



Brenna Norton-Baker »

# BIOCHEMISTRY

LIKE A LOT OF STUDENTS, Brenna Norton-Baker thought she wanted to go to medical school. Biology, she thought, would be her major. Then, she took organic chemistry as a freshman and everything changed. Brenna loved the subject matter, and that opened up a number of new possibilities for her.

“I enjoyed organic so much that I asked the professor at the end of the semester if I could work in his lab. He said yes, and I became a full-time, paid research assistant for the summer.” Brenna worked on the development of a new antibiotic, and the following semester, she earned academic credit working in the same lab on an anti-cancer drug.

On top of her coursework, Brenna continues to work in different labs, including an organic synthesis lab, where she was trained to work in ventilated hoods. “I was really privileged to be doing that as a sophomore. I can’t believe how much I learned, not only about the topic and performing air-free synthetic techniques, but also about working with other people. We had to do a lot of presentations. I had to present posters and do oral presentations, often just within the department, but also at conferences. That really helps you build confidence.”

As an acknowledgement of her efforts, Brenna won a Goldwater Scholarship – one of the top academic honors in the U.S. She agrees that biochemistry is demanding, but says she still finds time to for things such as participating in Alpha Chi Sigma – the professional chemists society. “We do a lot of science outreach with elementary school students. One favorite of mine is an experiment we call Fluffy’s Toothpaste, which involves a reaction that sends foam exploding 10 feet into the air. The kids always love it.”

After graduating, Brenna plans to intern with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Colorado where she’ll conduct research. After that, she hopes to attend graduate school and pursue more research opportunities in biochemistry. 📍



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