

INTERVIEWS OF CSF SPISE GRADUATES

Interviewee: **Joel Beazer**
SPISE Class: **2013**
Home Country: **Antigua**
University: **Harvard University - Class of 2018**
Major: **Physics/Chemistry**
Date: **26 April 2018**



Question 1. How would you describe your SPISE experience?

Before going to SPISE, I was never a part of such an intense learning environment. I believe that SPISE has allowed me to learn new areas. It has also helped me to see that there are a number of brilliant Caribbean people in the world and that academics can be much higher than I had previously known it to be. SPISE was an eye opener and it challenged me more than I ever was before. It widened my understanding and knowledge of Mathematics and Physics and once I returned home to complete my A levels, I realized that I had learnt concepts that my peers had not yet seen. What I learnt at SPISE was very useful in preparing for CAPE.

Question 2. How did it impact you personally and academically?

Interestingly, the instructor for SPISE Math was involved in designing the CAPE Math syllabus. At school I had already been through CAPE Unit 1 and quite a bit of the material being taught at SPISE was for CAPE Unit 2. I was taught a very significant portion of the syllabus and when I returned to school for my second year of A levels, I already knew three-quarters of the material and I was able to assist other students. I was also able to directly apply what I learnt at SPISE in Math class. In Physics, some of the information was useful when I returned to complete CAPE Unit 2. SPISE allowed me to get comfortable with learning on my own. The areas covered in the classes was done very quickly by the Professors and they guided me on how to study the subject. Biochemistry was also very interesting which encouraged me to take up subjects along the Neuroscience field when I entered college.

Question 3. What life lessons did you take away from SPISE?

SPISE taught me that the world was much bigger than I thought at the time. There are many things and people to challenge a person, their ideas and their skills. Coming from a small island, there is a limited number of people at each skill level so the number of people you encounter is relatively small. SPISE was a concentration of people at my similar skill level and it opened my eyes to other persons who can challenge me. It caused me to stay sharp and focused. I learnt that life is not about hand-holding and easy paths. I have learnt to be self-guided and be able to communicate with other people and how to live with others in a relatively small space.

Question 4. Did SPISE help to develop your networking across the region?

I really believe so. SPISE introduced me to Professor Cardinal Warde who has a lot of interest in the Caribbean. I also became good friends with one of the Teaching Assistants and keep in contact with her. I have kept in contact with students from my SPISE year and made contact with other students who can make larger contributions to the Caribbean community.

Question 5. How did SPISE contribute to your mental preparation for your university/college experience?

I learnt new skills that I would not have learnt otherwise, for example Robotics and Computer Programming. I also learnt how the scientific knowledge acquired in secondary school could be applied in everyday situations and I met many friends and useful connections. Being around persons from many different walks-of-life was inspiring and it was preparation for university life, teaching me how to socialize and work with others, learning new cultures and ideas.

Question 6. How did SPISE impact your career goals and choice of major at university?

When I got into university I intended to study Biology, but after some thought I eventually I wanted to get into Biotechnology and Bioengineering but decided to learn the mathematical elements first and then go back to the Biology and Biochemistry. I chose to study Chemistry and Physics and the natural sciences to further understand how Chemistry and Physics are applied in the everyday world. SPISE helped me to maintain my interest in Biology and I have taken many classes in line with my goals and my hope is to pursue a graduate degree in Bioengineering.

Question 7. What are your plans/career goals after you graduate from university/college?

Currently, I am taking a gap year, but I am not certain what I will be doing during this period. There is a high probability that I will be working in New York at a small biotechnology company and then after, I intend to go to graduate school to pursue my degree in Bioengineering. My interest is in drug delivery and how Computer Science can be applied to problems in Biology. I must give further thought to how I will move on from there. I have hopes of moving into the fields of Industry or Academia but prefer Industry because it has a more direct application. I have more drive to produce something that's useful.

Question 8. How do your near-term plans fit into your long-term goals?

Working at the small biotechnology company, depending on what area I will be working in, will expose me to how science is being applied in industry and will show me what people are doing with Biochemistry or Computer Science in a biological context. I would like to ascertain what areas are most useful, interesting and popular and to get an idea of how it feels to work in Industry and to learn what motivates a scientist in a business context, for example how do scientists approach individuals who are not scientists but have a lot of power and funding. I want to network and meet people in industry who will be useful in the future and who can offer advice.

Question 9. What kind of impact do you want to make in your field of choice?

There are several levels to the impact I want to make. Of course, the financial factor and financial security are important, but I have a very serious interest in solving problems and understanding how to take the tools of science together with finding interesting solutions to the problems of the general population. Other goals in this area would be creating engineering solutions to medical issues and building robots for biological principals. The use of bio-materials piques my curiosity. I get gratification from building items that other persons find useful and contributing something to the world.

Question 10. What advice would you give to a student uncertain about the STEM disciplines?

I would say that STEM subjects are an extremely useful field to get into. There are many STEM related areas that are interesting, and even if they are not as interesting to you, the tools acquired and the advantage to studying STEM are that these subjects can be applied widely across the board. Even if you are unsure about it, try it out and depending on what level of education you are at, for example if you are in high school, you can sit in on a STEM class for a semester and see whether you like it or not. You can even try this approach in college. Do not reject the idea of STEM, give it a chance. These skills can be translated to other areas as well. The door is never closed with STEM.

Question 11. How can STEM subjects be more widely encouraged in the Caribbean?

The most important thing we can do in the Caribbean is to expose our students to how the subjects they are studying in STEM can be applied or be useful. In the Caribbean, the exposure to STEM, is in classes that give you information but nothing on the process or practical portion, like how the information or research was applied to get to the end result. Students should be helped in exploring the physical fields. We can find new ways to introduce students to STEM as there are not many scientists in the Caribbean.

Question 12. If you could change one thing about SPISE, what would it be?

I would make the Biochemistry course a bit more challenging, but I think that it is generally good as compared to the Physics and the Math course. Robotics was also very useful but could have been a bit more guided.

Question 13. Would you recommend SPISE to a younger you?

Definitely. I think it was a useful and enjoyable experience and would do it again if I was in the position to.

Question 14. How far do you see Science and Technology being advanced in your country in 10 years?

I do not believe it will go very far. My reason for this is because I have observed that a lot of interest in STEM is only now developing in Antigua. The people in my age group are usually focused on Economics, Politics or Law but it is only recently that students are being exposed to Science and Technology and STEM. Most students in these fields have an interest in pursuing graduate degrees which will take an additional 5-7 years to complete. So if anyone is to provide the spark for the Caribbean, it will not be the students in my year up and coming because they will either still be in school or would have just graduated from school and it will still be too soon to make a good impact.