Recommendations

As much fun for me as this project was, it also was a tremendous amount of work. There is no way of estimation the amount to time it will take you to do a project of this magnitude, so I strongly recommend to anyone who is doing a research project in the future to start as soon as Mr. Thiel assigns you the project. It may seem like you have an eternity before it's due, but time flies by faster than you may expect it to.

One of the things I recommend anyone in the future to do is learn how you organize the project on a web page right away. Never having built my own web page before, I had to learn everything from how to scan in pictures to how to create links and buttons. I wish that back in September I had learned how to do these things, so that even if I wasn't working on the actual experiment, I could have been experimenting with sample pages to help my final one be created with less time and a little more ease. One of the problems that I ran into specifically was that I wanted to do as much of the web page at home, rather than school, because I was certain the rest of the class would be wanting to create their pages at school too. Unfortunately when I went to scan some pictures in on my computer, I was told I didn't have enough memory. I eventually solved this problem by working at school before everyone else was trying to and by doing some of my scanning at a store such as Kinkos.

My next piece of advice is that surveys are a pain. Avoid them if you can. I sent a letter explaining my purpose with the survey, and even a follow-up reminder letter a week later, yet still I didn't even get close to the amount of surveys I sent out back. Even some of the people that I had made previous contact with over the summer from other activities did not return the survey. Another problem with the survey is that people move. I got a few surveys back because the person was no longer at their latest address I had. Also, since all of my surveys went to scientists, it is important to keep in mind that they may be off experimenting somewhere, and you need to allow time for assistants to forward the mail to the scientists. One of the most helpful things I did was to include my e-mail address. Many people e-mailed me to say that the letter was on its way, or that the scientist was out of town, but they'd get the survey back to me as soon as he returns. This kind of communication was a relief to me, since I was worried about whether or not I'd receive anything back.

My last piece of advise is to use your contacts. They can help your life be so much easier! When I knew what I wanted to do for my experiment, I called up the lab looking for access to the machine I would need. What I got was a lot of, "What machine?" "Why did they transfer you here?" and "I have no idea" responses. Luckily, I am fortunate enough to have a nationally awarded scientist for an aunt, and when I brought it up, she knew someone she worked with who had a the equipment I would need and set me up right away. She also helped me out by suggesting ideas and going over my survey and information I should make sure to include in my report. My experience is, from this project and others, that if you can find a contact, they'll take care of you and make sure you get what you need.

picture taken by Lily Swift

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