

INTERVIEWS OF CSF SPISE GRADUATES

Interviewee: **Kester Wade**
SPISE Class: **2013**
Home Country: **Trinidad and Tobago**
University: **Stanford University - Class of 2018**
Major: **Chemical Engineering**
Date: **26 April 2018**



Question 1. How would you describe your SPISE experience?

My SPISE experience was really insightful. I was immersed in so many new topics like Mandarin, Biochemistry and Entrepreneurship. Plus, I really learnt about approaching problems critically and through collaborative design thinking with projects like building a robot and presenting a comprehensive business proposal. The program opened my eyes to possible future endeavors regarding college and beyond.

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

At that point in time, I had just finished upper sixth form, so SPISE was a good stepping stone for looking forward to my tertiary study plans. The program leaders did so much to help us form connections with Caribbean professionals, and to teach us about prospective career paths. Plus, Cardinal and Dinah were invaluable resources throughout the college application process. It really marked a turning point in my learning path by helping me learn to live independently, and showing me how to take full responsibility for defining and maintaining my optimal learning methods.

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

SPISE reminded me that, with a lot of effort, I could learn anything. I had never studied Biology before, but was challenged to learn in order to keep up with my first exposure to Biochemistry. It was daunting at first but after spending time learning, I was able to understand and even found the concepts to be quite interesting. Hand in hand with this, SPISE humbled me to be willing to solicit help and guidance from others, just as other might ask for my help.

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

Yes, it really did. At Stanford I'm two flights away from home and not really within a Caribbean "hotspot". Cardinal and Dinah are two amazing connections to make and through them I made other connections in CADSTI. They put me in touch with Caribbean folks in the Bay Area who have become trusted mentors, and almost like extended family. I have also kept in touch with SPISE classmates, and have even lived with one while at Stanford.

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

There are a lot of changes associated with going to university abroad- separation from home, being in a new country, cold weather...! Personally, I have had my challenges with balancing academics with other interests and extracurricular activities. SPISE helped me prepare tremendously by keeping me immersed in an intensive mix of work and activities. Whilst SPISE is only one month, it prepared me for an environment where I am work constantly. College life isn't like an 8am-4pm job, because even when you're out of class you have numerous home-work assignments to complete.

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

On entering the university, I was leaning towards Engineering, but my major discovery was more based on the subjects I enjoyed in secondary school and during SPISE. It's really difficult to pin down exactly what I want to do with my career, especially since that's constantly being updated. Nevertheless, SPISE helped me understand that anything is possible, I should do what excited me, and higher education is a great stepping stone to success. I remember some of the career presentations especially because of the indirect paths they portrayed. Now I hope to use my STEM learning to make some sort of implementable change to society.

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

Within the next year or two, I will be pursuing a Co-terminal master's degree at Stanford in Civil and Environmental Engineering, in the Atmosphere and Energy program. Before that, I will be working on Renewable Energy Policy for the Caribbean at the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI). RMI is a "Think and Do Tank" geared at sustainability. I will specifically be working on developing a business model for small island states to decrease their dependence on fossil fuels.

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

The internship is very interesting, and recently I have been thinking about the use of clean energy in the islands, so the internship is right on target with helping me to transition into my long-term goals. This is a great experience which will help me to recalibrate my interests and help me to decide what I will possibly want to do in the long term. It will also help me to define what I want to learn next through work or higher education.

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

Trinidad and Tobago is very fossil fuel dependent for many reasons, so much so that its CO2 emissions per capita are among the highest in the world. I would love to help build infrastructure to support clean energy use in the Caribbean- especially in T&T- to reduce pollution. I would love to be part of the wave that updates and upgrades the Caribbean energy market.

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

Try to find what excites you! I think the early secondary school curriculum is really geared towards teaching fundamental concepts with a limited emphasis on real-life applications. But STEM pervades almost every industry and field of work and its lessons are so universal. So my advice is to keep an open mind and don't feel pressured about not knowing what you want to do just yet. Try to find and clarify what topics, type of subjects, etc. that you enjoy, because this might be helpful later in helping to define your actual interests.

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

To me, there could be greater student exposure to STEM outside the classroom. There is a disparity between theory and practice, and I think we (students) don't get to see how STEM applies in daily life. I see potential in field trips to industrial plants like distilleries, manufacturing plants and bottling facilities to help display the practical side of STEM. Schools could try integrating how theoretical concepts might transcend the classroom into their lessons plans to help students really appreciate the importance of what they're learning.

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

There isn't much I would change about SPISE- though I do wish I could've spent more time in the program with my peers. There was an excellent integration of work time, bonding with peers and making meaningful connections with professors and Caribbean professionals- I still remember most of the people I met. I'm frequently reminded of how special it was to experience SPISE.

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

Yes, 120%. It was a great coming of age experience. It was nice to learn about certain subjects for the first time, and moving forward it made college in the United States a possibility that I didn't initially think would be very feasible.

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

In Trinidad and Tobago, there is tremendous potential for the advancement of Science and Technology. There is no shortage of sharp minds coming out of the country, but they are depending on the national authorities to invest in scientific development, R&D, technology areas, and create opportunities. Global connectivity in today's society has ruptured the gates wide open for information exchange. So I hope the authorities will take heed and craft a way for the country to capitalize on possible growth in the fields of Science and Technology.