimately very much interested in research development in Trinidad and Tobago.