HC IMPACT

A perfect place

The mathematical basis for much of modern science was glimpsed by Galileo some four centuries ago when he wrote that "the book of nature is written by the hand of God in the language of mathematics." In our own century, the mathematics of quantum mechanics is used to study the structure of atoms. In just a few decades, computational quantum chemistry has progressed beyond the stage of novelty to now address real-world problems of structural, medicinal, and exotic-fuels chemistry.

HC alumnus Rollin King is at the forefront of this revolution in modern science. Rollin—make that Dr. King—graduated from Huntington College in 1995, majoring in math and chemistry. Although just 26, he's already earned a Ph.D. in computational quantum chemistry at the University of Georgia and done postdoctoral work in Zurich. King recently settled in for additional postdoctoral studies at Cambridge University in England.

"Some particularly outspoken scientists, as well as the most prestigious scientific organizations in the U.S., seem to treat science and religion like church and state: the farther we can keep them apart, the better off we will be," King says. "There are, of course, a few controversies that get people fired up, issues over which Christianity and science are often considered to be at odds, like the age of the universe and biological evolution. However, such hot-button issues distract from the fundamental philosophical assumptions held in common by scientists and Christians.

"The universe of the Bible is real, ordered, and comprehensible—the perfect universe for doing science! Thus, it's not surprising that many Christians find great joy in their scientific studies. History even tells us that many of the very greatest scientists were Christians."

King says his HC education gave him a better insight into the contrasting views of some of his current colleagues. "At HC, I was able to participate in a dialogue concerning the relationship between the Christian faith and science. Inside and outside of the classroom, students and professors are interested in truth, not just pragmatic assumptions useful in a particular field, but the development of a comprehensive worldview.

"After attending HC, I was prepared to understand and communicate with some of my colleagues in graduate school who had compartmentalized worldviews. They might, for example, believe in absolutes in science but relativism in ethics," King says. "I believe HC is a great place to begin a scientific career."

The HC academics are on target, too, in King's view. "I saw what it was like at the University of Georgia, and—at least in the sciences—the majority of studies in the majority of classes compare with the classes at Huntington," King says. "I was academically well-prepared by Huntington College. Most of the chemistry graduate students at Georgia came from smaller schools like Huntington.

"Important aspects of an education at HC are the small classes and the relationships you can develop with your professors. Those relationships motivate students to develop depth of understanding. The relationships with the professors at Huntington College are far superior in that respect."

King is pleased with his choices. "I think what I did was a very good route of personal development—the best of both worlds," he says. "In retrospect, I wasn't very mature at 18. I hadn't had the opportunity to think about how faith related to science, history, or philosophy. I think it would be overwhelming to go to a place like Georgia as a freshman. There are 30,000 students there, and you're confronted by every worldview imaginable. There are a lot of professors who have axes to grind. It can be a confrontational environment."

That's why King hopes to spend his career in the classroom. "I'd like to stay in academia," he says. "I really enjoy teaching. In fact, I taught a high-school physics class at Westminster Christian Academy while I was in Georgia. I'd like to find a place where I can do some research on my own and still teach. I'm wary of going to a large university where you do what you think will be funded, and you don't have the opportunity to teach."

King has a clear message for anyone who chooses to follow his path through the science studies at HC: "If you go to Huntington College and are a good student, there's no reason you can't get free tuition and a stipend to go to graduate school in virtually any of the 50 states. There's a dearth of good people in the sciences, and HC graduates can help fill that void as well as anybody else." ■

Reprinted from Huntington College Magazine, Spring 2000.