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Mid-Program Reflection

As a sophomore in the biology program at Longwood University, I am expected to master certain topics and have a certain level of progress towards set learning goals. I believe that I have demonstrated this progress through a multitude of different assignments and assessments. I believe that the skills that I have learned so far have made me a better student and scientist as a whole.

 The first learning goal is to develop an understanding of the concepts of biological science. Our curriculum is split so that we build foundation level understanding of courses and then move onto more advanced topics and along the way I have been able to prove my understanding through a multitude of exams and assignments in each course. In the first biology course, Biology 120, we are taught about each different pillar of biology, ranging from cell to ecology to evolution and more. I feel that because of this class I am able to differentiate different biology principles across many fields. I learned the cell and molecular biology unit pretty well in 120 and taught myself how I study best. I found that redrawing examples and the mechanism of the cells was most helpful. I still use this method of studying, especially with biology courses. The next course I took was 250, where I learned about introductory genetics and cell biology. I have always loved genetics since taking a genetics course in high school, and this course allowed me to view genetics in a different light. I had not been taught the real repercussions of genetics until this course. It made me understand how important it is to be enrolled in more than just biology classes, as we need to view societal issues from many different lenses. I believe that this class taught me that putting in extra work and extra time in the lab really pays off. Some cell biology concepts were hard for me to grasp at times and attending tutoring and asking lots of questions helped me succeed in this course. I was able to show my understanding of this course by presenting during research day, and a copy of my poster is located on my E-portfolio. Making that poster and being able to explain it perfectly to anyone who walked by during research day still makes me feel accomplished. I worked very hard with my lab partner even after our experiment failed at first to get viable data and be able to address this limitation later.

 I also then took Biology 251, introduction to ecology and evolution, which allowed me to strengthen this field of biology in my mind. I had not been exposed to a lot of this particular field in the past. It has honestly been one of my favorite courses so far. I loved how our lectures were filled with examples and active learning opportunities. I found it extremely helpful to be able to talk about a new subject with my table and report out to the class with how we thought a particular system was working. Dr. Leech had us doing lots of group work, which I have grown to love. I earned very good grades on my exams because of my dedication to finishing the textbook problems and studying in advance.

 Currently I am in Biology 324, which is genetics. I am learning about inheritance patterns and got the highest grade on the first test in the class. I have been asking questions and actively been reading the assigned pages which is really paying off. I think that I do better when I have already read the content that we are being taught, minimally skimming each chapter before class. I have not taken organismal biology yet, or physics so I cannot comment on my progress in those courses yet. I have completely Chemistry 111, 212, and 214 and I am in my final course which is Chem 112 now. Chemistry is not easy for me, so I attend tutoring and office hours regularly. I regularly master the theoretical concepts of chemistry and I am working on mastering the mathematical side. I often make small math errors, so I have been working on checking my math as I go. For studying, I always practice the problems from my notes over and over until I recognize the pattern. I have really established that I need lots of time to study for all my courses in order to be the most successful.

 In all of my coursework, I have been asked to establish the basic principles of a lab experiment. I have been asked to create lab reports that detail all of the steps of each experiment. I was taught how to write the different sections during Biology 120. As the semester went on, I was able to turn in drafts and then revise and resubmit. This process made me extremely comfortable with writing lab reports and I find them to be pretty enjoyable now that I know the mechanics of them. On my E-portfolio, I have a lab report for each of my courses so far uploaded and I can see my growth as a writer. In the lab, we are asked to draw conclusions and develop our own hypothesis, which I find extremely fun. I love the investigative side of labs and I have found even better ways to frame questions and take notes on outcomes of labs.

 I have been giving presentations even since my first semester at Longwood and I feel very confident in my ability to communicate efficiently. I know now through my coursework how to format presentations and what kinds of data should be presently versus excluded. I feel that my writing skills have improved dramatically because of peer review and professor’s revisions on my drafts. I find writing to be fairly easy. My papers are linked to my E-portfolio as well to demonstrate my progress that I have made thus far.

 I think that moving forward I will continue to implement the study techniques that I have cultivated through my courses because it is effective and works for me. I will try to allow myself enough time to prepare for exams, as well as keep up with my readings. Additionally, I believe that my note taking skills allow me to understand and comprehend content faster, so I will look for more ways to make my notes more useful. I will continue to ask my professors for help and attend tutoring sessions because both of these opportunities strengthen my knowledge and also help me become more comfortable in professional settings. During research day, I have to communicate with several professors and during those small interactions I am learning how to perform competently in that type of professional setting. In group projects, I will continue to be a good communicator to my group and always pull my weight as well as ask for help when I need it. This program has given me so many unique opportunities that have allowed me to grow and learn, so I only wish to continue this for my next two years.