

Ambassadors Expand Their Horizons

Abhi Gandhi

Adapting to college life was a challenge especially in the beginning. From being surrounded by a sea full of new faces, meeting different people from diverse places, and after, having new experiences with these individuals; the whole course was such a journey. Although tough, the most valuable experience to me was learning how to live in an environment where I am completely independent and open to choose any path I want, may it be as simple as choosing what to eat, what courses to take with each other, or what organizations to prioritize. In my freshman year, one of the classes that really caught my attention was Solidworks, which is a computer program that allows me to

transform my 2D idea to a 3D plastic figure. It further reinforced my interest, respect, and love for engineering, as although it was strenuous, I still had fun creating the different representations.

At first glance, the sheer number of organizations and opportunities present at UF astounded me, but I was warned not to get overinvolved, as it would affect my studies and quality of participation. After careful consideration, I decided to become a member of an organization called FLEG, which stands for Freshman Leadership Engineering Group. This exclusive engineering organization critically chooses freshman-engineering students and trains them to be the leaders of tomorrow



After months of planning, the annual FLEG banquet was a success.

by encouraging them to do volunteer work, allows them to plan engineering and to create connections to their fellow colleagues. Moreover, I also joined a research project known as UNP. The goal of the project is to create a Nano-satellite that will pre-

cisely measure time of flight of light and its data carrying capabilities. The implication of this technology has the ability of upgrading the current and aging global positioning satellites by making each satellite smaller, cheaper and more efficient.

Ashwin Babuji

I attended the University of Florida for my first year as a college student. Here I made many friends in the honors program, and took part in many activities. I took part in groups such as Honors Without Borders, Doctors Without Borders, ISA and in each of these I met new people and forged new bonds.

Each group also had a service work aspect where we helped different groups out. The thing I was most proud of this semester however, was when I taught adults and kids higher level

math and reading skills so they could get their GEDs. Following the Pre-Med track has been challenging, yet it gives me such a rewarding feeling that I know I wouldn't want to do anything else.

Finally, I am glad to say that I helped create a small group where we would share our beliefs and perspectives on life and religion. I am looking forward to next year where I will be volunteering at the hospital and continuing my journey on the premed track.

Nikita Patel

They say Junior year is the hardest, and they are all so right. The classes become more specific towards one's major and they become even more competitive than before; as if, physics and organic chemistry weren't competitive enough. There is no room for mistakes. My advice to those who are becoming Juniors: focus on school, do not be intimidated by the specificity of the classes, and mentally prepare yourself for a hard year. Throughout my Junior year I completed more than half of the courses needed for my major—Microbiology.

Freshman year of college was absolutely amazing! From friends and social life to classes and research, I enjoyed almost everything about my first year at Harvard. I've always been

I also became involved with a Plant Defense Research lab, which is quite interesting so far. On top of that, I became a Microbiology Lab TA for a semester and a walk-in tutor for Biochemistry.

Currently, over summer, I am a TA for Organic Chemistry II, and taking Public Speaking, which is more nerve wrecking than I anticipated, but so far, it has been going great. I am still involved with Alleviating International Diseases and Students with a Greater Smile. In addition, I participated in the Diwali Show at UF this year hosted by the Indian Student Association.

passionate about technology, so I dove right into the startup scene this year. I found a couple of great co-founders and built Turftalk (a location-based social network) and Butucu (a platform

Students pose at the annual Garba program hosted by the University of Florida's Indian Student Association.



Neel Patel

for retail stores to connect with in-store customers via flash deals). We were lucky enough to be one of a few teams selected nationwide to be part of the Summer@Highland incubator, so we'll be spending our summer working on our startup full time out in California! I've already learned that college is a great time to start a company – you have the freedom and time to take chances on interesting ideas without having to worry about revenue or a job immediately. The ".edu" email address is an awesome way to get introductions; we've lined up a great set of mentors and advisors that

we never would have found without college connections.

Other than entrepreneurship, I also spent a semester researching at MIT's Media Labs, and was active in Harvard's South Asian Association (SAA). As part of SAA, we've hosted multiple charity events and parties benefitting education and equality groups in India, as well as created and hosted Ghungroo, an Indian dance performance and Harvard's largest dance event. This year has taught me how to find a balance between work and play, but also between academic and cultural pursuits.



Ashwin participated at the South Asian Cultural Festival in Orlando.



Students at Harvard come together for a photo after putting on a show.

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Sohani Kasireddy

With the end of my second year of college, I am thrilled and apprehensive to be a junior! I'm excited to delve into higher level microbiology courses and look forward to more leadership opportunities in the UF campus. This year was certainly more challenging than freshmen year with respect to academics as my course load significantly increased. However, the time management, prioritization and study skills I acquired throughout freshman were of great help. In addition, the extracurricular activities I became involved with through the Center for Leadership and Service

were a wonderful way to relax from the busy college life while also volunteering in the Gainesville community.

During the fall semester, I became a member of an organization known as Project Mascot, a one-on-one mentoring program aimed at working with "at-risk" elementary school age children from the Alachua county area. I was inspired join this program after volunteering with After School Gators in my freshmen year. Both these mentoring centered programs gave me the opportunity to see different parts of the Gainesville community while working with children



Members of the Telugu Association of Greater Orlando volunteered at an Assisted Living Community for Alzheimer's patients in Casselberry.

from diverse backgrounds. I will be serving on the executive board as treasurer for these organizations in the coming school year and hope to bring these organizations to light in the UF community. I have also been continuing

my time as a volunteer in the pediatrics department as well as the ER at Shands hospital. To further increase my clinical exposure, I will be volunteering in both the Helping Hands and Equal Access clinic beginning this summer.



Ashish and a friend pose at the University of Miami's Holi Celebrations.

suing it now and set a focus.

And so, from now on all my efforts will be directed towards becoming a master of video production, of film making, and of acquiring good taste. My route from here isn't certain, it isn't

clear, and thankfully, it isn't going to be easy. I must be level headed, objective, and hard working. With the blessings of Lord Ganesha, may I have the strength and intelligence to conquer the obstacles that shall come at me.

Veena Selvamani

My third year at UCF consisted of two of the hardest semesters. As the semesters progressed so did the amount of work load. Both semesters I only took science classes so it was much harder! I was somewhat successful in all my classes because I would start studying ahead and it made a difference. Almost every time, I had 2-3 classes host exams on the same day and that was about 300 powerpoint slides! During my spring semester, I had my arangetram so it was tough in the beginning to get a hold of all my classes but I

ended it well. I also started studying for the MCAT and it was very tough with 15 credits during the semester too.

Some of the duties I took over this year include my role as head banquet director for MAPS. Through the organization, I volunteered at the Orlando Homeless Shelter once a month and at an old age home once in 2 weeks. I also was also the co-teacher of the Philosophy 1 class at Chinmaya Mission. In addition to these duties, I volunteer as an assistant teacher for students with ADHD/ADD at Evan Elementary school once a month. I also volun-



Keron and Veena speak about Gen Om at the West Indies Hindu meeting.

Even though I had done dual enrollment, my first year in college has been a very challenging yet equally rewarding experience. Apart from not living at home and having to share an apartment, I was able to

make sound decisions that will impact my remaining college years and furthermore, the rest of my life. I am a student of the Burnett Honors College and a Leads Scholar so I had to take an Honors Symposium in the first semes-

teered with the public library system at a correctional facility. We taught them how to use iMovie and taught classes on poems to middle

school children. One of my accomplishments includes receiving the National Society of Collegiate Scholars award this past year.



MAPs at UCF visited UM and engaged in various medical workshops.

Keron Prashad

ter and an Interdisciplinary course in the second semester along with my Biomed courses. I also had to take a Leadership class in both the Fall and Spring as part of the Lead Scholars program.

During the Honors Symposium, I volunteered at schools teaching kids in the elementary classroom. For Lead Scholars I volunteered at Give Kids the World and the Creative School for Children. The Creative School for Children, which is on the UCF campus, cultivates a safe, fun and educational environment for children to grow and develop and I participated in many activities that were very beneficial to me and the kids.

It was a fun-filled experience and brought back lots of good memories of growing up.

I was on the Dean's list and was offered membership in the National Society of Leadership and Success. I am also taking two chemistry classes in the summer so that my pre-requisites are completed.

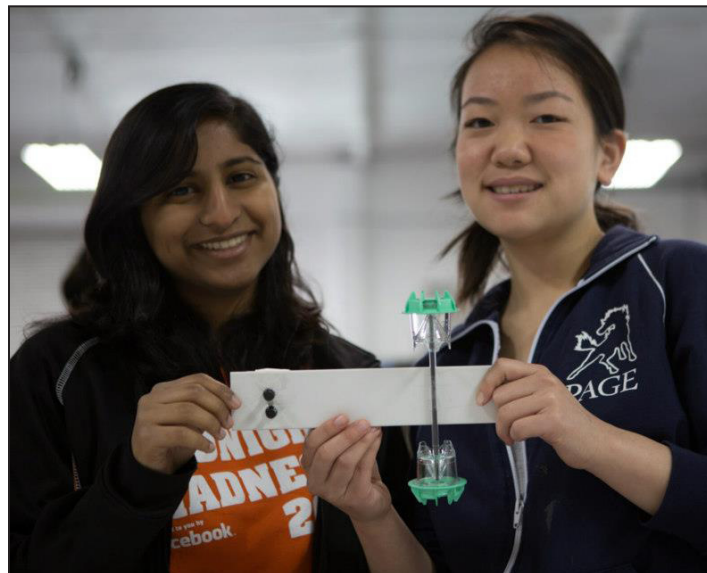
I also promoted various Generation Om events such as the Diwali event sponsored by the Saraswati Devi Mandir and Vedic Cultural Samaj of Central Florida. I will continue to promote Hinduism in the community, as it has always been a part of my life having grown up in a Vedic home.

Ruchi Jahagirdar

Every year, the Caltech Y hosts an event called “Make a Difference Day” (MAD Day). Students are invited to participate in one of twenty community service projects and volunteer around 3.5 to 8 hours, depending on the project. Projects include judging a science fair, working at an animal shelter, as well as visiting the elderly. This year, a couple of my friends and I chose to volunteer at Trash for Teaching (T4T), a nonprofit organization that uses clean, safe, and inspiring items that local businesses discard in abundance to help kids out in the classroom. They put together kits that allow students to use their imagination to create mechanically powered cars, obstacle courses, or even prototype rockets. Part of our volunteering experience was to design a rubber-band powered car

using only the material offered by T4T. The parts we used in the cars would then be used to assemble a new kit for the classroom and inspire middle and high school students to design rubber band powered cars.

As I wrote about in my previous article, Caltech has a very unique dormitory system. Freshman are assigned into one of the eight houses based on their personality. As a member of Ruddock House, I’m part of the Ruddock House Social Team, which organizes events every week to allow people to socialize with one another and take a break from the pressures of academia. Recently, we held a “Midterm Massage” event, where we hired masseuses to come to the house and give professional massages to stressed students. Another recent event was paintballing, where the team



Ruchi and a fellow team member display one of their recent projects.

paid for students to hit each other with paintballs! It’s always fun to organize events that the whole house can enjoy and giving back, whether it’s to the community or your fellow dormmates, is always satisfying.

Though the academics have increased in workload and stress, I’ve found that I’ve grown to deal with them and take things as they come. This sum-

mer, I’ll be doing research at Caltech once again, working on an implementation of an online spike detection and sorting system for electrophysiology using tetrode devices. The project will be challenging, but once implemented, will provide a quick and efficient way to determine brain activity. I’m much more prepared and I’m looking forward to another year at Tech!