

De La Cruz Engages Undergraduate Audience

Enrique De La Cruz designed his Undergraduate Program presentation to allow the audience to learn both from his path to a career in science and from his research program. His talk, entitled “Being Interested in What You Don’t Know Ensures That You Will Always Have a Goal,” led students from his time as a high school student to his current position as a professor of biophysics at Yale by highlighting key nuggets of information that aided him throughout his career.

De La Cruz mentioned that it was late in his undergraduate education when his interests changed from becoming a physician to becoming a research scientist. As a result, he had to take a year after graduation to prepare for the GRE and apply to graduate programs. One student in attendance, Elizabeth Schinski, a junior majoring in biology at University of Richmond, had not fully considered that a career may take a path that was not originally intended. She found it “comforting to know that changing directions so dramatically can still lead to a fruitful career.” It was evident to the audience that De La Cruz enjoys his work and wants to share his experience with future scientists. He emphasized the importance of growth and change driven by motivation, planning, and a strong work ethic. Through this approach De La Cruz was able to remain engaged and focused on the research projects that interested him the most, even when it required retraining himself with the appropriate skills to tackle new questions.

Jaimee Perlmutter, a junior at Dickinson College majoring in biology, was attending the ASCB Annual Meeting for the first time and presenting her work with her advisor, Tiffany Frey, in both the undergraduate poster session and main poster session. Perlmutter commented that “[De La Cruz’s] inspirational talk really opened a new door for me, I think because he used his own life experiences to show his audience that there are many opportunities in the field of science. He had a goal that incorporated the subject he loves to teach (science) into a learning experience instead of an exact destination.”

De La Cruz challenged his audience to purposefully interact with poster presenters who weren’t already engaged in conversation. To that challenge, Perlmutter responded: “I think it changed how I asked questions at other people’s posters because I didn’t just ask facts, but what their future research was going to consist of. It also taught me to approach the posters that might not have interested me at first, but ended up being quite interesting once I gave them a chance.” After the program De La Cruz spoke with members of the audience who stayed to ask him questions.

(From the [Jan/Feb 2013 ASCB newsletter](#), by Omar Quintero for the Education Committee)