



SRJC Alumni & Friends

In His Words: Craig Belon

I attended Maria Carrillo High School as the first graduating class of 1999, and went to SRJC on the Doyle Scholarship. Moving on with an AS in chemistry in 2001, through the IGETC agreement, I then attended UC Santa Barbara, graduating with a BS in chemistry. I worked in industry for 2 years a research chemist for a small startup, and decided to re-enter academia. Several twists and turns aside, I ended up with a PhD in biochemistry and molecular biology, as well as an MD from New York Medical College. Currently, I'm a 2nd year resident in Anesthesiology at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City.



I would like to thank SRJC for giving me such wonderful opportunities. From the very start, the Doyle allowed me to attend SRJC with essentially zero out of pocket expenditure. Despite having some of the best public universities in the country available to me (the UC and Cal State systems), even as an in-state resident the cost was prohibitive to go to University directly out of high school. The science exposure I got at SRJC fostered me as a young scientist, and removed many of the barriers I may have otherwise experienced in this lengthy academic path.

The instruction I got at SRJC was top-notch. As someone that has been through the entire educational system from low to high, and now I even have several teaching roles myself, I commend the SRJC faculty for being truly outstanding. The focus seems to be on excellent instruction, a decidedly different focus than what I experienced at the 4-year level where actual teaching ability is not the primary goal for instructors. This pattern definitely progressed through the post-graduate level as well. The instruction at SRJC was, and continues to be (based on my discussions and general observations during my recent visit) simply without peer.

In addition to the faculty, the facilities at SRJC are similarly excellent, especially compared to the UC level. At the university level, as a transferring upper division student, my peers were very impressed with my knowledge and use of "advanced" analytical techniques. This was not solely due to SRJC class work, but leads directly to my next point.

During the beginning of my second, the Chemistry department brought in several industry representatives and, essentially, offered us jobs. It was really as simple to get a job as me sitting in the lecture hall and someone asking me if I wanted a chemistry job! I began working at Seres Labs as a QA/QC technician using, on a daily basis, those analytical methods I'd already be

accustomed to using. As it turned out, most of those working at Seres at the time were, at one point, trained by Dr. Dennis Fujita, an SRJC faculty member! In addition to my official duties, I spent a large amount of (mostly my own) time in the R&D lab, practicing organic synthetic chemistry for pharmaceuticals, something that would pay off big later in life.

By the time I'd graduated from SRJC, I had gone to school for free, gotten an outstanding education, worked in industry, and secured a transfer agreement to a good 4-year school! I cannot tell you how many times, at that point and since then, those interviewing me have been surprised by the experience on my C.V. I directly credit this to the path you have led me down beginning with SRJC.

I am still young in my career as a physician-scientist, but it is not so early that I'm oblivious about those that have helped me be so personally and professionally happy in my career so far. Abigail Zoger in the Life Sciences department, gave me the first glimpses of biochemistry and molecular biology. Drs. Dennis Fujita and Gary DeCicco were similarly instrumental in my formation as a young scientist. I still use, on a daily basis, information I have learned from these individuals.

I look forward to the near future when I can begin repaying the institution that has given me so much.