Michael Rice

Over the past year, I have become a better designer as well as improved personally. I have become more confident in my direction as a designer. I am primarily interested in soft goods, consumer electronics, medical research, and products for developing markets. While I’m still open to working in nearly every field, I will now be able to taper future projects into the fields I’m looking at. In terms of skills, I learned to 3D model with new programs, learned to sketch better, and learned to sew. Sewing will be especially beneficial since I can now work more in depth with soft goods by prototyping and creating final models. I want to continue exploring soft goods by learning more about different fabrics as well as new construction methods and stitches.

Outside of design, I also began learning Mandarin Chinese while studying abroad at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. After learning the basics of Chinese for a month, I plan to continue learning the language when I return to the United States. Knowing Chinese offers insights into Chinese culture and the Asian design market I wouldn’t otherwise have. Learning Chinese will also will open up business opportunities in a quickly growing market.

Over the past year, I have become quite involved in UC’s chapter of Design for America, a social-impact design group. I became a team member first semester and developed a project aimed at helping people who suffer from neuromuscular disorders. During the second semester, I was appointed Team Lead and Recruitment Officer. The community has been a great place to develop as a leader and designer. The cross-disciplinary nature allows me to develop skills in areas outside of product design. As a Team Lead, I worked on a project that was entirely graphic design focused, learning quickly how graphic designers iterate and prototype. It was also great opportunity to develop as a leader. While it was hard at times to keep the team motivated, it was only more rewarding when we finished the project. DFA has also given me extensive exposure to design research and product design for the medical field. I was also fortunate enough to interviewed users and reached out to community members. Working with the community was extremely rewarding. Knowing that my work would directly impact people made it that much more gratifying. DFA gave me the opportunity to practice my design skills outside the classroom in ways I might not have otherwise done. With this experience behind me, I know I’ll be more prepared for co-op.

There were also a myriad of networking opportunities I partook in with DFA. Our group grew its campus presence immensely during the spring semester. We started with getting a new advisor, Cory Christopher, the director of the Propel Program at UC. He’s already become a great contact, connecting us with other groups and events on campus. We attended a networking event at Centrifuse in downtown Cincinnati. Truthfully, it was quite intimidating. I had never attended a professional event like that before. I definitely feel more confident with talking to professionals in the design field now though. We also participated in the Undergraduate Research Conference at the end of the semester. This was a great chance to practice explaining my work to people not working in the design field. We also attended the IQ E-Pitch competition. We took our design solutions and looked at them in the context of business, searching for profit opportunities and addressing scalability. In the design field, these experiences will prepare me for pitching ideas and bringing products to market. I got to discuss my design work outside of the classroom, just like I’ll have to during interviews and on co-op.

I’m excited to continue pursuing my design studies and begin co-oping. In the future, I want to continue learning Mandarin Chinese and explore developing markets more. I also want to become better at sewing and develop as a leader. The one thing I do have to keep reminding myself of is not to put too much on my plate. I tend to fill up my schedule, but can’t always put forth a full effort for every commitment. I know that I can continue to grow and develop as a professional without always being stressed, it will just be hard to get to that point. I am happy with what I have accomplished this year, and am excited for the next four.