Former REU intern Marcos Pantoja is currently studying to earn his doctorate in Polymer Engineering under Dr. Kevin Cavicchi. He began his journey at UA in the fall of 2014, and now he is sharing his experiences with us. Read more about Marcos and his academic journey in CPSPE.

How does your major fit into your life’s plan?
My immediate goal would be to go into industry and engage in polymeric research. However, I believe the key skill gained upon completing a Ph.D. program is the ability to solve problems, whether they are related to polymers or new disciplines, which we are required to learn as part of the job. My goal would then be to continue my education by joining interdisciplinary teams, and to challenge myself to learn different disciplines. In other words, I see polymers as an entry gateway into a wider range of technical fields.

What have you learned that makes a difference to you?
I have learned to appreciate the importance of networking. As Ph.D. students we dedicate most of our attention to investigating a specific aspect, and we find ourselves diving deep to get answers. At times, I have found myself applying that same laser-focused mentality to my career. However, being part of extracurricular activities such as the Society of Plastics Engineers (SPE) has broadened my scope. SPE has given me a valuable platform where I have been able to leave my comfort zone and expose myself to the corporate world. SPE has helped me make many connections through both local and national activities and has helped turn me into a leader and an advocate within my department.

Why did you choose The University of Akron, specifically the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering?
During my undergraduate studies I participated in two Research Experience for Undergraduates summer research programs at The University of Akron’s Department of Polymer Engineering. These experiences were pivotal in developing my interest in research and my desire to obtain my Ph.D. upon completing my undergraduate studies. Coming from a big university, I gravitated towards a smaller department where everyone knows each other and you immediately become part of a family. I was fortunate to be offered acceptance into this department as a Ph.D. student and I was delighted and excited to accept the offer.

Who is your favorite professor (or staff person) and why?
My favorite staff member in the College of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering is Diana Woolf. I think Diana has done a superb job looking out for our safety and making sure that we’re the best versions of ourselves. Although I sometimes find myself scrambling to find my safety glasses whenever she is in my lab, I know that she takes safety seriously and so should we.

What are your plans after graduation?
Upon graduation I would like to go into industry and work for a large multi-disciplinary corporation. I would like to do R&D for the first 5-10 years of my career and eventually earn my MBA degree to slowly move into management. I also look forward to being part of affinity groups within my company and becoming involved in my local community by mentoring the youth and encouraging them to pursue careers in STEM.