



# MEET OUR ALUMNI!



## Jayna Nichols

*BFS Class of 2017*

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- Pursuing PhD Genetics and Molecular Biology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, B.S. in Biochemistry, Graduated 2021

### What are you up to now?

I am currently working on my PhD in Genetics and Molecular Biology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. I chose this path because I fell in love with research during my undergraduate years, and wanted to pursue research as a career. Broadly, I'm interested in learning how our genes and lifestyle interact during the development of complex diseases, such as cardiovascular disease. I'm lucky because at UNC, there are lots of faculty with similar interests to work with in designing my thesis project. I spent my first year of graduate school rotating through different labs to try out different flavors of research, and will be picking my mentor/thesis project in April.

### Do you have any passion projects?

When I'm not in the lab (and admittedly sometimes even when I am..), you can find me scouring the internet for travel deals. My coworkers joke about how often they catch me looking at plane tickets and dreaming up trips. I love roadtrips, camping, backpacking, and anything outdoors! I've also started volunteering at the aquarium and animal shelter.

### What was the biggest challenge you faced in College?

It took me a while to find what I was passionate about, and learn how to pursue my interests in a healthy way. I went into college knowing that I wanted a career in science, but I was confused when I got there and didn't love everything I was doing right away. I hated a lot of my science classes (ie organic chemistry). I thought I wanted to do research, but my experiments consistently failed my entire first year of working in a lab. This really scared me - I felt like an imposter. I worried that I was in the wrong line of work, but I had no idea what else I would want to do. For my first two years, I tried to solve my problems in the wrong way... by FORCING a passion. I spent MORE time in the library, MORE time in the lab. For me, the turning point was my junior year when I decided to get a life outside of work. I worked my very hardest Monday through Friday, then escaped through camping trips at the beach or the mountains on the weekend. I invested in friendships and stopped isolating myself. Classes were still hard, my grades dropped a bit, but my mental health got so much better. I don't like organic chemistry and never will. But having a life outside my grades made exams less stressful because they weren't my life anymore. I found myself excited to go back to the lab again - I felt curious about what I was doing and excited for new opportunities. I was able to find my passion for the things I'm doing by learning how and when to take a break. Sometimes getting through challenges just takes grit... but sometimes it takes perspective gained through stepping back.

### What advice do you have for BFS students as they go off to university/college?

Passion and excitement for what you're doing is so much more important than doing it perfectly. Learn how to foster your curiosity and passion first, then worry about grades.

### What memory of BFS comes to mind?

I have so many memories of BFS but my favourite has to be living in Wellbeach. I lived in the building with some of my best friends so we would gather at one person's house to eat, do homework, and just hang out. And of course most of our teachers lived there too so it was always "nice" bumping into them. But out of all the Wellbeach memories my favourite was when we had to make a documentary for our Media class so I made one about life at Wellbeach.