

# Symposium Reflection – Summer 2011

Daniel B. Guilak

21 September 2011

This summer was quite the enlightening experience for me. Up until now I had never worked on a large individual project with only guidance from a mentor – and certainly never in chemistry. I sought out this opportunity doing organic chemistry research because I thoroughly enjoyed the course and I wanted to become more comfortable in laboratory and with the techniques therein. I was also curious to see if organic research was something that I would be suited for as a potential career. By the end of the summer, I felt at home in the laboratory.

The symposium was an experience unlike any other poster sessions I had been to in the past, and one that I was surprisingly prepared for – although I didn't realize it until the day of the event.

For the duration of the summer, everyone (and I mean *everyone*) asked me what I was researching. Sadly, organic chemistry inherently does not lend itself to an easy explanation to those who have not taken the course or familiarized themselves with the jargon. At first I would often skirt the question, but then I began thinking up metaphors and real-world examples (enantiomers can easily be explained using only two hands as props and many people have heard of *thalidomide*, a drug whose possession of chiral quality caused it to be either sleeping drug or teratogen). After a while, I could give the research-equivalent of the "elevator pitch" for what I was studying – I had it down to about a minute or so, and people claimed that they at least understood the gist of what I was trying to convey.

That being said, the symposium was comprised of essentially giving that pitch time after time after time, but with nice variation because with people with more science-oriented backgrounds, I could go into more detail and get into in-depth discussions. It also opened up some really fascinating conversations with professors whom I did not know. I also thoroughly enjoyed the

getting to see (i.e., getting amazed by) what my classmates and friends accomplished over the summer and having worldly conversations with them as well.

This program that the school and its beneficiaries sponsors is a vastly powerful one – it gives those who are curious about the natural sciences an outlet to explore whether or not research is for them. I personally am extremely grateful for this laboratory and symposium experience and the view into professional science research it has given me – one that I hope to pursue.