

Medical Student Enrichment Program

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine

Clinical Elective: Oxford, England – The University of Oxford

Dates of Training: June 2, 2024 – July 27, 2024

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Date of Reflection: August 28, 2024

I've heard various stereotypes about the United Kingdom ranging from the terrible weather to the uptight and rude people; these stereotypes always led me to wonder how amazing authors such as J.R. Tolkien, Jane Austen, Agatha Christie, Beatrix Potter and many more were able to spin such whimsical and gripping tales that enraptured a reader's heart. My summer in Oxford made me quickly and easily realize how not just writers but anyone from any specialty could easily be inspired by the beauty of the UK and have it motivate their artistic creations or scientific endeavors.



The train ride from London to Oxford is an hour to hour and a half depending on which station you board from. My personal favorite is Paddington...would that have to do with the adorable Paddington bear cafe on the second floor of the station? Maybe. During my first train ride into Oxford I will never forget how enamored I was with the adorable English countryside. The rolling hills, dairy cows, fluffy sheep, and lush greenery captured my attention as I eagerly awaited my arrival to Oxford. When I arrived in Oxford, I hailed a classic black cab and set off towards St. Edmund College, located right off of Oxford's bustling High Street. The moment the cab entered into the city center I saw the magnificent walls of Christchurch College, home to the famous dining hall of Harry Potter (pictured left). As the cab drove closer to my destination, I



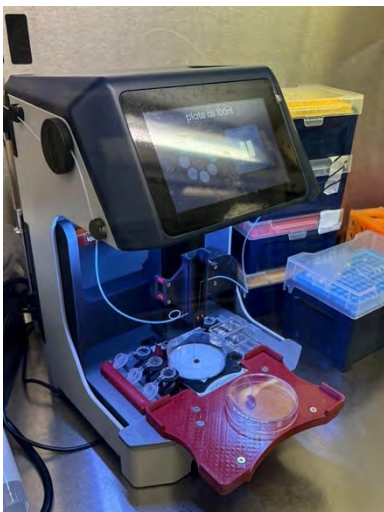
saw the stunning architecture of the University of Oxford sprawled across the city. I felt like I was in the middle of a Jane Austen novel or had somehow stumbled upon the set of Bridgerton.

From the outside, the 39 colleges of Oxford don't appear to be much other than large walls and a few various towers with gorgeous spires. However, once you walk past their gates you can truly witness each college's beauty. When I arrived at St. Edmund's Hall, I was greeted by its gorgeous, quaint, and charming quad (pictured left).

After settling into my accommodations, I embarked upon beginning my research project in Dr. Claire and James Edwards's lab. On my first day, I became acquainted with my amazing mentor, Daniele (Dan) Cotton, an MD-PhD candidate at the University of Oxford (pictured below). Throughout my undergraduate career, I have had the opportunity to engage in basic science and clinical research; from these experiences the one thing I have learned is that a good mentor will truly make or break your research experience.

Dan was an exceptional mentor. On top of being incredibly intelligent he is a kind, caring, and multifaceted individual who is a part of the taekwondo team at the University of Oxford and an avid magnet collector (such as myself). Aside from getting to know Dan as an individual, his guidance in the lab and easy to understand explanations of complex research techniques or theories truly made me enjoy and regain my passion for basic science research.

During my research, I learned about the complexities of cell culture research and how to successfully culture my own cells. I learned about the various cell lines utilized in the lab and how each one differs in its characteristics and origins. Alongside these new skills I gained, I discovered how to operate a microfluidic printing device (pictured) to create structures to observe cell migration and conduct single cell picking for use in culturing cells that have been successfully transduced with fluorescent proteins. The various research techniques I learned about were mind-blowing to me. They



opened my eyes to how within research one must approach their scientific questions in creative ways. In the same way that literature or arts requires a flexible and fluid mindset so does research. My interactions with Dan and seeing his own approach towards tackling problems within his PhD inspired me immensely and have left a significant impact on the way I will not only approach research but also, in the future, how I approach clinical reasoning.



Alongside meeting Dan, I met Britney Johnson (pictured left), an MD student at UABHSOM who is pursuing her PhD at the University of Oxford. Britney and I bonded almost instantly. Her knowledge about medicine in the US combined with her passion to pursue her PhD in the UK was inspiring. Within medicine, I believe that many medical students fear from going off the beaten path and pursuing unique opportunities. Brittany's own experiences as a medical student forging a pathway to Oxford fueled my own dreams and goals for my future in medicine. Growing up with a multicultural background, I always knew I wanted

to pursue global health and take time abroad during my medical education; with the help of UAB MSEP I have been able to accomplish that goal however, now thanks to Brittany I believe my own path in having a global career in medicine is not as far-fetched as I assumed it would be.

Aside from my time in the lab, I was able to take various weekend trips to: London, Leicester, and Glasgow. While in London, I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and attended my first music festival by myself and was able to see one of my favorite artists, Doja Cat, perform live. My trips to Leicester and Glasgow were far more personal as they involved meeting family members whom I had never seen in my life. A fun fact about myself is that I am a British citizen due to England being my mother's birthplace. The relatives I met on my trips were able to show me pictures of my mother from her childhood and when she was my age. It was an incredibly touching moment for me to learn more about my mother and witness the beauty of the country she had told me so much about. In Glasgow, I met my second cousins who helped me accomplish my bucket list goal of petting a Scottish Highland Cow (pictured right).



The time I spent in England allowed me to see the beauty of living a slower paced life. Within the US, it feels like we are constantly on the go but in the UK I witnessed how brewing a simple cup of tea, slowing down, and being present within your environment are key aspects of their culture. (A key example of this would be the various hot water dispensers in the Botnar coffee lounge and the dedicated fridge of milk for those to brew a cup of tea—I was a frequent user of these necessary resources.) Additionally, the rich history of England is prevalent in its architecture and various museums. Whenever I had the chance, I would explore the amazing collections nearby at the Ashmolean and Pitts River Museums.

My magical summer in Oxford showed me that although research and medical school appear hard and daunting, initially, they are both journeys that can be thoroughly enjoyed by grabbing the opportunities you have available to you and instilling your heart and soul within them. The growth I have undergone

through this program and the lifelong friendships I made will forever change me as an individual. I would sincerely like to thank UAB MSEP and the Edwards Lab once again for allowing me to partake in this amazing program.

