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Who Do You Think You Are? Vonnie

Andreas Haffar
Iowa State University

Amber Klootwyk
Iowa State University

Julie Doyle
Iowa State University

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Not every class can be a cakewalk. From three-hour labs to brutal exams, there are a number of factors that can take a class from an "easy A" to a nightmare in no time. But sometimes, the class matters less than who's teaching it. We asked Iowa State students to tell us about some of their worst experiences with instructors—with any luck, your MWF 8 a.m. won't seem so bad in comparison.

Mikayla and Alix

Mikayla: "There were two TAs who would walk around just to make sure no one was talking or on their phone, but one TA was awful. If there was someone in the middle of the row on their phone, he would literally squeeze past everyone—everyone had to move their bag and shift their bodies so the TA could get through."

"One time a girl was texting in the row in front of me and the TA couldn't get to her for some reason, so he came to me and asked me to get her attention just so he could yell at her. At that point, that whole class could have been texting, and I'd be less distracted than I was by the TA making a big scene just to get someone off their phone. This happened every class."

Alix: "On one of the review days right before we had a test the teacher was trying to tell us what would be on the test and he was yelling at people about their phones and we couldn't hear. I sat at the back of the class and the TA was standing behind me and yelling right over my shoulder. I turned around and asked him to please stop yelling at people right over my head because I couldn't hear the teacher and it was important that I knew what was on the test. He told me to 'mind my own business' and shot me a dirty look and kept doing it anyway."

"At the end of class he waited at the end of my row and let everyone out, but when it was my turn, he stepped in front of me, got in my way and as he 'let me pass' he shoved me with his shoulder/arm/hip and I fell into two other students that were passing by. Everyone kind of gasped and stopped and stared at him. Someone reported it and I was called into the office and asked to tell them what happened. I did, and he was removed from the class."

Libby

"My TA is one of the people who knows he is smarter than everyone and likes to show off about it. He is a stand-up comedian, or so I've heard … His teaching styles are awful. He belittles his students with what he says. He loses a lot of papers and makes the students redo them. He also loves to give us feedback on how we did our lab 'wrong' the week after. He doesn't give us any feedback on how we are doing the experiment during the time we are doing it. My usual grade on my post-labs is below half because I can't even ask enough questions to understand how to do it. I have had to give several reviews for him and I have made many, many suggestions as to how he can improve teaching the class. Going to this lab is the worst part of my week."

Lindsey

"My friends in the dorm convinced me that Tinder was God's gift to the world and that I needed to get one or else I wasn't living. I made my profile and ended up having some shitty conversations with douchey guys and wasn't convinced. I had always joked around with my friends that I'd just hook up with my TA in class like they do in movies."

"A couple weeks later, I got bored in class and decided to swipe through Tinder, and to my surprise I came across my TA so I jokingly swiped right. That night, I was looking at my matches and he matched me. I then decided to delete my Tinder and never listen to my dorm friends again. This also made SI sessions extremely awkward from then on out."

BAD TEACHERS
When TA stands for terrible attitude

BY KELSEY RINDFLEISCH

DESIGN ALIXANDRIA COLLINS

PHOTO MEREDITH KESTEL

Who Do You Think You Are?

Vonnie

BY ANDREAS HAFFAR

DESIGN AMBER KLOOTWYK

PHOTOS JULIE DOYLE

Be a fly on the wall in this entomologist's life.
It all started with a SQUISH!

The beginning of then six-year-old Javon “Vonnie” Latimore’s immense fascination with the insect world all started with the accidental squashing of her sister’s ladybug. She couldn’t resist the temptation to take a stick from the yard, poke the bug apart and examine its parts.

“Oh my God, did you see what happened there?” she told her sister. “I swear up and down, I thought it was the coolest thing.”

While others may scream bloody murder at the sight of anything with more than four legs, Vonnie does the exact opposite, relishing every chance she gets to be around insects. Seven of her 12 tattoos are of arthropods (which comes from the Greek word, translating to “jointed leg”). It became clear to her mother, who tolerated the insect pets that her daughter kept in and out of the house, and her teachers who went out of their way to find books and resources for her, that this girl was destined for a bug’s life from the beginning.

Vonnie, originally from the Minneapolis area, first came to Iowa in 2008. She is currently a senior in entomology (the study of insects which is a branch of anthropodology) at Iowa State, with one more year to go and admits that her decision to come here was one of the best choices she made academically. One of the things she loves most is the plethora of opportunities given to students to take advantage of here—some of which we may not be aware of.

A Compilation of Critters

One such opportunity is the access to the Iowa State Insect Collection, located on the fourth floor in the Science II building, which contains thousands of preserved insect specimens from all over the world, some dating back as far as the mid 1800s, around the time Iowa State was founded. The collection has a vast amount of information to assist entomology students’ research.

Anyone is is allowed to visit the impressive collection so long as they are accompanied by a lab supervisor. In the lab (or collection), Vonnie works on incorporating new insects into the already comprehensive collection and digitizing, taking photos of all of the specimens with a new machine. While many of the bugs have already been digitized, Vonnie says that there are hundreds that have yet to be worked on. You can find her in the lab, or you may see her taking pictures of numerous arthropods such as insects, arachnids, centipedes and other closely-related creatures with the cameras available to ISU students. Not only does she take snapshots from the collection, but she also ventures outdoors during her free time to capture photos of live insects.

Vonnie admits that she’s taken a lot of photos of insects, “Of the ones I like, I’ve kept about 400. Ones that I’ve taken though, there’s thousands of them.”

Vonnie hopes her work with photography can also help her in making calendars and possibly putting the pictures on clothing items with the assistance of her older siblings, who are all in the fashion industry.

A much more interesting place to display her work, she mentions, would be National Geographic. At Iowa State, she primarily focuses on work with roaches, where in the
lab she dips them in jars of alcohol, letting them dry for preservation and integrating different ones into the collection. Along with her two dogs Bubba and Boss, and her three anoles (a type of iguanian lizard), she also owns roaches as pets.

Vonnie’s main goal: developing a list of all of the roaches found in Iowa. However, this has proven to be a difficult task.

“It’s challenging because there isn’t a lot of literature on Iowa roaches,” she says. “No one has put together a full list of them.”

But why roaches? Vonnie says there is research supporting the idea that roaches may play a part in curing HIV/AIDS. Roaches, she explains, aren’t “infectors” or spreaders of disease, unlike mosquitoes or ticks.

A World of Difference

The words “tasty” and “bugs” are rarely used in the same sentence. For Vonnie, this shouldn’t be the case. She has recently become interested in “entomophagy,” the practice of eating bugs, and has already found websites that have insect related recipes and food for purchase. From dragonflies to giant water bugs, she says that there are over 1,000 different edible bug species.

To the average American, this seems repulsive or inconceivable. Perhaps the problem is precisely because we are Americans.

“It’s normal to eat insects—just not in the United States. I’m trying to get people to dabble in eating insects,” Vonnie says. “You can cook them, you can present them in a nice-looking way, and you can put them in food in a way that you’d never know it was there in the first place.”

Vonnie says there is a wide range of protein content found in insects; some have up to 10 times the amount of protein in food in the American diet, such as chicken or fish.

“That’s how other people survive in some places [of the world] because of the high protein in certain bugs,” she says. “I’d like to see the world’s view of this change.”

While her love for bugs is tremendous, her desire to help people may be just as great.

“Some countries are developing, and their education systems are, too,” Vonnie says. “If we could incorporate some sort of agriculture or some sort of microfarming but with insects instead, there may be less malnutrition and more opportunities for food.”

The Future is Fast Approaching

Vonnie may be close to finishing up her time here at Iowa State, but she, like every other near-graduate, has to choose which path to follow next. She admits that she wants to leave her mark here at the university, and in a way, she’s already done so by helping reestablish the Entomology Club here on campus. Soon, she may even run to become its president.

Whether it be graduate school or working on her own personal projects, wherever she goes her life will always include bugs and tiny critters. Why? It’s simple. “Insects already rule the world.”
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