

## **From the Undergraduate Bench to Corporate America**

**MicrobeLibrary Article: *Focus on Microbiology Education***

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First, allow me to provide you with some background. When I attended Miami University of Ohio I was an older, returning student. I had been through several career changes, including working in Emergency Medicine as a Paramedic for almost 10 years. So, at the ripe old age of 32, I was thrust into the world of fresh-faced 18-year-olds in my quest for an undergraduate degree in microbiology. Why microbiology you ask? Well, it was simple. I fell in love with it. Go on to medical school? At 36 it would've been a daunting task, not impossible, but daunting nonetheless. No, I wanted to get my degree and move on with my life, perhaps find a nice cozy job in a laboratory, maybe get a little crazy with some recombinant DNA work, but mostly just work contentedly at the bench.

I loved my undergraduate studies at Miami University. The Microbiology Department faculty members were kind, encouraging, and very knowledgeable; some in fact have become cherished friends. My coursework at Miami provided me with an outstanding knowledge base. I felt that with my clinical background, I wouldn't have any problem landing a bench position. Why then, during my senior year, did I even consider looking for work off the bench? I'd spent almost a year as a laboratory assistant, working with Dr. Kelly Cowan, and I loved every minute of it. Was I crazy? What in the world could I do with my microbiology degree other than bench work, graduate school, or medical school? What would happen if I were to apply for research jobs in industry? I decided to take a chance and see what was out there.

Miami University has a great Career Placement Center, especially if you are involved in the school of business. I searched online one evening for positions within Procter and Gamble, and I decided to look at all of the jobs, not just traditional bench positions. I found a position in Regulatory and Clinical Development as a Clinical Data Coordinator. During my junior year I had visited Procter and Gamble's new Health Care Research Center and I was very impressed. Would I fit in? Would I have the right skills to get a position? If I got a position, would I like it? Would I miss the bench? All of these questions and others ran through my mind as I nervously applied online.

To my astonishment, I received a letter of acknowledgement asking me to take the skills assessment test and then to interview for possible positions within the company. A recruiter passed my application and curriculum vitae to a hiring manager, who called and explained what the position entailed. The position would be literally at the opposite end of the work spectrum from the bench work that I so dearly loved. At Miami I had been working in the earliest phase of research, the testing of theories on the bench. The position at Procter and Gamble included working with those compounds that had made their way off the bench, had passed through strict testing, and were now ready for clinical trials. I would be responsible for the entire clinical trial "lab book," as it were. Everything that happens in the course of the trial is collected according to the Good Clinical Practices and then the data are presented for analysis. I would be required to call upon my critical-thinking skills, my attention to detail, and my scientist's curiosity as instilled by the dedicated faculty at Miami University. The practice of keeping good lab documentation while at Miami would be instrumental in my work at Procter and Gamble. Would I be successful?

After two years at Procter and Gamble, I think I am. I loved the time I spent at Miami University, and the Epidemiology course I took from Dr. Cowan provided me with a great deal of knowledge that I'm able to

apply on a daily basis with my work. I do miss the bench but I truly enjoy what I'm doing now. My education provided me with the tools to get me started, I just chose what to work on.