

Monica Berron

Posts from me

Pinkies up and we are done

Posted on [August 1, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I really liked our etiquette lunch yesterday. Many of the others found it too proper, but I liked the fine dining aspect. I definitely made mistakes, but I felt kinda cool? And no, you didn't have to hold up your pinkies or anything like that.

Today we did a demo practice, which was a very accurate portrayal of what Friday will feel like. While all the presentations have personally been frustrating for me, I think they will pay off and I should continue to improve my pitches.

I'm glad I took the time to challenge and reflect on my work ethic here. I'm proud of the hours I built in a group setting. Looking back, this is probably the best group project I've had to do. I have had some particularly sad ones in my undergraduate career. I never thought I could have collaborated with two engineers who were really cool, and well-versed.

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10 Minutes of Fame

Posted on [July 30, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I have the Fame theme song stuck in my head.

Tomorrow we are presenting our poster and project at Eliot's WATCH research team meeting. At the end of every meeting there is presentation called "10 Minutes of Fame" where someone presents a virtual reality subject or area of interesting research to the team that isn't necessarily done at VRAC. We were encouraged to share our work with the team for this week's meeting. It's exciting to present to the people at VRAC and practice for Friday's symposium. I have created slides with an agenda and we will practice at the end of today.

We'll also be having an Etiquette Luncheon tomorrow, which I hope is funny aside from informative.

I think many of us are excited to go home and some of us will even be on the same flights ☺

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Friday!

Posted on [July 27, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

It's our last Friday at VRAC and it was also our last journal club session! Amanda and Hua picked a cool topic, college student diets, and we had a great discussion. We're all starting to miss these experiences.

Adriana and I switched gears today to check on each other's work on the poster and paper. Eric is supposed to



come by to implement code with Jordan, but due to some other factors we might not get to pilot until much later. We're focusing on writing a brief results section and in-depth future work section to justify our experiment and challenges.

I'm nervous about having free time next week and being under the time crunch. It's our last free Friday and this time next week we'll be presenting and leaving. I'm not going to believe it and when I go home this will feel like a dream.

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Continuing progress and field trips

Posted on [July 26, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

This morning we received great feedback on our poster and paper so Adriana and I have each taken the two projects to finalize. We are moving calmly but surely through our program and are choosing not to be outcome-oriented.

We also had a discussion with Pam about making our results simple to have the poster print on time. We will only run a pilot study, if that, but that doesn't mean we haven't learned anything from this experience.

I'm really glad to feel less under pressure although it's easy to get disappointed when you don't achieve or over-achieve on a project.

I enjoyed the career field trip we took yesterday to the Science Center and Principal Financial. I liked going to workplaces with different cultures. The rooftop luncheon was also really cool and scenic.

Later tonight a few of us are going to the DeMoss farm, an event which requires no justification or explanation in Iowa.

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7.24.12

Posted on [July 24, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

We are having another wonderful day at VRAC. I'm happy with the progress we made this morning and hopefully Jordan will be done his portion today for our experiment to start coming together. I am continuing to work on the poster and Adriana started thinking about ways to adjust our paper. She did a great job of finalizing the poster yesterday so everyone on the team was happy.

Today we had our last luncheon lecture, which was a little scary. When I get back home, I'll probably wake up at the same time in the morning thinking I need to catch Cyride...

Thelma did a great job of explaining the nitty gritty details of grad school to us today. This program is really appealing and accommodating, but I have also done little research on schools. She provided so many resources for researching grad schools and preparing for the GRE.

It's also my room-mate Alex's birthday! Over the last three years I've learned that having great room-mates is such a blessing. I'm really going to miss our little apartments here.

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Where are we?

Posted on [July 23, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

This morning I was very happy to be making progress with Adriana on our experiment. We found the position coordinates for each of the organs we want to test. It was definitely too hard of a task to conquer last week on a Friday afternoon.

Jordan is also coming along with the program, but I'm not absolutely positive about where we are time-wise. Eric will also have to come in a later point to put our two pieces together.

Eliot also took a look at my computer and explained why ISIS runs slowly on it. Poor Bob Slydell. I'm excited to have a demo of our experiment at the symposium, if we can pull it off. It has to run on a stronger hard drive.

I'm glad Eliot's back and I'm a bit too anxious to finish the project. I should try to focus on ending on a high note versus just completion.

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7.20.12

Posted on [July 20, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Long time no see. I was reminiscing about all of us going to Walmart on the first night scrambling with 10 bags of groceries each in the Iowa State vans. It's truly been a long summer, but not in a bad way.

I go back and forth between grad school ideas often now. I'm very glad we got to hear Melissa's insight yesterday. She told us exactly how we would spend our time here and what Iowa's like, which I appreciated. She also took the time at lunch to talk with many of us one-on-one, which was very nice. The main aspect I'm needing to reflect on are career options, if I were to apply to an HCI program.

Today, Adriana and I looked at organ coordinates, which is difficult. Bethany is working on a structure for us to create our user study (Isis' 3rd I believe). Jordan is collaborating again and I hope he feels less overwhelmed. I'm glad we have insight from many mentors here because it allows problems to be solved in more ways when you've run out of ideas.

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Apparently we're worry warts?

Posted on [July 17, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

It's really great to hear from our mentors that we've done a good job here, but apparently we're also known as the more worrisome bunch from previous summers. While that's not necessarily a good trait, I know I've definitely enjoyed being with more like-minded peers as opposed to my other undergrad experiences.

I also forgot to mention last week that we had our last Ethics class. I came more prepared for this one, but I actually found the case less difficult than our first case study. We didn't come down to an easy solution or conclusion, but the nature of the study is familiar to me because I've taken a number of classes in politics, contemporary moral issues, written argumentation etc. I also live in a fairly hot political area so the cases on safety and engineering are refreshing to me.

Today, we're having starting our discussion on graduate school and the HCI program. It's great for me because I have a limited time to think about graduate school. While I'm interested, I also believe it's almost impossible to plan for things so far in advance. Especially because you can't accurately predict where you'll end up in 6 months or a year. I mean, Ames, Iowa. Perfect example.

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Update to Week 8

Posted on [July 13, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

This week was excellent in general.

I enjoyed visiting John Deere and taking a field trip. I'm also happy to say I received helpful feedback on the poster and Adrianna and I are working on drafts. Jordan is working hard programming and got a lot of tech support yesterday.

Today, I was a test subject for DPIVE's experiment, which was great and gave me good experience for when we run our experiment. We basically had target practice with guns in a 3D environment.

I'm very excited to learn more about the HCI graduate program and graduate school next week. Our REU is very different from traditional REUs and makes this grad program appealing. I'm making the mistake of future tripping right now and want to get back to work to make the next very few weeks count.

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QT and Poster time

Posted on [July 9, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I'm trying to practice a QT interface today. Bethany showed us how to use the Designer program last Friday. There's lots of loops and command prompts.

Jordan is working away on Kinect code and Adriana is thinking about touching up our paper. I have a feeling I'll be leading the poster portion. We are going to a lecture on how to design it today and I'm looking forward to it.

My overall hope is to contribute more to the experiment and program development and keep us on track to deliver a prototype this week. We are going to the John Deere lab Wednesday too. No pictures allowed :/

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7.6.12

Posted on [July 6, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

We are enjoying another relaxed Friday and it's also pay day. I'm so glad for these days and that we've come so far. We're researching hand gestures and trying to install the right programs to build our project for experimentation. Other groups have prototypes and user tests going, which I'm excited to experience.

I'm really happy to go home in four weeks to enjoy August to myself and have this experience to take with me. My mantra right now is to appreciate and stay engaged in the present moment while also getting plenty of rest during our stressful weeks!

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Totally awesome lecture in Design for Social Inclusion

Posted on [July 5, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Okay, the whole lecture wasn't strictly about social inclusion, but the user studies Debra has done really resonated with me. She does projects involving children with autism and creating applications to aid in reproductive health empowerment for young women.

I don't think I've talked about my interest in young women's health, but basically I know many women with feminine health issues including cancers and I think the lack of preventative research we have for young women is not acceptable.

While Debra definitely does other work in product design, the public policy points she touches on are very meaningful to me and remind me of my classes at school.

I'm so glad these luncheon lectures happen twice a week because they really allow us to get the full view of this program, which is not limited to the four projects we are working on currently.

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Mind Blown

Posted on [July 3, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Today we asked Eliot to give us his talk on HCI, which stumped us because we could not predict what technology will be out in the next five years. Maybe we should have gone with the ISIS lecture.

I think it's interesting how lots of engineers get into industry and entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is not discussed in my discipline although business is, and entrepreneurship courses are also new and in small supply at my school. I personally think that online entrepreneurship is fascinating.

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Presenting

Posted on [July 2, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

The next two weeks are focused on getting ready to present our work while starting program development and experimentation. We might not get to our user study during the rest of our time here, but the ISIS team really wants to make our program well and conduct a pilot study. I'm excited to see what it will look like in the end.

This morning I wrote a presentation outline and we will rehearse tomorrow. I'd really like to do this well. I've sat through pretty embarrassing presentations in my undergrad career.

I've also been looking at the posters around VRAC because our draft is due at the end of next week. It's weird for me to think about doing all these things so far in advance, but maybe the less-structured schedule we have currently just makes me *feel* like we have more time.

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5 more weeks

Posted on [June 29, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

So our IRB was not done and I nearly killed it yesterday. We received a serious final edit. I then proceeded to mix up corrected files accidentally, but I got all the needed signatures okay. I turned in the hard copy at 4pm. Such an

arduous day. I hope no more corrections are required.

Our debate in Eliot's class was interesting and challenging. I'm curious about what the next case study will be.

Today we are chilling although working ahead is important. I'm kind of recovering from yesterday although I rested a great deal last night.

Tomorrow we will be up early to go to the Farmer's Market in Des Moines. I'm glad to get away.

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Slacking!

Posted on [June 27, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I've been slacking on this blog. Quick update? We are done IRB! Hooray! I'm so glad I gained that experience and know how to do those forms in the future. Bethany was of tremendous help to us and we're continuing to work on our writing skills. We are working on our literature review, which is sort of tedious. It's hard to back up the specific claims required especially when combining two different worlds like video games and medicine. My team mates have really been helping me research which I'm so grateful for. We're hoping that together this afternoon we can tie loose ends and knock out the last questions about game devices together.

We have a fairly large amount of homework including research for Eliot's Ethics class. I wish I had a time machine for my sleep cycle... ☹

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Switching Gears

Posted on [June 22, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Overall and simply stated, I feel I have a better grapple on switching gears at this REU (on the day morning classes end and we're three weeks in...)

To share something different in light of our "How to Give a Talk" lecture with Dr. Gilbert, I'd like to include two of my favorite TEDtalk videos, which apply to this experience. I connect with Robinson's arguments on the limited view of intelligence and I'm thinking of re-watching Brown's video due to the trials and tribulations I'm going through now with research.

Enjoy the weekend!

[Sir Ken Robinson](#)

[Brene Brown](#)

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IRB

Posted on [June 21, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

We are behind at the moment. We got mixed up with due dates and are starting work earlier than expected. I'm a bit mad at myself for not taking initiative earlier to avoid control freak comments. I feel like it's been too quiet and I haven't taken the opportunity to lead.

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Why I Always Recommend a Power Outage

Posted on [June 20, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

This time last year, I was stuck in a huge electrical ordeal at a residential life job. One surge bursting turned into an unpredictable nine-day ordeal with hundreds of students, no a/c, record high East Coast heat, generators, and two days at a hotel. Also our first week on the job, every person's true colors were revealed. Disaster forces people into leadership and collective power. Furthermore, in our electronic disconnect, we were all able to connect on a humane level. I learned who my real friends were and which co-workers had my back. I made the friends who would willingly give a hand and cover a 3am shift for me. Working with the bare essentials and no outside accessibility was liberating and fun.

The recent Ames outage was certainly child's play in comparison, but I'm always prepared because of that past experience. Yesterday, we were forced to avoid overwhelm because no tools were accessible. VRAC was obsolete. Coincidentally, we had an outdoors activity scheduled for late last night and spent hours taking these really cool light photos with flashlights that created shapes and letters. It was relieving to find joy in something innately human and simple. Electronic cameras and flashlights are "natural" in comparison to VRAC.

I think that power outages happen for a reason. Disconnection ultimately allows for connection.

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Staying Afloat

Posted on [June 18, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I'll be glad when we have no more classes. This week marks our last course week in Computer Graphics. (We just finished our HCI course and will have more classes spread over time.) We are using OpenGL, which is essentially created graphics with C++. It's not so bad. We are only creating shapes and lines so far. I hope it doesn't get tremendously more complicated this week. I was very tired this morning and found it hard to focus, but I caught up.

My wood pieces are floating and still lack shading. I'm going to have to inquire further about that.

I'm still enjoying my Craigslisted bike and the long vacation away from home. While occasionally I wish I was just hitting the beach this summer, I don't regret this enriching experience and never being bored.

Also, my wonderful roomie Alex made Rotel over the weekend, which was delicious. I definitely don't mind the southern cooking over this trip.

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Gender in Comp Sci

Posted on [June 15, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

We had an interesting discussion in class today about [women](#) in computer science and their declining numbers. The group felt the study wasn't specific enough in factors and only pertinent to the California population, but the topic itself brought in good debate.

I'm continuing to model my wood pieces. Rotating and shaping them is fascinating. Creating the shadows is my next endeavor.

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Day 16?

Posted on [June 14, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Today we're going to finishing our problem area paragraph and tomorrow I'll be finishing my modeling project. I thought this (or a piece of it) would be interesting to recreate and practice textures.

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Break from Modeling and into Med School

Posted on [June 13, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I want to take a break from modeling to focus more on our literature review. Maya is annoying me and I'm having to relearn things everyday, but I'm glad to be adapting.

I just found an article on the stress of medical school. First year students are our likely test subjects so we're formulating ideas on how to help them view organs with technology. We had another meeting with Eliot yesterday where he pushed and challenged us to get quantitative and affirmative about what we're going to test. So we're whipping out the numbers now.

The tools we are able to use are fascinating, but medicine is so slow moving to adopt and make tools accessible. It makes more sense to me to put money into prevention research than treatment for this reason.

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Art in HCI

Posted on [June 12, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Today, I was greeted with tons of foot traffic biking to lab, but still made it quickly. In coming to class early, I started to talk to our Modeling mentor and got great advice for my next tech and art editing program investments. I should basically take advantage of my student discounts in my last year of college. I felt good about our Modeling exercise today and enjoy learning Maya. However, my group's big project is not quite model-based.

Our faculty luncheon today was with a professor who does sonification or who programs audio signals you might hear on your computer (i.e. Mac trash bin). He had a geology background and has always been a "programmer" or "tech guy" on the side selling his work as "geology". Many people in HCI have these unique twists when it comes to their identity.

I was excited to find an article on Kinect being used in a urological surgery, which I'm reading for our last-minute planned, weekly team meeting today. Problem area paragraph due this week already!

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Modeling and a better picture

Posted on [June 11, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

We had our first Modeling class today, which I think was a success. Maya appears to be a tease and you have to save your work as a new file every twenty minutes to better guarantee an uncorrupted file or losing data after a crash (which Maya does often). I'm very glad I bought extra storage devices for this trip.



After talking with our awesome graduate mentor, Bethany, I found there will be more of a focus on C++ when it comes to our project versus modeling and graphics, which we are learning in the next two weeks. However, it is important I learn those tools for possible future HCI projects.

Right now we're waiting to get access to files on our computers so we can start playing with medical visualizations and seeing where we will be putting our coding.

I'm also thinking of starting a Google doc for our problem area paragraph. Tonight's plan is Modeling homework and more lit review.

I'm really proud of the bike trip I took over the weekend. I ran errands with zero gas and plastic bags. We also know who the other REUS on campus are now after our big picnic yesterday. Lots of engineers and medicine school-bound kids. Our group was hard to explain as usual 😊

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Better Today + pictures

Posted on [June 8, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I'm feeling better today after our first research meeting with the team. Unfortunately, our faculty mentor could not attend, but I feel much more guided in my literature review research. I'm happy I did more work yesterday, making a research reading list and trying to find coding assistance online. I also read for our journal club, which is becoming an important part of our experience so we can read articles properly.

I'm a bit worried about not having enough written coding experience and I hope it's just a part of the many parts of HCI. I also hope I enjoy modeling and graphics. The next time I take a coding class, I might set goals for myself about the skills I want to learn in a language to guide me. I think I just took things in and didn't set enough personal goals for myself this week. But it's only the first work week!

I also keep forgetting to add pictures from the past week!

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Not much

Posted on [June 7, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I honestly don't have much to say today. We went to another lecture and learned about the same kinds of projects done in the cave and C6. A few of the students could see themselves doing those virtual programs, which was cool. Almost every professor we've heard from has ended up back in Iowa, which is interesting. One of the perks of being a professor is travel. It seems like a more humane job than working equally as hard in a cubicle. At a university you see students grow and move onto better things unlike at a company. Does on the job training still exist with programs this comprehensive?

Graduate school is really important and I hope to gain the patience for research during this experience, which I don't have too much of currently. At the moment, I'm trying to adjust my literature review game plan. I might hit the library.

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Oh the Humanities!



Posted on [June 6, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

We are into day 3 of programming and it's pretty intense. Somethings flew over my head and I'm using online references to do our current assignments. I'm trying to gauge how much I should learn C++, focus on our presentation Monday, and continue literature research for our big project. I'm not a fan of juggling, but I suppose it's an acquired skill and I'm not completing unfamiliar with it as a college student.

Today we were lucky enough to meet two former REUs who were accepted to the HCI graduate and PhD programs. They both had computer backgrounds unlike myself. They said the REU program confirmed their interests in graduate school so it's nice to know how much can be gained from this experience.

This experience is proving to be very event packed and enriching. However, my interests are drifting more towards the user experience and business side of HCI, which we'll cover more in the weeks to come. I also feel like I should ask more questions. Just a hunch.

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[Programming Day 2 and our first Luncheon Lecture](#)

Posted on [June 5, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

I feel like a sponge today. We just had our first lecture with Dr. Stephen Gilbert, which gave us a taste of grad school and the HCI program here at Iowa. We learned about his diverse background alongside his research in computerized learning tutors and interfaces. We had the opportunity to ask lots of questions about the best ways to get into grad school such as finding the right department and network based on what you plan on doing with your degree afterward. I feel really lucky to be exposed to this kind of talk, get free advice, and gain new insights. I can't help finding though that our group is quiet especially today and maybe collectively we are still adjusting to this new intensive environment. Or maybe the discussion of graduate school felt over our heads.

Last night, my team discovered our strengths and weaknesses. Some of us are concerned about what we bring to the table and how we can equally contribute. With team members in different fields, you are forced to divide equal amounts of work in different fields too, which is feels uneasy when trying to create a computer program for homework. The practice of trust from the ropes course feels especially relevant to HCI work.

We're also going to see the transit of Venus tonight. Talk about once in a lifetime!

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[Lessons from the Ropes Course](#)

Posted on [June 4, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Saturday I learned that it is extremely difficult for me to trust and be vulnerable as was demonstrated at the Iowa Valley Adventure Course. I was pretty good at being a pendulum (I was caught by two people on either side of me), but falling and heights were another story. I'm proud that I almost made it to the top of a fifty foot climbing course. I also took some neat scenic views, which I can add here later. It was difficult for me to climb the course although there was someone holding my rope at the bottom. I found that it's hard to accomplish a large goal without the support of others and trusting in them.

Today was our first lecture and programming day. We are starting our full work weeks with homework and examining



research articles. Jordan Adriana and I have decided to create a tic-tact-toe board with C++, which I think is achievable. I made one in Java many months ago and I'm understanding C++ so far, but it's only been day one!

Eliot also gave us all a nice talk about relaxing and having a good time here, which was reassuring despite our overwhelm. My group tends to work well independently so most of the magic will happen when we put all the pieces together. This is a good challenge for me because I work better with others, but I know that I can turn to my other mentors for support.

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Research Intensive- Getting in the Zone

Posted on [June 1, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Today we had our first journal club reading where we also reviewed the milestones of the REU. We have to start reading and really getting into our specific research projects. I'm excited to get into the nitty gritty now. When it comes to research reports I tend to struggle at the beginning and enjoy the analysis later so I'm going to try to do these parts I don't like as soon as possible: finding the problem area, developing a thesis etc. Our Literature Review and Methods are also going to be time-consuming so I need to plan ahead for that.

I really feel like I have to focus all my attention here or else I'll forget something. It's actually very beneficial that I'm not near home, but I think I'm going to ask all my friends and family to call me because I gotta get in the zone!

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First Impressions + Bio

Posted on [May 31, 2012](#) by [Monica](#)

Hello and welcome to my first post! I just finished talking with Eliot and Bethany about the background of our project and got a feel for medical visualizations. I took a lot of notes and I'm still unfamiliar with the lingo, but my only assignment for now is to do research on users using video game technologies to view 3D medical scans (CTs, MRIs etc). Overwhelming, but very exciting. I'm glad to be exploring past research next week aside from learning C++, which is a language I have no experience with! I'll let you know how it all goes.

I'm a Media and Communication Studies major with a pending Web Development certificate (and a minor in English). I also speak Spanish and have familiarity with the Midwest because that's where my family is from. I come from Maryland and I'm enjoying the rural vibes. Iowa State is lovely and I'm excited for how the next ten weeks will go. I'm a fan of Jason Mraz, Norah Jones, veggie smoothies, the interwebs, freelance, the blogosphere, video editing, and mentoring.

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Press f for fullscreen.

