

My SPISE Experience

By Obe Joseph

I was actually reluctant to apply for this program when I first read about it online. Somehow I felt that it was out of my league, and was not willing to spend money and time applying. Fortunately I came to my senses and began the application process one week before the deadline, after encouragement from my mother and final persuasion from my friend Kervelle. The fact that another friend of mine was also applying may have been another contributing factor. Thankfully, my school and lecturers were all very cooperative and sent the transcripts and letters of recommendation on time. It was now up to me to complete the process. Interestingly, I enjoyed applying for SPISE and started discovering new things about myself just from writing the essays (how fascinating; self discovery even before the program started). I just lay everything in God's hands and waited excitedly for the verdict.

Turned out that I got accepted! Thank GOD! Now I just needed sponsorship. I was appreciative for the hard work of Dr. Cardinal Warde and the other CSF staff members. I eventually got sponsorship from the U.S. Embassy for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. I will be forever grateful.

I began to count down the days to when I had to leave Dominica for Barbados (20th July 2013). I remember seeing the schedule, a few days before the 20th, and thinking, this should be interesting. I also found out that another Dominican, Nyana George, would be taking part in SPISE. I was very thankful that I would have a fellow Dominican to share my experience with.

Coincidentally I left on my sister's birthday, so I wished her happy birthday in the wee hours of the morning and I began my hour-long journey to the Melville Hall Airport. I met Nyana for the first time there, but our families apparently knew each other already. This was my first time flying to Barbados and I enjoyed it. I remember when the plane was about to land in Barbados, the beaches looked so beautiful and the water a breath-taking BLUE. Flying through the clouds really gives one an appreciative perspective of life. We had a safe, hassle-free flight. Nyana and I were met at the airport by Jason Clarke who would be our Teaching Assistant (TA) for Robotics and Electronics. He drove us to the Cave Hill Campus where we met Lois Oliver (assistant director), Cherysa (Biochemistry TA) and Carolyn (Physics TA). They were very welcoming and it surprised me how relaxed they all were; I was expecting a school-like ambiance. However, that set the program off to a great start. The other students arrived gradually and we stared at each other in an awkward silence. Fortunately, that eventually changed.

We did not do much on the first day since some students were still in transit. Basically, that day was used for settling in. We did diagnostic exams the following day, so that we could be placed into classes that suited our capabilities. We also met Professor Warde for the first time, and received the first of many words of advice. After we were placed into appropriate classes, the core learning began. I should mention that I felt like I was in a dream for the first two weeks of SPISE. It seemed so surreal that I had been presented with this amazing opportunity where I could acquire such valuable knowledge at no personal expense with a marvelous group of people. I got to learn from my peers and teach them what I understood. The teachers and TAs were also very enthusiastic, and committed to each student and their comprehension of the material. The information we learned was very neat and I knew it would be very useful in the future, especially for the coming school year.

The classes we took included Calculus, Humanities, Physics, Robotics & Electronics, Biochemistry, Entrepreneurship, and Mandarin. I really liked the Robotics class, particularly the lab work. During the

lab, we got to work on our robot's hardware as well as software, and I enjoyed every minute of it. I also got to meet representatives from the U.S. Embassy for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, including the ambassador, and talk to them about the robots. We were challenged to design programs and work with many tools, in teams, to complete our underwater robot for a final competition. Electronics proved to be fun challenge. I truly enjoyed the Calculus I class as I strengthened my skills greatly in that area. Humanities made me correct much of the Caribbean and World History that I had learnt before. I appreciated that, as well as the discussion of the One-Caribbean Concept and its profitability. Physics II opened a new world of Physics to me, which was great preparation for the coming school year. I polished some of my previous knowledge in the Biochemistry class, and was exposed to neuroscience. Testing the simulated serum for disease was also fascinating. Familiarizing ourselves with the business environment, during Entrepreneurship class, was very useful as we got to pitch business ideas on the last day. Moreover, our Mandarin "choir" was a lot of fun, and I hope to continue learning the language on my own.

Besides our routine classes, we received career seminars from very experienced people which I desperately needed. We also had scheduled outings. We saw the Concorde and actually finished the hike to Bathsheba, unlike the participants of the previous year. In addition, we were supposed to go to Harrison's Cave, but the rainy weather caused us to visit the mall instead. The last week included final exams for certain classes, in an effort to mark the students' progress.

The final day came quickly. We spent the first part of the day preparing our robots for the competition as well as our business and robot presentations. After lunch came the public presentation. We pitched our business ideas to pretend venture capitalists, and they financed the businesses with fake money. My group pitched the idea of a paper-thin, foldable tablet. We tied for second place with another group, i.e., we got the second highest offer from the venture capitalists. Then we had to do the Robotics presentation. We explained that the robot had to be able to maneuver in the water, pick up floating balls and release them in a basket area. We also gave a preview of the robot-making process. Then everyone moved excitedly to the field for the robot competition. My team had some technical difficulties with the robot, so we got last place. However, I was still pleased with the final product.

Finally, we left to prepare for the Farewell Banquet and Awards ceremony where we listened to students and TAs perspectives of SPISE, and received certificates of completion and course awards. Remarkably, I got awards for Calculus I, Robotics, and Spirit of SPISE. Then, Dr. Warde gave his final words, we took photos and simply enjoyed each other's company.

At the beginning of SPISE, we were asked to write down three goals that we would like to achieve during the course of the program. My goals were to develop a clearer view of my career path, form healthy relationships, and learn proper time management. I can now confidently say that I have achieved all three of my goals. I felt very comfortable with the theoretical and practical Robotics and Electronics. As a result, I am seriously considering a career in Electrical Engineering. Additionally, I formed meaningful relationships with my fellow SPISE students, TAs, and lecturers, and we exchanged on different aspects of our culture (dialect was especially interesting). I hope to keep in contact with all of them. Moreover, I received coaching in Time Management from Dr. Dinah Sah and I'm working on implementing what she taught us.

SPISE has caused me to grow, not only in academics, but as individual. I regret nothing when it comes to my participation in the program. I count the opportunity as a blessing and hope that other students will get the chance to experience SPISE.