Shannon Sturgeon’s decision to major in electrical engineering technology was “a natural continuation” from an associate’s degree in electrical technology and employment as an apprentice electrician at Interstate Construction.

However, the inspiration to take this road came a lot earlier — way back in the high school days.

“In high school, I worked for my dad doing residential construction,” Shannon says. “He didn’t do electrical work but I enjoyed that hands-on work enough to pursue it further.”

The first step in that direction was enrollment in the Associate of Applied Science program at the Iowa Central Community College.

“The most interesting project I’ve done so far has probably been during my time at Iowa Central,” Shannon says. “I had to wire up an Allen-Bradley PLC [factory automation equipment manufactured by Rockwell Automation] to an I/O bank of console-mounted pushbuttons and lights, and then program it to make the lights flash in various sequences when different buttons were pushed.”

Shannon graduated in the spring of 2015 and started looking for a university that had an Electrical Engineering Technology program and that would accept credits in electrical from Iowa Central. UNI did both.

“Out there in the real world, you absolutely have to work as a team to get things done.”

Shannon Sturgeon

“‘The experience [at UNI] so far has been… busy!’ Shannon says. ‘I hadn’t been a student since the spring of 2015. So, getting back into the swing is taking some work.’

‘But it’s a good kind of busy,’ Shannon adds. ‘It’s like being at a carnival: it’s crowded and loud. Sometimes, you don’t know what you’re doing but you have a blast anyway.’

The coursework? “Not easy… but manageable,” Shannon says. “I’ve been able to draw on my community college experience, my own skills, and the resources here to get things accomplished.”

“It probably helps that I’m taking Strategies for Academic Success,” Shannon adds. “I used to think that I wouldn’t need it, but I really appreciate it now.”

Shannon did not identify as a “computer person,” either. “Sure, I own a computer and use it as much as the next person but I didn’t think I had any affinity for it.”

The Intro to C++ class changed that.

“Somehow, I’m good at writing in C++ and find it a lot of fun,” Shannon says. “But I’m definitely not going to drop everything and become a computer science major.”

A member of the No Shame Theater Group on campus, which meets twice a month and performs original artistic content, Shannon likes “to dance in night clubs, read tarot cards, and sew” in free time.

A degree in electrical engineering technology makes one ready for a wide variety of jobs, Shannon believes. “Once I graduate from UNI, I plan to get a job with some industrial company in California.”

Shannon does not buy into the stereotype for STEM that “it tends to attract loners, people who don’t work well with others.”

“Out there in the real world, you absolutely have to work as a team to get things done,” Shannon adds. “It doesn’t matter if you’re programming a VFD [variable frequency drive] or drawing up the prints for an ethanol plant’s process system or researching medicinal side-effects. We all work better when we work together.”

Thus, Shannon’s short and simple but strong advice for students interested to major in STEM subjects is: “Be collaborative.”

Story by Mir Ashfaquzzaman, UNI STEM Graduate Assistant, ashfaqum@uni.edu

Strategies for Academic Success (POSTSEC 1055) is a two-unit course designed to help students to achieve academic success and develop personal and professional strengths.

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