

THE HAPPY BIOLOGY MAJOR

Michael Lashbrook is happy “looking towards future.” He is happy “living every day.” In fact, he has never been happier. It’s all mostly because of his biology major.

Michael or MJ, as he is known to his friends, has always wanted to study natural sciences in college. “I have always loved science,” he says.

So, the decision to major in biology ultimately came down to how interested he was in it. “Biology is such a diverse topic that it stood out to me most,” he adds.

The decision to enroll in the University of Northern Iowa was simple, too.

“It is very close to my hometown,” he explains. “It felt right from the moment I visited it first. The campus and the people here are so welcoming that there was no question in my mind of going anywhere else.

UNI it will be for him till he gets his master’s degree. He then plans to go on and get a Ph.D., and become a research professor. “Hopefully somewhere tropical,” he adds.

MJ has found the experience at UNI amazing.

“I have learned and grown not only academically but also as a person,” he says. “The coursework has been challenging in the best way. Professors try especially to focus on higher order thinking, which will definitely help in the future.”

The professors have also made the classroom experience both exciting and exhilarating. So, when it comes to choosing his favorite class so far, he finds it a three-way tie between Oral Communication, General Chemistry, and Ecology, Evolution, and the Nature of Science.

“In the first two, I had such great professors that their classes stand out,” he says. “In the Eco-Evo class, I had an awesome professor plus the content was engaging, interesting, and downright fun.”

MJ is currently working on a research project on nitrogen use efficiency in tallgrass prairie feedstocks. “We are observing this efficiency in different forms

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Michael Lashbrook, Biology major at UNI

by studying specific leaf areas, leaf area indexes, and how much biomass is produced,” he explains.

He is also working on a research paper “reviewing hypotheses for the adaptive radiation of scleractinian corals.”

His weekdays are quite hectic.

“I am an undergraduate research assistant, a student assistant/TA for Chemistry, and a lab tech for the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry,” he says. “I’m also tutoring General Biology: Organismal Diversity this semester as an on-campus job.”

So, free time is very hard to come by but when it does, MJ tries to catch up on sleep. “Usually unsuccessfully,” he adds.

He has also been involved in volunteer work. “In the past, I volunteered at Waverly hospital,” he says. “The most recent work was volunteering for the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry’s Halloween House event.”

MJ has recently become a STEM Ambassador.

“It was the suggestion of a professor, and the idea of getting to share my passion for science,” he says. “I think being a STEM Ambassador will be the perfect opportunity to get others excited about STEM fields.”

MJ believes students interested to be a STEM major should go for it. “If you’re interested, talk to anyone you can,” he says. “And try a little bit of everything when it comes to STEM and see what fits you best.”