

DOUBLE DELIGHT IN DOUBLE MAJOR

Jessica Thatcher was not sure what she should do after she had completed high school. “I had no idea what I wanted to do when I graduated high school,” she recalls.

Her best friend went to the University of Northern Iowa; so, she decided to follow suit. It turned out to be a good decision.

“I’ve loved studying at UNI so far,” says Jessica. “I’ve learned so much, both in my classes and through the different research projects that I’ve completed.”

Her decision to double major in Physics and Computer Science was, however, not as impulsive as her decision to enroll at UNI might have been.

“When I decided that I wanted to major in Physics, I met with the head of the department,” Jessica says. “I wanted to find out what I should expect from a degree in Physics and what I would be able to do with it.”

The meeting helped her in other ways, too. “The knowledge I gained from him helped a lot as I decided which classes to take and prepared for those classes.”

“I chose to major in Computer Science after taking Physics III for my Physics major,” she adds. “In Physics III, we programmed simulations of physical systems and [that’s when] I realized that I really enjoyed programming.”

She had originally ticked Computer Science as a minor. “But after taking the first few classes, I decided that I would love to do Computer Science after I graduated and changed it to a second major,” she recalls.

What also changed is her perception

about undergraduate coursework. “The undergraduate coursework hasn’t been as bad as I thought it would be,” she says.

Jessica admits though that two STEM degrees seem too much at times.

“There are definitely times when it seems like a lot,” she says. “But, most of the time, I’m able to keep up with it.”

With so much on her plate, free time is hard to come by but when it does, she spends it reading or playing video games.

Computational Physics has been her favorite course so far. “It allowed me to combine the skills I’ve learned in both Physics and Computer Science,” she explains. “I was able to solve some interesting problems in the course.”

Jessica has also been involved with some interesting project during her time at UNI.

“I have designed, built, and programmed a robotic prosthetic hand, built and programmed an automated irrigation system to reduce water waste, and programmed an autonomous robot to wander around the Physics building,” she says.

When she graduated from high school, Jessica might not have had any idea about what she wanted to do; however, now, she knows full well what she wants to do once she graduates from UNI.

“I’m hoping to work as a software engineer,” says Jessica, who is currently an intern at Kailo Healthcare Technologies in Cedar Falls.

Her advice to aspiring STEM majors is to do what she did when it was time to declare her major: “Talk to professors and students who are in STEM fields.”



Jessica Thatcher, major in Physics and Computer Science



Jessica’s robot wanders around the Physics building