

work we did for the past ten weeks. This was very upsetting to me since we just had that talk from Eliot about being proud of our work and I didn't feel like we were being allowed to. Eventually we decided to finish the REU paper and write a new one about cranks and whatever. I'm not thrilled about working on this stuff after the summer ends (especially for free) but I'd hate for Ves and Vlad's hard work to go to waste.

Today was our REU post-survey. I made sure to give a very truthful and complete picture of my time here. I hope someone actually reads it and doesn't just toss the report aside.

Evaluation time:

This summer has created some mixed feelings in me. I did learn some things though:

1. I like to blog.
2. I am probably going to grad school.
3. I am definitely not going to grad school for HCI.
4. I will not go to grad school for any STEM fields.

My biggest problem is that I simply don't belong here. Some of you, kind readers, may have noticed that I talk about doing lit review a lot. This is because lit review was all I did for the entirety of my ten weeks here. This is really unacceptable. It's no fault of the mentors or the other two interns on Team Robo, it's due to my lack of computer programming ability. However, this should have been taken into account during the selection process and some Psych major from Texas shouldn't have been placed in the most technically demanding group.

That leads me to my second point: Team Robo really ought to be a part of a separate REU or something. It has nothing to do with HCI and doesn't follow the schedule of the program at all. The extra hours after 5:00 pm became unbearable at times, but we still had to show up from 9:00 to 5:00 simply because of the extra work the program provided us with. The C++ class was too basic to be of any use and we didn't use Maya or OpenGL in our projects so those didn't really matter either (even though I absolutely loved Maya). Basically, if Team Robo were their own thing and allowed to come in whenever they wanted and didn't have the same constraints as the other REU students they'd probably be much happier. Also, they should all be experienced programmers so none of them end up having to do the grunt work for the whole summer. When I signed up for this internship I had wanted to do HCI to help me narrow my focus for grad school and decide if it was something I really wanted to do. I am probably even more confused now than I was before since I have done no HCI here.

I did like some things about the REU. Apparently this is one of the only ones that has several teams of a few kids so I really appreciated the social aspect. Having the other kids around was the only thing that kept me sane at times and the extra-curriculars were a god-send. Ted and Marie were particularly helpful in providing a lot of social support and helped me through some hard times. Modeling, despite being irrelevant to the project, was a fun course. I just wish I had been on one of the HCI using groups since I think that would have played into my talents a lot more.

Countdown: pretty darn close

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Comments Off](#)

March of the Blog Queen

Posted on [August 2, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

Today we had a luncheon lecture on augmented realities and their applications and... stuff. It was all I could do to stay awake so paying attention was a Herculean feat I was unable to accomplish. I think this shows that my interests really do lie outside of HCI since this is supposed to be a very interesting topic in the field and I really don't connect with it. The brownies that we had after lunch were good though.

Yesterday was Vlad's birthday so we went out and got him a cake and a balloon that said he was our BFF. I think he appreciated it. Shane also went away for realz this time which was a little depressing since I would have liked to hang out with him more before the end of this week.

Speaking of the end of the week, the time of my departure from bizarroworld is fast approaching and I have not even begun packing. I'll have to get on that soon. There are a few things about this place I like, but I'm super antsy and want to get going.

Research goes.

I really like my new iPod. It's one of the best devices I've ever bought.

Since I haven't written an overly long movie review in a while, I think I will now. We saw Megamind last night and I thought it was exceptional. It proved superior to its similarly themed and near-concurrently released rival film, Despicable Me in most ways. Even though I like Steve Carrel, I thought his fake Russian accent in DM was a little grating at times. The lead character, Gru, was a little boring to look at too while watching Megamind bounce around with an unexpected amount of agility was a joy to watch. The supporting cast in Megamind were at best very likable and at worst a little predictable. I actually hated the design for Minion the first time I saw a trailer for Megamind, but seeing him move around in the movie made me appreciate the cobbled-together-from-lots-of-parts nature of his construction. He and the brain bots were way better than the flatulating, giggling, yellow tumors that populated DM's backgrounds anyway. I thought Megamind was a surprisingly deep character too; his actions were motivated by a need for validation by those around him rather than any material reward. The fact that he had a relationship with the woman he frequently kidnaps even before his turn to heroism evidenced this well. As a psych major, I am told over and over that environmental factors are a huge factor in how a person grows up and I was surprised to see the issue tackled in a movie ostensibly made for children.

Countdown: 3 Days 10 Hours 34 Minutes

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Comments Off](#)

The Final Blogdown

Posted on [August 1, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

This weekend was interesting to say the least. Last night Veselin and I made several revisions to the poster and today it was finally turned in. It's being printed now so it's out of our hands which is fine by me. Apparently our research topic has taken another slight detour and Team Robo is on lit review duty again. I have no mouth but I must scream.

Now to talk about fun stuff:

Saturday Kerstyn, Alicia, and I went to Dess Moynees to cash our checks and do some shopping. I finally broke down and bought an iPod Nano 6th Generation with 16 gigabytes of memory. I got the red one since it was a little prettier than the puke green one and a portion of the proceeds went to fighting AIDS in Africa or something. Now I can be the hipster who is conscious of social issues! The decision to get a red one was not an easy one though. I took something like twenty minutes to choose between it and puke green. I really like green, even gross shades of it.

We also went to the Humane Society and saw all the puppies and kitties. We played with one pair of cats that were particularly adorable. The mother cat was really scared the whole time but the baby was a little spazz and kept running himself into the wall.

On Sunday Alicia, Kerstyn, and I were very disappointed to find out that the water park didn't open until 1:00 pm since we had planned on going early and I didn't think I'd have a chance to go before I left. Things worked out in the end and I got to go a little later (although we swapped Alicia out for Jordan). After that, it was the above mentioned work time.

Today has been strange. Vlad and Shane were working on Shane's last experiment until about 5:00am so Vlad still has not appeared as of this writing. When he gets here I'm sure wackiness will ensue.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Number of the Blog

Posted on [July 29, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

Yesterday is a big blur to me. I'm trying to remember exactly what I did but all I can think about was how we were all in the lab until 3:00 am. Oh wait, it's starting to come back to me. I recall there being some kind of talent show. I performed the final dialog from *Gone with the Wind* in the stylings of Alicia and Dan. Half way through I didn't feel like doing the whole thing so I started improvising so I could finish faster. I think my Dan impression was surprisingly good but my Alicia needs work. I forgot to do the Alicia Hamster Dance while I spoke and that was really a key part of capturing her countenance. We also played Powerpoint Karaoke which was an improv activity in which we were given a random powerpoint presentation and told to present the material as best we could without having practiced or seen the material before. It was fun and I think I did a good job imparting upon the kids the evils of cover letters.

It's our last weekend together and I'm starting to feel sad to see the other interns go. I'm glad to get back to my usual routine at Rice but some of these kids are going to be a pretty big loss. Tomorrow we're going to Des Moines (which I refer to as Dess Moineys) tomorrow to cash checks and hang out for a while. I also hope to start packing a little bit this weekend so my escape goes smoothly.

Countdown to Departure: 8 days 9 hours 59 minutes

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Blogmouth Strikes Again

Posted on [July 28, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

Yesterday was as fun as a cylindrical container full of primates. It started out pretty slowly at the Principal center. None of the information was super new to me since I learned about how the industry treats (or mistreats) human factors kids in my HCI class last semester. Dr. Kortum was full of all sorts of stories about his time working in the industry so HCI doesn't have this air of mystique for me the faculty here seem to think it does. Lunch was very good. CJ and I split some delicious cheesecake. After that we toured the Science Center. This was where the majority of the primates came in since, despite being for kids, most of the exhibits were at least fun to mess around with. Body Worlds was the highlight of the afternoon. Seeing bodies splayed open with all their innards showing was gruesomely intriguing and I liked the exhibit that showed the difference between different countries eating habits. When we got back it was haircut time! I look like a surprisingly respectable young man. I don't know if I like that, but I think the cut looks good. I even bought some overpriced (very overpriced) hair goo for special occasions.

The lit review has gone under another revision but it is still a horrible Frankenstein's monster, with parts falling off here and parts hastily sewn on there. I think he's at least alive though, groaning and mumbling about fire being bad. I'll make him into a real person eventually, it'll just take some more cosmetic surgery. We're still struggling to find out what our final experiment will be. It'll happen though. I believe in us!!!!

Tonight is the talent show. I am dedicating my performance to Alicia. I think she'll really appreciate it. Veselin is going to read the Gettysburg Address in his usual chipper voice. I think it'll provide a humorous juxtaposition to the somber events the speech is dedicated to. I look forward to hearing his rendition.

Countdown to Departure: 9 Days, 10 Hours, 53 minutes

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#)

The District Blogs Alone Tonight

Posted on [July 26, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

This morning we were awoken by the dulcet tunes of the fire alarm, sweetly serenading us with its blaring song of deceitful dirty sensors. I had actually fallen asleep after turning my alarm off so it was actually pretty handy that the fire alarm went off since it kept me from sleeping waaaay in (like some people did...).

Today the lecture was about how to apply to grad school. I was told that without knowing exactly what I want to do with my life right now that I am doomed to failure forever. This concerns me because I do not want to fail forever. I hope Dr. Chen can lend me some guiding words since she's one of the few professors I've worked extensively with. Working on my personal statement is also

something I need to do, since even if I don't know exactly what I want to do, I should be able to sound like I do. Apparently, my weak personal statement was also the reason for my being tossed into Team Robo since it was too difficult for anyone to tell what I was capable of. This method of placement seems suspect to me, but it is perhaps several months too late to ruminate on this topic so I shall let it lie.

The kids have a fever and the only cure is more lit review.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#)

She Blogs the Drum

Posted on [July 25, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

Saturday most of us went paintballing and it was a lot of fun. I was pretty bad at it, but I think that's mostly due to the fact that I couldn't see out of my visor most of the time since it was fogged up. I also had a problem keeping my mask attached to my head. I didn't get shot too many times though, and when I did it didn't really hurt that much which was surprising. Vlad and Shane came and played with us as well. It was nice getting to hang out with them outside of work. Shane is good simply because he's fast and good at hiding whereas Vlad is terrifying because he never stopped shooting and wasn't afraid of running out there and taking some shots if it meant inflicting some pain. I dueled Shane and lost. I at least fired some shots at him before he got me in the hand.

Sunday I went soul searching in Des Moines. There are better places to search for souls than in Des Moines. I did find some pants though. I also finished watching *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*. It was a very artsy movie, more concerned with being visually stunning than telling a super exciting story. It has a lot of buildup but I think the payoff was worth it. I think if I'd been in the mood or had more energy I could have finished it in one sitting.

Today Veselin and I brainstormed some ideas for an experiment to test our constraint mapping algorithm. We are thinking about trying to get the robot to turn a steering wheel with a trucker knob on it. This would allow it to map constraints as well as adapt to newly introduced constraints in the environment (when the steering wheel stops turning the robot should start turning it the other direction). Shane suggested having the robot pull a drawer out of a dresser which would work as well and might be less work. This made Vess and I think about our robo-maid idea and how in order to have a real robo-maid you'd need at least four robots. One robot to open doors, one robot to fold towels (taking 20 minutes a piece), one robot to open drawers, and one robot to push the other robots around. *Sigh*, and I really liked robots before...

Vess and I also demolished a package of Ritz crackers. We can't let all that food in those coolers go to waste, now can we?

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Comments Off](#)

Another Blog in the Wall (Part 2)

Posted on [July 22, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

Unfortunately I continue to have nothing interesting to write about. Tomorrow we are going paintballing which should be a lot of fun, especially since I've never done it before. Aside from that, it's just business as usual which is just lovely. I think I'm going to slowly start packing in anticipation of my exodus from the midwest in two weeks. Hopefully if I start early it'll be less painful than if I start the night before leaving.

Also, I'm running out of puns. It's a good thing this thing is ending in two weeks or I don't know what I'd do.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Saturday Nights Alright for Blogging

Posted on [July 21, 2011](#) by [Ramy](#)

Howdy Y'all!

Today we had an etiquette luncheon and we learned how to take tiny bites of

food and make silent signals to the wait staff to take our plates away because heaven forbid we talk to the help when we're at a fancy dinner. I never really saw myself as one of those anti-elitists (people who have talked to me about movies can attest to that) but this whole high-fallutin' fancy dinner thing was irritating to me. I don't feel like you can learn much about a person by watching them eat unless they are absolutely atrocious in their manners, and if everyone learns the same rules and follows them then you are eliminating even that small bit of information. Furthermore, if I were applying for a job, I'd want to be hired for my skills, not my table manners. It's just a tedious relic from the 19th century which my friends back at Rice are all about but I am hardly enamored with.

I performed Team Vet Med's usability study. They did an admirable job and I'm very glad Kerstyn got her website working in such good condition since I know it was giving her trouble for some time. I remember doing usability tests in my HCI class last semester. Mine was way jankier and involved way more cardboard and duct tape, so good job Vet Med for having no duct tape in your study.

Apparently Veselin Falcon Punched the robot last night and it's lying broken in pieces in the lab. Aside from that, things are going as they tend to. Vlad gave me some much appreciated feedback on my section and I'm working on doing that.

Having Alicia compliment me every hour was a great idea and was just about as hilarious as I thought it would be. The following summarize her kind words.

1. It was nice of you to share your mozzarella sticks yesterday.
2. Your flat forehead means you have a chance of being either more or less intelligent than average!
3. You have shiny hair.
4. Your outfit doesn't clash today.
5. You are good at "voicing your opinion".
6. You are good at being annoying (I said this didn't count so she replaced it with...)
7. If you were killed and made into barbeque you would probably taste pretty good with paprika.
8. You're like a pair of old man shoes. You're not particularly stylish or attractive, but you're at least useful.

What a horrible child.

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