

## SPOTLIGHT ON ERIN WENIG



This week we catch up with Erin Wenig from FRC 2655 The Flying Platypi. She is now a design researcher and shares how her *FIRST* journey led to her current position.

### **What teams were you a member of?**

Various *FIRST* LEGO League teams including one that went to the FLL World Festival and *FIRST* Robotics Competition 2655 The Flying Platypi

### **How many years were you on the team?**

3 in FLL, 3 in FRC

### **Where do you currently work and what is your job description?**

I'm a design researcher at a consultancy called THRIVE in Atlanta, Georgia. Design research takes places at the very start of the product and service development cycle and uses qualitative (emotion-driven, human-centered vs. numbers-driven) methods to help highlight areas where companies can make new or improve current offerings. A lot of my job involves interviewing and observing people at work, recording that information, then analyzing it. I love my job because I get to travel all over the country and meet some fascinating people.

### **Length of Employment**

~1 year 4 months (Since June 2016)

### **What is one highlight from your time on the team?**

It's really difficult to pick just one! Probably the most memorable moment was when my team earned the NC Regional Chairman's Award in 2011. It wasn't necessarily receiving the award that made it so memorable now but instead the journey to get to that point. The first year we submitted for Chairman's in 2010, we finished the presentation on the steps of Dorton Arena just hours before we went in front of the judges. Not ideal. In 2011 we had a better idea of the timeline and were thrilled just to have a cohesive essay, presentation, and video. We approached it as an improvement upon the previous year and as a documentation of what we accomplished as a means to help us do better in the future. Beyond the Chairman's submission, I knew a lot of my team members since I was in FLL and seeing everyone, including myself, grow through the time we were together was awesome. Hearing the judges announce that our small team of fifteen won

Chairman's was a culmination of years of hard work, curiosity, and passion for what we did as a team.

**What are the top three skills you learned from your *FIRST* experience that have made an impact on your current job?**

- 1) Pushing myself to do things I don't want to do.
- 2) Learning how to ask questions.
- 3) Pursuing my interests.

When I started in *FIRST* I didn't want to do a lot of things, especially public speaking and communicating my thoughts to others. Through my time in the program, I had to push beyond my comfort zone in order to help my team be more successful and to be a better team member to others. All these 'soft' skills helped me tremendously - especially since I work in a very collaborative office environment and study people's behaviors as a part of my job.

**How has *FIRST* impacted your choices (school, career, etc...)?**

On a very basic level *FIRST* helped me value 'doing' as a means of learning. By making websites, scheduling meetings, and coordinating various outreach events, I had to be proactive and gained experience through taking action. Being on *FIRST* teams influenced my choice of attending the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP) for a degree in Industrial Design. Classes at DAAP are project-based in an often collaborative studio environment where we had to sketch, use CAD, and fabricate our designs in a short amount of time (sound familiar?). Additionally, as a part of the curriculum, I was able to have five internships where I was able to explore toy, display, and medical device design as well as what I do for my job now - design research. Little did I know that when my FLL team interviewed building maintenance personnel and conducted a power audit for our Power Puzzle research project that would be a preview of what I get to do every day for work.

**What words of wisdom do you have for current *FIRST*ers?**

Don't be afraid to try new things and use your time on a team to learn and fail (often). What you gain by building a robot or writing a business plan counts positively towards your future and are experiences not everyone has by the time they graduate high school. So step out of that comfort zone and be confident that, no matter the result, you know something you didn't know before and have the experience to back it up.

