

Getting Ahead of the Game: Insight from Lake Forest College Alumni

Kayla Ahlstrand

Department of Biology
Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

Keggars. All campus parties. Homecoming. Just what the average college-bound high school student envisions as they say goodbye to their parents and hello to their new home for four years. We science majors at Lake Forest, however, have a little more insight as to how "college life" really works. We all know that the Biochemistry exam was strategically placed on the Monday after Homecoming. We all know (but usually do not admit at the time) that writing a grant proposal, creating a PowerPoint presentation to defend that grant, creating two posters to explain a neurodegenerative disease, and mentoring innocent First Year Studies students, all at the same time and all for the same class, truly pays off in the end. We all know that interning at Rosalind Franklin University, shadowing a physician, being a member of three science organizations, and taking vigorous classes simultaneously is just "normal".

So what is it that makes us work so hard? To many, it is being accepted into the most prestigious medical or graduate school in the country. To others, it is for the feeling of great accomplishment. Nevertheless, there is one common thread amongst these people: They they have utilized their four years at Lake Forest effectively, getting ahead of the game, and working to achieve that goal, whatever it may be.



Shaun Davis '09

It is not uncommon to hear about the successful science alumni that Lake Forest produces, yet what exactly were their initial strategies on the playing field? Did they come to Lake Forest knowing they would be doctors and researchers? Shaun Davis'09 knew he wanted to study "the cutting edge of science, using new techniques to find answers to simple questions.". Although his advisor tried to talk him out of applying for the Richter Scholar Program, Shaun knew that this was his ticket to success. The opportunity ultimately led him to work in Dr. Karen Kirk's lab for four years. Davis is currently a second-year graduate student in the Molecular and Human Genetics program at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, TX. In the lab of Herman Dierick, he studies the genetics and neural networks involved in modulating aggression in *D. melanogaster*.



Michele Beekman '03

For Michele Beekman, the chief resident in pediatrics at Rush University Medical Center, however, the future was not so clear. Coming from a family of educators, she pondered being a teacher herself. It was not until she majored in Psychology and Biology and worked as paraprofessional therapist for children with autism that she finally decided to combine all her passions and to become a doctor. "In the medical field you are both a clinician and an educator, not only to your patients, but to medical students and more junior physicians as well."



D'Anne Duncan '04

Once they knew what field they wanted to pursue (or even if they still did not), many different experiences and events solidified the road to success. For several, it was the invaluable opportunity to conduct research as an undergraduate that paved the way. D'Anne Duncan'04 participated in the University of Chicago's Summer Research Program and interned at Rosalind Franklin University, which, with the combination of upper-level biology classes, led her to apply to PhD programs in the biological sciences. Currently, Duncan is a PhD candidate in the Northwestern University Interdepartmental Neuroscience Program. Working in the lab of Stephen D. Miller, PhD, Professor of Microbiology-Immunology, she uses animal models to study Multiple Sclerosis.



Shruti Pore '08



Grace Dunford '09

Aside from skills attained through undergraduate research, Shruti Pore'08, a first-year student at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine in Boston, MA, attributes aspects of her success to being a member of *Eukaryon*. Impressed by how dedicated the members were and by how far the journal had come in just a few years, Pore was excited to be a part of it. **"The experiences I had working and coordinating with so many different (and amazing) people to put together the journal, as well as the leadership opportunity...have definitely added to my life now."**

For Grace Dunford '09, it was her motivation and persistence that enabled her to reach her desired future. Although a visiting biology seminar speaker, Dr. George Hornby, told her she could volunteer at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, Dunford did not hear from him again. It was not until she finally went down to Chicago, found Hornby's office, and told him how interested she was in his research that she

got the position. Yet with this great opportunity also came great struggle. Dunford, like others, had to find a second job to pay for food and rent, which took over a month after applying to over 40 restaurants in the Chicago area. She also simultaneously attended classes to fulfill prerequisite courses and applied to physical therapy programs. Nevertheless, she did not let this hinder her desire to succeed. "You have to remember that the people who hire you need to know that you are dedicated. Rejection is a test, so if you get turned away, try again and do not give up." Dunford is currently attending Northwestern University to get a doctorate in physical therapy.

Are there even more costs during one's undergraduate years to following such dreams? Are "science people" hermits who that only surface after hours and hours of studying the molecular mechanisms of the human brain? Sometimes. But in reality, the most successful students are also some of the most well-rounded individuals. Perhaps Davis sums it up best, as he advises to "get outside of your comfort zone...What's new in politics? Why is the new exhibit at the art museum so interesting to others?" Our science alumni have certainly worked hard for their achievements, yet that is not to say they did not find themselves celebrating Homecoming weekend, ready to take on that dreadful Biochemistry exam the Monday after.

Note: Eukaryon is published by students at Lake Forest College, who are solely responsible for its content. The views expressed in Eukaryon do not necessarily reflect those of the College. Articles published within Eukaryon should not be cited in bibliographies. Material contained herein should be treated as personal communication and should be cited as such only with the consent of the author.