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I have been privileged during my time at UMD to be both a teaching assistant and a research assistant. I strongly feel that both have strengthened my career and my character. In addition to enhancing my communication and presentation skills, teaching introductory astronomy bolstered my heartfelt belief in the vital importance of instilling a new generation of students with a passion for scientific inquiry. It was in research, however, that I found my true calling. My years as an RA have taught me to independently develop scientific questions and design observational approaches to answering them. In this I have been extremely successful, and will graduate in two years with a substantial number of first-author publications and an excellent shot at obtaining a postdoctoral prize fellowship. Engaging in multiple projects taught me to manage my time, effort, resources and collaborators in simultaneous pursuit of a variety of research goals and increase my total output. Thanks to my research assistantship, I have entered into lasting collaborations with scientists all over the world, and made original discoveries using Lick and Palomar observatories and NASA space telescopes such as Hubble and Swift, as well as world-class radio facilities like the VLA. I have also been able to attend prestigious conferences to present my research to scientists that I hope will be my future colleagues. In short, my time as a graduate research assistant has been of inestimable worth to my future as a teacher, scientist, and active member of the international astronomical research community.