

Three more trainees make biomedical career moves

By Jacqueline Powell

This spring and summer, three more trainees joined the ranks of NIEHS postbaccalaureate and postdoctoral fellows transitioning from their mentored experiences at the bench to the next steps in their careers. Although their destinations differ, their paths have one thing in common - each took advantage of the many career development resources available at NIEHS to complement training in the lab.

"Don't underestimate the value of your NIEHS peer network, as more and more connections are being made through NIEHS alumni," said Tammy Collins, director of the NIEHS Office of Fellows' Career Development. "One of my goals is to expand the bridge between current and former trainees, particularly for the purposes of informational interviews, a key element of career planning."

Aleksandra Adomas, Ph.D.

In May, Adomas began a career as a medical writer at MicroMass Communications Inc., in Cary, North Carolina. MicroMass specializes in healthcare marketing and provider promotion, and behavior research geared towards improving patient outcomes. Impressed by the company's mission to better the lives of patients, Adomas had a long-standing interest in MicroMass and was enthusiastic about accepting her new position.

"After identifying MicroMass as a potential employer, I created a company-specific job alert to notify me of openings as soon as they were advertised," she said. A phone interview for an opening last year left a positive impression, and when Adomas applied for a second position, MicroMass offered her the job she wanted.

Since joining the company, Adomas has worked on presentations, papers, and advertising materials. She credits her broad scientific background and extensive writing experience with giving her the skills and confidence she needed to pursue a career as a medical writer. At NIEHS, Adomas served as associate editor on the NIH Fellows Editorial Board, an editor for the journal *Epigenetics in Cancer*, and a guest writer for the NIEHS *Environmental Factor*. Impressively, she managed to handle these responsibilities alongside her research fellowship in the Laboratory of Molecular Carcinogenesis, where she investigated the role of C-terminal mutation on the GATA3 transcription factor, a mutation driver gene in breast cancer.

Adomas encourages fellows to attend NIEHS career development workshops, so they can better identify career options, pin down a career path, and gain professional experiences that give them a competitive advantage in the job market.

Kristin Lichti-Kaiser, Ph.D.

After completing her postdoctoral training in the Laboratory of Respiratory Biology, Lichti-Kaiser accepted a position with Syngenta Crop Protection as a product safety scientist. She works at Syngenta's Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, campus, where the company develops technology to help meet the world's changing needs for food, fuel, feed, and fiber. In a department focused on toxicology and human health, she is involved in assessing the safety of genetically modified crops.

With a Ph.D. in toxicology and postdoctoral fellowship focused on diabetes research, Lichti-Kaiser had not envisioned a career in agricultural biotechnology earlier in her training. However, she became acquainted with opportunities in this area, by attending the NIEHS fellows' brown bag lunch series and conducting informational reviews.

Lichti-Kaiser also pursued opportunities that would better position her for a career in the industry, including a class in good laboratory practices offered by Wake Technical Community College, a course in U.S. regulatory affairs sponsored by the North Carolina Regulatory Affairs Forum, and a regulatory affairs internship at the Duke Translational Medicine Institute.

Underscoring the importance of professional networking, an acquaintance passed along her resume, after she applied for the position online. Lichti-Kaiser successfully navigated multiple rounds of interviews, beginning with a phone interview and culminating with the presentation of a seminar on her postdoctoral research, and was offered the job.

Zachary McCaw

McCaw, a postbaccalaureate research fellow in the Laboratory of Respiratory Biology (LRB), is starting graduate school at Harvard University this fall, working towards a Ph.D. in biostatistics. He began working with Steven Kleeberger, Ph.D., in the NIEHS Environmental Genetics Group during his sophomore year at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). He continued working in the lab throughout his undergraduate years, spending two summers in the NIH Summer Internship Program (SIP) at NIEHS. After graduating from UNC last year with a Bachelor of Science in public health, biostatistics, and quantitative biology, McCaw continued his work with Kleeberger's group.

Describing his time in the lab as a great experience that allowed him to do both lab work and biostatistical analyses, McCaw said his research at NIEHS helped him feel well prepared for graduate school interviews. He also benefitted from seminars held by SIP and LRB. McCaw is entering graduate school with an open mind to a variety of career paths that include both academia and industry.

(Former NIEHS postdoctoral fellow Jacqueline Powell, Ph.D., is a writer and analyst with Education and Training Systems International.)



Adomas took advantage of teaching opportunities with the NIEHS Scholars Connect program. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Keeping an open mind was important for Lichti-Kaiser in recognizing opportunities in agricultural biotechnology. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



McCaw gained a solid foundation in the lab and during training sessions, which will serve him well as he goes on to pursue his doctorate in biostatistics at Harvard University. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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