

Comments from Students Participating in AirUCI Skype Event

C.E. Utt Middle School in Tustin, California and AirUCI Institute

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Eighth grade chemistry students at Utt Middle School engaged in an opportunity to question AirUCI scientists about their career pathways and to take virtual lab tours during an all-day Skype interview. Dr. Lisa Wingen, Project Scientist at AirUCI, hosted and organized the event. AirUCI researchers of all levels participated, from undergraduate and graduate students to post-docs to project scientists to professors, and Utt chemistry teachers Kristina Posavec and Ian Williamson presided over the seven class periods.

The students wanted to know about chemistry careers and had questions such as:

- What are the benefits of your chemistry project for society?
- How long did it take for you to get where you are today?
- What is your favorite chemical to work with?

The AirUCI team participants of all levels smiled and enjoyed answering the very questions they had asked as young, curious students themselves, and they enjoyed sharing their perspectives toward academic careers and reasons for choosing chemistry.

Many of the AirUCI graduate students involved said they believe it is important to do this kind of public outreach, and that it also benefits them to learn how to explain our science to others. After the formal interviews, Mrs. Posavec gave us the highest compliment, stating “You may have sparked an interest in some of the students to be scientists... the same way your interest was sparked by your favorite high school teachers [as you mentioned during the interviews].”

Many Utt students commented on how cool it was to be able to talk to real scientists/chemists and to see inside a ‘real’ lab. Here are just a few of their reflections on the experience, submitted to AirUCI by Mrs. Posavec:

- McKenzie wrote: *This experience was cool because I could see what it is like to be a chemist. The Skype call was also interesting because we could make up the questions and ask them to learn more about it. This was a fun way to learn.*
- Madison P. wrote: *Being able to Skype with chemists was really cool! It brought the classroom out of just four walls. We got to sit and listen to chemists doing the jobs we might possibly do in 10-15 years. I was fascinated when they said even if they improved their work by 1% it would improve the world a lot.*
- Alex wrote: *In the Skype interview, we had to speak to real life scientists which was pretty cool. We got to ask them some of our questions and they got to respond to it. They said that during their school experiences it was fun but difficult at the same time. They used many chemicals and one guy said in his words, “If it's not difficult it's not important”. Chemistry is dangerous but you need to focus. Skyping with them was an amazing experience.*
- Rachel wrote: *Skyping with the chemists was interesting and I learned a little more about chemistry and what's cool about it. The things they do are quite incredible: taking months to solve equations, doing tons of research, trying to make the world a better place. It really inspired me.*
- Faith wrote: *Skyping with these nice chemists gave me more knowledge about the path to become a chemist. I would one day really like to be a biologist or chemist and even thought you through a lot of school, it's worth it. They talked a lot about how some days they get upset because something doesn't work. That means you need a lot of patience which I'm totally ready for.*
- Claire wrote: *While Skyping with these chemists, I have learned that this may be a profession that I am interested in. Asking these questions has been a very enriching experience and I think chemistry looks interesting. I think it was a very fun and enriching experience.*

- Oscar wrote: *Skyping with the chemists was a fun experience. It was interesting to know what they are working on. I learned about aerosol particles. I got to see the equipment they use. I was lucky to get my questions answered. I got to see new things I never knew. I liked to hear the chemists' motivations. It's cool to hear and see how they are finding out about the aerosol particles. Things that we see and just take for granted.*
- Tatiana wrote: *The chemists gave us some interesting information. I learned that it takes an average of four years in order to be a chemist. You also need to wear a lab coat and goggles in the lab. It can take up to ten years to become a chemist. Speaking to chemists really changed my outlook on science.*
- Connor wrote: *We, as a class, Skyping with chemists opened up the world of chemistry more. By asking questions to people who are actually earning their degrees to learn more about it. It interested me into looking more into becoming a chemist or studying more about it.*
- Madison C. wrote: *I thought the Skype call was very informative. I got to ask my questions and got it answered. The people were very friendly and gave a lot of information on what they do for a living and how they got where they are now. The whole class liked to speak to them. They told us about their lab, and showed us around. I learned a lot and even thought I wanted to become a chemist. My favorite part of the call was the tour of the lab.*