

YEAR IN REVIEW

Spring 2024, Second Semester at University of Cincinnati

8 Jan '24 – 28 Apr '24

The greatest pride is to grow in your own eyes

Spring Semester was all about pushing my boundaries and accelerating my growth. Adding to the challenge of 'firsts' – this time focused on pushing my limits and achieving a new level of personal and academic growth. Having established a comfortable rhythm at UC I felt prepared to take on a challenging course load: 18 credit hours, including 3 honors experiences with my enrolment into University Honors Program (UHP). Additionally, I declared a second major in Statistics and as if that wasn't enough, I also dove headfirst into a personal project – AmbuAlert, which promised to test my skills and determination.

But how would I possibly juggle all of this? Could I actually achieve a perfect 4.0 GPA? Would I be able to keep up with the demanding coursework, especially as a pre-junior with 59 credits already completed? Could I conquer the challenges of learning a new programming language in my first CS coding class? I was determined to find out.

Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you

Drawing upon the lessons learned from the previous semester, I began Spring Semester with a laser sharp focus on my academics. I planned my time meticulously, ensuring that every minute was accounted for and my team-building skills were honed as I carefully selected collaborators for each project. It wasn't always easy. One instance even resulted in an academic misconduct allegation, but in the end, it was cleared up, as it was simply a misunderstanding.

My dedication to my studies fueled a relentless pursuit of excellence. I poured over every assignment, every lecture, every textbook, ensuring that I fully comprehended every concept. And my commitment to my work paid off. With unwavering focus, I reached my goal – a perfect 4.0 GPA! Not only that, but I also earned a place on the Dean's List and was recognized as a Distinguished Honors Scholar, all thanks to my stellar 3.97 overall GPA.

My 'first' CS coding class was a revelation. I loved the challenge of solving complex problems, the thrill of discovering new coding techniques. This wasn't just a class; it was a passion, a dedication that consumed me. Only when work becomes devotion does it become truly fulfilling. It was this passion that propelled me to explore the world of coding further, enrolling in coding challenges and achieving my reward – a growing confidence in my abilities.

Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice.

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Beyond the classroom, I dove headfirst into a world of opportunities, each pushing me to learn, grow, and test my limits. Hackathons, The Innovation Challenge (AmbuAlert Project) – these were the battlegrounds where I honed my skills and pushed my boundaries. I even completed certifications in Adobe Illustration and JavaScript, ensuring I had the tools to bring my ideas to life on functional websites.

But why stop there? The opportunity to participate in a game design challenge for Molton Brown, a renowned British luxury brand, was too tempting to resist. This was my chance to integrate my coding skills with a real-world application. The challenge? To design a mobile-friendly game that seamlessly integrated with the Molton Brown website. Now, this was a new challenge! I had never used Figma before, but I was determined to learn. I started from scratch, diving into tutorials, experimenting with the software, and ultimately mastering the art of building wireframes. With every click and drag, I felt my confidence growing, and I was ready to tackle the next stage – building the actual website.

Throughout the semester, I was a regular on GitHub, the platform where developers collaborate, showcase their work, and learn from each other. Every line of code I wrote, every project I completed, was a step forward in my journey. From brainstorming ideas, to writing code, to presenting my work, I immersed myself in the world of coding. Moreover, The interview process for the Peer Career Coaches in the Bearcat Promise Career Studio was a nerve-wracking experience, but I was eager to see my hard work pay off.

University Honors Program

Joining Honors Program was a thrilling new chapter, a chance to push the boundaries of my major and explore a world of intellectual exploration. It was an exciting opportunity to test my knowledge, collaborate with students from diverse fields, and prove that I belonged in this intellectually stimulating environment. One of the highlights of this semester was developing an honors portfolio to showcase my diverse interests and experiences. This project provided an exceptional opportunity to display my creativity and dedication. You can view the portfolio here: [<https://bhalgatarnav.wixsite.com/arnav>].

My journey began with three honors experiences, each a gateway to a different sector of knowledge. Firstly, my participation in the Student RoundTable Meetings was a highlight on impact, where students from various backgrounds shared their experiences and insights on running successful organizations. Fueled by this newfound knowledge, I'm now driven to start my own organization, a platform where computer science students can put their skills to the test. Secondly, I completed an honors seminar which focused on the art of writing, a journey that honed my ability to craft compelling narratives and convey my thoughts with precision and impact. We delved deep into the power of words, exploring how every essay, every piece of writing, has the potential to move readers and shape their understanding. The seminar was a

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revelation, and I realized how crucial writing skills are in today's world. My third Honors experience was a testament to the power of innovation. It was here, amidst the excitement of building something new, that I truly delved into the world of website development. It was a chance to translate my ideas into a tangible reality, a digital platform that could reach and inspire others. This experience was a turning point, pushing me to think outside the box and embrace the challenges of creating something truly unique.

The Honors Program provided a rich tapestry of experiences, each contributing to my growth as a student, a leader, and a creative individual. The seminars, the portfolio, and the various Honors experiences were all steppingstones on my path to achieving my full potential.

Advice to Past-Self for Present and Future Success

Academic Integrity

The line between collaboration and academic integrity is a thin one, and this semester I found myself navigating that precarious terrain. Completing homework or assignments with others, even with the best intentions, can easily blur the lines. The same logic is often used, leading to similar work. I discovered this the hard way, realizing that ensuring my work is uniquely mine is just as crucial as completing the assignment itself. The thought of professors questioning my integrity was infuriating. I poured over every assignment, diligently working ahead of time, ensuring that I fully grasped every concept. And yet, here I was, having to defend my work, prove that I was the author. This confusion, although eventually resolved, should never happen again. It was a harsh lesson, a reminder that academic integrity is paramount. The weight of my academic achievements – that perfect GPA – felt diminished in the face of these accusations.

Presenting Techniques

This semester was a whirlwind of presentations, interviews, and opportunities to showcase my skills and ideas. While I didn't quite reach the podium for either the NEXT Innovation Scholars program (NIS) or the Molton Brown Game Design and Innovation Challenge, I learned valuable lessons about presenting my work effectively.

My first realization: *a functional product is key*. My Molton Brown presentation showcased a promising idea, but it was not fully functional, leaving a gap between my vision and its execution. I learned that a working product, even in its early stages, can significantly impress an audience.

Second, *engagement is paramount*. I discovered the power of a captivating opening. An eye-catching image, perhaps a playful animation, can instantly draw the audience in, making them eager to hear more.

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Finally, *preparation is everything*. I learned the importance of carefully crafting and rehearsing my presentations, ensuring that my message was clear and concise.

These experiences, though they didn't lead to immediate success, were invaluable learning experiences. I learned that presenting isn't just about delivering information; it's about captivating the audience, creating a compelling narrative, and leaving a lasting impression.

Reflecting back

Spring '24 Semester was a symphony of learning, growth, and pushing boundaries. From conquering a challenging course load to embracing the exciting world of coding and game design, I learned to navigate the complexities of academia and the exhilarating possibilities of innovation. I discovered the importance of academic integrity, the power of a well-crafted presentation, and the satisfaction of building something truly unique. While my journey may have just begun, I am ready to embrace the next chapter, confident that my experiences this semester will guide me towards a future filled with both personal and professional fulfillment.