



BIOMOLECULAR SCIENCES

Spring 2021

After BMS at CCSU: Guidance for Upper class and Graduate Students

Our alumni have advice for students preparing for the next step

We reached out to CCSU graduates including:

Matt Rubenstein—a veterinarian, currently practicing in Perth, Australia.

Caitlin Gabor — an active duty officer in the US Army (a 71A, Microbiologist). She worked in a clinical lab for 4 years and is now working toward a PhD at University of Maryland School of Medicine studying enteric pathogens in the Molecular Microbiology and Immunology program.

Brandon Lepore— currently a temporary associate microbiologist position at Medtronic.

Elizabeth Mendes — a PhD Student at Duke School of Medicine studying cancer biology/pharmacology, planning to go into industry (tech transfer/ small biotech start-up).

We asked CCSU graduates questions provided by our current students:

What about the job/grad school search? Any advice before I go on interviews?

From Matt:

When it came time for vet school interviews (and I suppose this would relate to job interviews as well) I Googled “vet school interview questions.” I compiled a large list and I just answered them over and over in my head until the answers were pretty smooth. There were many questions asked during my interviews that I had expected so the answers easily rolled off the tongue. There were questions, however, which I did not prepare for (once I was asked “Tell me about a time when you started a project you had no idea how to do, what you did to prepare, and how did it turn out”).

For anyone seeking a job:

Something I came across while doing interview question research which I didn't realize is that it's ok during your interview to take some time to think about your answer. I asked for a little time after the above question, took 30-60

seconds to think about how to answer it, and then let the answer flow. It's better to take a little time and give a well thought out answer than to just word-vomit whatever is on the top of your head.

What should I read?

Any peer reviewed journal like Cell or Nature. And make sure you speak to peers and professors. Conversation about scientific topics enhances your understanding of them.

Outliers, the Story of Success by Martin Gladwell

The Tao of Pooh by Benjamin Hoff (“sounds weird, but I think it is a great story reminding us to be the Pooh and not frantic Rabbit, worrying Piglet, or pessimistic Eeyore of the world”).

Which websites should I check out?

From Elizabeth:

[The PhD balance community](#) has tons of resources on grad school.

Adding Our Own advice:

Check out the CCSU BMS Alumni page on Facebook. You'll find ideas, job opportunities and people who can provide more excellent advice.

[BMS Facebook page](#)

When I applied to grad school, [Cientifico Latino](#) helped me tremendously. It offers 1:1 mentoring for FREE. I am now a mentor through the program if you have questions.

"Científico Latino aims to help undergraduate, graduate, and professional students by providing mentorship, open-access resources on scholarships, fellowships and blog posts on professional development."

Follow science accounts on Instagram in general (and LinkedIn/Twitter). I have found job opportunities, application advice, and more from these platforms. Always expand your network. Some great accounts are science.sam science.bae (both of these ladies have PhDs and do a lot of great work).

Any more advice to reach success? How did you reach your goals?

Brandon:

I made sure to pay attention in class and take good, detailed notes. Take a practical approach by trying to imagine what the topic of discussion in class would look like in industry.

Elizabeth:

I got good grades (I did my MS at CCSU), paid attention in classes, joined a lab ASAP. I participated in a research fellowship (the PIE program) and held a job outside of BMS (as a technical patent writer). I can expand on any of these if people are interested.

Caitlin:

Get work in the science field while going to school and networking. Experience is important. Landing those basic lab tech jobs can help a lot for building your CV. The lab jobs I did have I wouldn't have been able to get without networking. A fellow CCSU student helped me get my first lab job and I then

was able to help fellow students when we had openings. A fellow graduate actually helped introduce me to another graduate when I wanted to join the Army to be a microbiologist as well.

I wish I'd done more research to really get as many tools in my toolbelt as possible. Don't be afraid to become familiar with as many techniques as possible.

Don't be so focused on what you want to research right now...it is just as important, if not more, to connect with a mentor you are going to work with.

Matt:

Developing such a strong science foundation at CCSU helped me get into and ultimately succeed at vet school, but honestly, what I use most is probably algebra. I use algebra on a daily basis. And yes, I did take algebra in high school, but I was an older student and hadn't thought about algebra at all for years before I went back to school. I knew that I had to take calculus to get into vet school, so I wanted to make sure my math foundation was faultless.

I suppose really the overarching theme of education is critical thinking and logic. Use what you've learned to make leaps in your thinking. Don't just blindly regurgitate facts; use what you've learned to critically think about what you're being told. This certainly comes into play when reading papers – what are the flaws (if any) in the way this experiment was conducted, how could we do a better job in future experiments, etc. I actually found it very difficult to be critical until I learned that it wasn't some personal attack, but a way to make everyone better.

And the last word comes from Brandon:

I made sure to always consult my professors and go to them for help if I need it.