

Lacie Smith '09 received her BS and MS of Chemistry at UNCW

The first time I fell in love with chemistry was in high school. My chemistry teacher coach Richard Rookie showed me how exciting and rewarding science could be. It was not until my sophomore year of college that I realized this would be the career path that I would take. The greatest influence in my decision was Dr. Sridhar Varadarajan. He taught me Organic chemistry (I) lecture as well as lab. I spent an enormous amount of time in his office that semester. After that time I got to know him not only as a professor, but also as a person. His passion for chemistry began to rub off on me during that time period. I learned the fundamentals of organic chemistry in the classroom and the techniques associated with those fundamentals in lab all from him. Dr. Varadarajan opened my eyes, heart, and soul to organic chemistry! He was such a big influence in the classroom that I decided to take my learning experience to the next level by working with him in his research laboratory doing a departmental honors project. Gaining hands on experience in the research laboratory was one of the best decisions of my undergraduate career. While working in his lab in 2005 I received the UNCW undergraduate Research Fellowship and the Glaxo-Smith Kline Summer Research scholarship for my work in synthesizing novel quorum signaling molecules. This experience is what led me to graduate school!

As a masters student my interests continued in organic chemistry. I really enjoyed the faculty and staff as well as the overall atmosphere of UNCW department of chemistry so much that I decided to stay for graduate school. I continued working with Dr. Sridhar Vardarajan on a different project than that of my undergraduate research. My graduate research involved synthesizing site-specific DNA-methylating compounds targeting pancreatic  $\beta$ -cells. My favorite part of graduate school was working in the lab and being apart of Dr. Varadarajan group. I'm the type of person that would rather be in the lab than doing busy paper work! There was nothing about graduate school at UNCW that I did not enjoy. Everyday was exciting and rewarding in Dobo Hall! The happiest/saddest part was graduating! I was happy to finally have finished my research and received my degree, but sad that I had to leave such amazing faculty and staff. The faculty and staff in this chemistry department is truly one of a kind. They are all an unforgettable group of people that touched my life in so many ways. They have molded me into the scientist that I am today!

After graduate school I got a job with Pacific Northwest National Labs in Richland WA. This laboratory is a Department of Energy (DOE) government lab operated by Battelle. I am a Post Masters Research Associate working with Dr. Aaron Wright synthesizing activity based protein probes for applications in the field of Proteomics. My job currently relates to my graduate studies in the sense that I am still doing organic synthesis; eventually I will be doing biological testing of my compounds. The ability to continue doing organic synthesis was the main reason that I decided to take this job so far away from my home state of NC. I could have settled for an analytical job in NC, however I am a strong believer in doing what makes you happy. If you love what you do then it is not work! This job will give me the experience that all the big pharmaceutical companies are looking for and the opportunity to become more of a chemical biologist.