

Today, I pulled into the East Lot, finding a spot where I hope shade will land in the afternoon. I don't have to show anyone my badge as I enter the lot – there isn't a guard at this gate – but there is the long (I think it is around a mile) walk uphill to the office. I hear it will be around 100 degrees today but I don't worry about that until I'm actually walking back to the car and melting underneath the bright sunshine.

Rather than a guard that greets me as I walk onto lab, a badge reader waits readily for morning rush of employees waving their badges in front of it, unlocking the turnstile. I walk up to it happily waving my purple badge in front of it. It has been around three months since I started – 10 weeks to be exact – and I will have to turn in my badge soon. I had waited two weeks since I started to trade my paper blue badge in for one that has a rather unfortunate picture of me and will allow me access to walk through the turnstiles.

Walking the mile up to the office gives me time to think and wonder about things I would be doing during the day and what I need to remember to do later on. I give myself a checklist of things that I don't usually remember completing at the end of the day. By the time I'm in front of my building my calves are sore, unused to such abuse after a year of just sitting and studying in school, and yet I still have three flights of stairs to climb. Every morning I climb the stairs, saying a mental thank you to the elevator that patiently waits for a new occupant with its doors open welcomingly opposite the door to the stairs. When I eventually get to my seat, I'm already half sweating and gulping down a bottle of water.

Later, when I head for home and am walking back the same path but in the afternoon sun, I remind myself that walking is healthy and that I need to get my exercise in for the day. One doesn't really appreciate exercise when you end up with sore legs in the car but I can appreciate all the others who end up parking even further than I do in the same lot.

For the past ten weeks I have been here, I've explored the lab and have spoken to many different people who do many different things. However, in the end, I am still an intern for CloudSat and have, of course, learned about clouds and climate. I have to thank all the scientists and engineers who have taught me about how satellites – especially CloudSat – work and how their data benefits research. I never thought that clouds can do so much in affecting the climate of an area and how climate research involves so many different areas that it needs a team of satellites (the A-Train). Finally, I have also learned how to appreciate how research works and how science works. Working with the CloudSat people and JPL in general has shown me how science is such a wide subject that even non-scientists and non-engineers can have a hand in helping people learn more about Earth and the universe.

Though I have a real, solid badge now, I feel as if I am still the new kid on the block, still clueless of the building numbers and where people sit and what the name of the person on the other side of the building is. I might work here and get paid for my work but I am still not a full-fledged JPL'er. For that, I still have a very long way to go. I have certainly made many new friends and acquaintances during my stay here, many whom are very interesting and kind. I highly doubt I will forget who they are and what they have done

for me. After this week, there will be no more Tupperware lunches for me or morning greetings with the coworkers or even the writing on the white board. After this week, I will go back to looking at JPL from the outside, only able to get in if I have an escort as any other visitor needs. However, after this week, I know I will be able to look at the name JPL and tell people that I've worked there and actually had one of those employee badges. I will be able to walk into JPL and greet people I know and not wonder what goes on behind its gates and walls. I will be able to say that I've learned something here and it isn't just from talking the tour and walking through the museum. And hopefully, I will be able to look at JPL and say, 'I'll be back next summer.'