

# HPA SPRING NEWS

## PRINCETON UNIVERSITY HEALTH PROFESSIONS ADVISING

### HPA 2019-20 Highlights

This has been a year of unexpected changes at HPA.

In our professional staff, we said goodbye to both **Jessica Matzko**, assistant director, and **Randall Perez**, HPA adviser. They will both be greatly missed, but move to new and exciting opportunities supporting students on both coasts—Jessica in Maine and Randall in Oregon. **Sachiko Datta** joins us as a new HPA adviser, where she will continue to support first-year and sophomore students as she did as the Wilson College Director of Studies.

We have also introduced a new HPA affiliate role within our office to draw on the wisdom of the wider Princeton community. **Jess Deutsch**, associate director of student-athlete services and former associate director of HPA has also stepped in to provide evening appointment hours for our prehealth student athletes. **Dr. Joe Perno** offered office hours as a physician in residence, chatting with students about his career in clinical, academic, and industry roles. We have appreciated their support and the guidance that they can provide to our students.

We could not do our work without the support of our student leaders! Thank you for everything to our graduating HPA Peer Advisers—Rucha Alur, Josue Chirinos, Alison Heilbronner, Jaein Jung, Jayson Saleet, Elisabeth Slighton, Nivi Thomas, and Claire Thompson. And within our **Jock Doc peer network** for student-athletes, we offer thanks to our graduating seniors: Alison Chang, MacKenzie Ebel, Cole Morokhovich, Annique Nyman, Caroline Taber, and Davis Wachtell.

And of course, the changes in our staff have been overshadowed by the changes in our country and in the world. With these past few months of quarantine and of protest, it's even more clear that we are in urgent need of diverse and socially aware physicians, scientists, advocates, and policy makers who are willing and able to lead and serve. It is a privilege to support our prehealth students on their paths toward this goal.

In normal years, we put together a comprehensive end of the year newsletter with additional HPA and broader community news. This year has left us less time and resources to do this. But, our favorite part of the newsletter is highlighting the success of our recent applicants to professional schools, who offer their advice to our current students. You will find their profiles on the following pages. We hope that their words provide some inspiration and motivation to you on your prehealth journey—they inspire us in our work!

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## White Coats for Black Lives

Resources for educating yourself and taking action to end racism as an aspiring health professional:

- [White Coats for Black Lives](#) was founded in 2014 as a medical student-run organization that shares resources and builds coalitions. (Follow [@natlwc4bl](#))
- [Association of American Colleges Diversity and Inclusion news articles](#)
- [Harvard Medical School Antiracism and Health Suggested Resources](#)
- [Duke University School of Medicine Anti-Racism Resources](#)

## TigerDocs in Training: 2020 Matriculant Profiles

At the end of each application cycle, we invite successful applicants to share their advice with younger students through a series of Accepted Applicant Panels and these matriculant profiles. Many thanks to all of our alums who pay it forward to our aspiring health professionals!

### Jennie Yang '20, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology with a certificate in Linguistics

Pursuing an MD at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine

**Significant college activities:** Student Volunteers Council - Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center and Rescue Mission of Trenton; Project Solidarity; John C. Bogle '51 Fellows in Civic Service; International Internship Program; EEB Research Assistant and Senior Thesis Research; Koleinu a Cappella



Photo courtesy of Rescue Mission of Trenton

#### Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:

Take advantage of the opportunities at Princeton. If you're interested in service and civic engagement, browse the Pace Center's volunteer opportunities—or create your own! If you're interested in research, scroll through the Student Employment job listings for research assistant positions, or navigate department faculty pages and email professors whose ongoing research piques your interest. If you're interested in shadowing, reach out to as many alumni physicians in your area as you can (this worked for me on two occasions!). If you're interested in interning at an organization, apply to the Bogle Fellowship freshman year or contact a possible mentor directly. Believe it or not, there are internships outside of PICS and IIP! The list of potential opportunities goes on and on, and there are so many people and resources at your fingertips to support you and help you develop your passions as a premed.

Don't be afraid of rejection, especially when it comes to reaching out to professors (even non-Princeton ones) or alumni—know that it only takes one person emailing back in the affirmative for you to possibly gain a life-changing experience.

Bounce back from failure—if you get a B- in Orgo like I did, or if it's relatively late in the year and you still don't have summer plans like I didn't, don't let it deter you from your dream of becoming a physician. Instead, pause to reflect, regroup, and re-strategize. Always stay open-minded to new learning experiences and opportunities (but don't overwhelm yourself!), and try your best to major and/or minor in what interests you.

Never allow yourself to think that you are not doing well or enough while others around you are—the Princeton duck syndrome exists too, so try to participate in precept (or lecture) even if it seems like you have something less valuable to offer.

Most importantly, take good care of your mental and physical health, recalibrate yourself when needed, and keep what you are working for and towards in the back of your mind. Resilience and perseverance are key. Good luck on your premed journey—I'm rooting for you, we're all rooting for you!

## Seeking Shadowing Opportunities

- [HPA Shadowing Tips Handout](#) (pdf)
- [Princeton LinkedIn Community](#)
- [Association of American Medical Colleges How to Shadow advice](#)
- [HPA Clinical Experience FAQs](#)



**Rohey Jah '16, Psychology with a certificate in Neuroscience  
Pursuing an MD at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine**

**Significant college activities:** Research Intern at ASER Centre in New Delhi, India, Study Abroad in Uppsala, Sweden, GlobeMed, Princeton Nursery School, Big Sibbs Mentor, Community Action Leader, Muslim Students Association, Black Student Union, Sigma Xi Honors Society

**Post-college activities:** Post bac at University of Maryland College Park, Wroblewski Fellow at Cumberland Valley Retina Consultants, Research at Medical Research Council in Kololi, The Gambia, Suicide Counselor, Hospice and Vigil Volunteer, Infant Cuddler at NICU, Instructor for So What Else

(After School Integrative Health & Wellness Program)

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:**

If you encounter a few hiccups along the pre-med path, that's okay! You're entering a field where there will be more than a few of those and cultivating a sense of grit and resilience when confronted with them will be imperative. Don't be afraid to take time off to recalibrate through a gap year (or several); the field of medicine isn't going anywhere any time soon! Spend this time engaged in activities that allow you to deeply reflect on yourself, your passions, and why you are pursuing medicine. We sometimes get caught up in the flurry of activity that comes with being a pre-med; inundated with prerequisites and research and extracurriculars and exams, it's easy to inadvertently lose sight of what called you to this path in the first place. Try your best to always keep sight of your "why". A gap year can be a remarkable way of doing this. I spent my gap years in places and roles I likely would not have been able to as a medical student and though many were only tangentially related to medicine, they were pivotal in reigniting my passion for the field and are experiences I will always cherish. As an added bonus, admissions interviewers are always super intrigued by these non-traditional experiences, so don't be afraid to forgo the often trodden path and pave your own way to medicine!

And as you pave this path, try not to compare your journey to others'. Remember, comparison is the thief of joy and unfortunately, we have an excess of avenues for comparison these days. Consider taking a sabbatical from or spending less time on social media, Reddit, or SDN during your application cycle. Though they can be remarkable fountains of knowledge, they also have a tendency to stir feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, even for the best applicants. Consider diverting your attention instead towards self-care or other activities unrelated to medicine. Now would be a great time to look into yoga, journaling, mindfulness meditation or to pick up that activity that's been a New Year's resolution for years.

When you do apply, please do everything as early as you possibly can. If you're a procrastinator, now is the time to sort that out. I applied while abroad and wound up doing a lot of things at the last minute. Although things may miraculously work out, you'll have saved yourself a world of nervous anguish if you do things early! There are so many factors in this process that are outside of your control, so try to make sure all those that are (such as timing) are attended to with utmost diligence and urgency. The importance of timing really cannot be overstated!

No matter what happens, remember that you will always be enough. And your journey will be a beautiful one, precisely because it is yours. :) Feel free to ask HPA for my contact info, you're welcome to reach out to me for anything at all!

## Chinenye Azoba '18, Molecular Biology with certificates in Latin American Studies and Global Health & Health Policy

Pursuing an MD at John Hopkins University School of Medicine



**Significant college activities:** Tutor/Mentor at Community House After School Enrichment (CHASE); Princeton Neuroscience Network (PNN) Community Outreach; Forbes Residential College Advisor; HPA Peer Advisor; McGraw Center Tutor for General Chemistry and Calculus; Global Health Internship in Bolivia; Princeton Brazil Global Fellows Research

**Post-college activities:** Clinical Research Coordinator in Boston

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** During my time at Princeton, being a pre-med student felt like I was just going through the motions: grind through a problem set, study for yet another exam, devote countless hours in the lab, rinse, repeat. Although my interest in STEM gave me the stamina I needed to get through my coursework, I have since learned that my motivations for pursuing a career in medicine were largely grounded in the experiences that I had outside of the lab and in my non-STEM classes. For example, my passion for Latin American Studies, which originally begun as a budding interest in Spanish language, took me around the globe. In addition to clinical exposure, during my international experiences I gained a critical perspective on how issues of public health and social justice are intertwined. Importantly, through my LAS certificate, I met one of my current mentors (and now friend), who provided me with a much-needed outlet and encouraged me to pursue creative talents that I didn't even know I had. Ultimately, my advice for pre-meds is as follows: while you go through the motions of Princeton academia, don't be afraid to dive in when you find something that you're passionate about, whether it's STEM-related or not. Even if you may not know it at the time, your extracurricular activities and side hustles can inform your personal values and enrich your career trajectory. Moreover, seek mentors and experiences outside of your major. As an individual and as a future physician, you need to learn to embrace diversity of thought and experience, and it's never too early to learn how to do this.

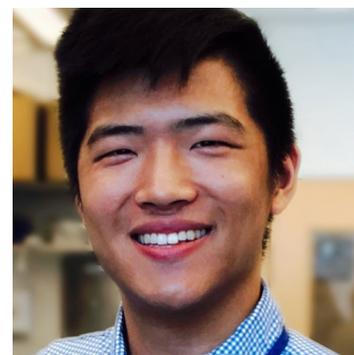
## Adam Wang '18, Molecular Biology

Pursuing an MD/PhD at the Tri-Institutional Program at Weill Cornell / Rockefeller / Memorial Sloan Kettering

**Significant college activities:** Research in the Rabinowitz Lab, McGraw Peer Tutor, Peer Academic Adviser, Hospice Volunteer

**Post-college activities:** Research at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** With the wide variety of academic and extracurricular offerings at Princeton, it can be easy to spread yourself too thin, especially when you have a lot of interests you want to explore. I entered Princeton as a Classics major, participated in arts and humanities related activities, dabbled in global health, and wanted to spend as much time in the lab as possible. It wasn't long before I realized that in juggling all these commitments at once, I couldn't devote a meaningful amount of time to any of them. I decided to focus most of my time on areas I found the greatest passion for: science, teaching, and mentorship. But then my worry shifted to how this might be perceived by medical schools—would I be considered too one-dimensional, boring, stereotypical even? Luckily my interests aligned well with what MD/PhD programs generally look for in applicants, but I realize now on the other side of the cycle that these principles should hold true for all pre-meds. If you are ever feeling overwhelmed with your commitments, know that it will be okay if you let a few of them go. Focus on what excites you most and your dedication and drive will naturally shine through.



**Hila Ghersin '18, Psychology with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**  
**Pursuing an MD at Albert Einstein College of Medicine**

**Significant college activities:** Residential College Adviser, Big Sibs, Orange Key Tour Guide, Baby Lab Research Assistant

**Post-college activities:** Clinical Research Coordinator at UCSF's Breast Care Center; member of the Patient Support Corps; Volunteer at Hamilton Families

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** Enjoy the Princeton experience and focus on forming meaningful relationships-- college is more than a stepping stone to med school. There is no right way to be premed and it's a long road, so make sure you are taking courses and doing activities that you are actually passionate about. My favorite courses, and the ones that most shaped my thinking and understanding of society, were AAS & GSS classes I had the opportunity to take as a part of the GHP certificate-- and I talked about them in interviews more often than any science course!



Remember to take advantage of HPA's support and experience and reach out to the larger Princeton alumni network. Before I went to each interview I was able to get in contact with a fellow Princetonian who gave me some insight into what the med school is like and what to expect from the interview day, which definitely put me at ease. As you gain more experiences, note the small experiences that bring you joy and were significant learning moments-- you will definitely draw on them for essay inspiration, talking points, or for motivation. Finally, to maintain some sanity throughout the application process, try to avoid comparing yourself to others and take a deep breath. You are doing great!



**Catharine Leahy '17, Chemistry with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**

**Pursuing an MD at University of Illinois College of Medicine**

**Significant college activities:** Outdoor Action, Homework Helpers at Princeton Public Library, Princeton Disability Awareness, Orange Key

**Post-college activities:** Research Technician at Dana Farber Cancer Institute (2018-2019), ER Scribe (2019-2020), and Befriender with Samaritans Crisis Hotline (2018-2020)

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** Use a journal! You'll appreciate having thoughtful memories of meaningful experiences just for their own sake, and it's an amazing tool for reflection and growth. But you will use and appreciate it writing applications and preparing for interviews. It's a lot easier to look over a journal than trying to come up with stories that you may not remember super well.

Stay on top of your prerequisites, but be sure to spend time to explore other careers and majors than those you thought you would do at the beginning. I am so grateful for the time I spent undecided (about my major, post college plans, life goals, etc.) in college, because I am more certain and confident about what I am doing now. Use the awesome opportunities you have at Princeton to explore the many different pathways you can take your life. And while gap years are useful for building that resume, know that it's also an important time for personal growth, finding out what matters most to you, and learning how to survive outside of an academic bubble. Take time to travel, find new hobbies, contribute to your community, and invest in your relationships.

**Nergis Khan '19, Neuroscience with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**  
**Pursuing an MD at Stanford University School of Medicine**

**Significant college activities:** Princeton MediHack, Center for Health and Wellbeing Health Scholars Fellowship, PICS Internship at Children's National Hospital, Bogle Fellowship in Civic Service, Butler College PAA/ HPA PA, summer internship at a health IT startup, Organic Chemistry McGraw Tutor, Muslim Students Association

**Post-college activities:** Clinical Research Assistant at the Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Neurology, Ataxia and Movement Disorders Unit



**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** The best pieces of advice I have lived by during my own premed process at Princeton don't have to do with which classes to take or how to set up research experiences, instead they have to do with something much more fundamental but sometimes quite elusive: cultivating a healthy, motivating mindset. If I could go back and have a conversation with my freshman self, this is what I would tell her—hopefully this is helpful to you!

Firstly, try not to let yourself get caught up in constructing a narrative for yourself too early and too rigidly. I remember going through my first couple of years at Princeton trying so hard to keep up with a checklist I convinced myself I needed to stick to in order for the arc of my premed storyline (of sorts) to not only "make sense", but also "be unique". Writing it down outs how ironic and ridiculous it is but in reality it is hard to resist planning out your next five moves. By the time you submit your application to medical school, your narrative will fall in place if you've been true to yourself throughout this process. Allow yourself some room for spontaneity in your choices of classes, extracurriculars, and even friends. My most meaningful experiences have come from those moments when an opportunity I didn't expect materialized and I decided to take a chance.

Next, amidst the sea of people offering you their advice and opinions (myself included!) it's important to focus on yourself. Your premed peers are similar to you in many ways but you all diverge in many many more key ways. No two people's journeys to medical school are going to be the same and medical school admissions committees know that, so don't automatically internalize someone else's experiences or opinions. Consult with people that you trust when you need to, but at the end of the day you should be the one deciding what your academic and professional goals ought to be. You need to be the one to set your own standards. Retake the MCAT or take those four certificates if you want to, regardless of how many people might say you don't have to.

Lastly, everyone fails but few people will tell you if you don't ask. Reach out to your mentors, advisors, and friends for perspective when it becomes difficult to toe the line between just being discouraged and feeling prohibitively set back. I wish I had had the courage (and the humility) to do this more often during my time at Princeton; I would have emerged from so many challenges faster and stronger. Everyone has a story that you can learn from and draw inspiration from and more people than you would expect are willing to share, you need only ask. Nobody succeeds alone—it's ok to need to be reminded of that once in a while. Best of luck on your journey to medical school and beyond!

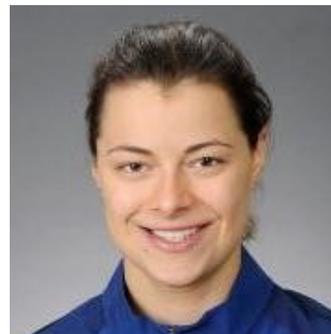
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## Crafting a Personal Narrative

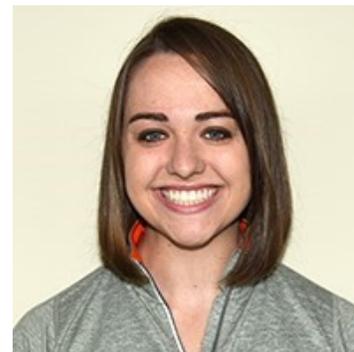
- [HPA Power of Self-Reflection Question of the Week](#)
- [Sample stories from the AAMC Anatomy of an Applicant](#)
- [Two sample medical school essays via US News & World Report](#)

**Kat Holmes '17, Chemistry****Pursuing an MD at Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai****Significant college activities:** Varsity Fencing Team; 2016 Olympic Fencing Team; RA Niv Lab**Post-college activities:** RA Dettwiler Lab; training for the 2020 Olympic Games

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** There is no getting around it, Princeton pre-med is tough. But remember that everybody is in the same boat and that the professors genuinely want you to succeed. Even though everybody wants to go to the best med school and that the classes are hard, nobody is out to get you. If you are struggling, talk to your classmates and reach out to your professors. Initially, I made the mistake of trying to shoulder everything on my own, without seeking help when I needed it. I think a lot of people make this mistake at first but then, as time goes on, begin to open up and realize that they can get farther if they work with others.



That corny saying about "standing on the shoulders of giants" to see farther really applies here. Your professors are already a given in that sense. They are already giants in their respective fields and if you don't understand something, at least in my experience, they are always willing to go that extra mile and help you grasp the material. And as for your classmates, odds are there is a lot of stuff they don't understand as well and that you can help each other fill in the blanks. You can help each other "see farther." It sounds corny and trite, but one of the things a lot of med schools emphasize throughout the application process is teamwork and how it is necessitated in medicine. So by learning to work with others now, you can not only help yourself do better and better, but you can also practice one of the central tenets of medicine.

**Delaney Johnson '17, Molecular Biology with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy****Pursuing an MD/MBA at Tufts School of Medicine****Significant college activities:** Varsity Swimming and Diving, Cannon Dial Elm Activities Chair, lab thesis research (Shenk lab), Peer Health Advisers, IIP in South Africa, Coach for College, Community Service Interclub Council, Student Athlete Wellness Leader, Princeton Aquatics, Annual Giving**Post-college activities:** Varsity Swimming and Diving, Cannon Dial Elm Activities Chair, lab thesis research (Shenk lab), Peer Health Advisers, IIP in South Africa, Coach for College, Community Service Interclub Council, Student Athlete Wellness Leader, Princeton Aquatics, Annual Giving

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** Don't feel like you need to rush into medical school! Take time for a gap year to explore your interests and gain a broader perspective on healthcare. At the same time, find the balance for when is optimal to go back! If there are no serious gaps you need to fix, don't hesitate or be scared to apply. There's plenty of time during the cycle to keep up activities so find the time when you're the best candidate for you and not the "perfect" candidate. If you aim for perfection, you'll always find another reason to delay the application. Also, stay confident in yourself, your abilities, and your application! It's a daunting process so take time to reflect on everything awesome you did to get there! Throughout the cycle, find ways to keep busy and distract you so you're not constantly checking email, SDN, etc. Finally, reach out to current students as it is very helpful to get a good idea of a school's environment and opportunities beyond just google searching. Good luck!

## **Kathleen Mulligan '17, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**

**Pursuing an MD at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine**



**Significant college activities:** Varsity Swimming and Diving Team, Tigris-sions A Cappella, senior thesis research with SUNY Upstate global health team on Dengue fever in Ecuador, IIP at Semmelweis Medical University in Budapest, PHA, Student Athlete Wellness Leader, Commencement Committee

**Post-college activities:** 2 years of scribing in private practice dermatology, 1 year of clinical research at Dana Farber Cancer Institute, post-baccalaureate classes at Harvard Extension School, volunteering with mobile health clinic

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** If I could tell my freshman self one thing, I would say to not feel bad or guilty about following my passions and encourage myself to take advantage of all the opportunities at Princeton, but to not feel the need to cram it all in at once. My years at Princeton allowed me to explore so many interests and passions at a high level, from being a varsity athlete to being in a cappella to dozens of other activities. But balancing premed coursework on top of all of these was incredibly daunting, and I simply did not have enough hours in the day to excel at everything.

Once I got over my initial reservations about taking a few gap years and decided to incorporate them into my long term plan, I was able to enjoy my Princeton experience so much more. I also found that my three years off since graduating have changed me as a person just as much as (if not more than) my time at Princeton. Learning to be an independent adult outside of the Princeton bubble has given me a much stronger internal locus of control. I was able to immerse myself in clinical and research experiences full time for several years (which I absolutely would not have been able to do while in college) and have confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt that the long path of medicine is the best career choice I can make.

One important aspect of my application process was crafting my school list - I knew I had to find schools that would value my journey and all of the ups and downs I experienced along the way, and focused on schools that were particularly suited to my strengths. Thankfully I will be matriculating at one of these wonderful schools that is incredibly strong in my interests, which I continued to discover throughout the application process! Having the persistence and resilience in my early years of college to keep pressing forward, even when I doubted my own abilities early on, has paid off a thousand times and I am so eager to help encourage students with similar stories.

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## **Learn More About Glide/Gap Years**

- [Ten Reasons to Consider Taking a Glide Year](#) (pdf)
- [Glide Year Opportunities Q&A](#) (pdf)
- [Where Princeton alums have spent glide years](#) (google sheet)
- [Association of American Medical Colleges: What to do during a gap year](#)

**Pranav Rekapalli '20, Molecular Biology with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**  
Pursuing an MD at Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania

**Significant college activities:** Sympoh Urban Arts Crew, Princeton Hindu Satsangam, McGraw Tutor, PICS internship at NIH, IIP at EcoSurgica in Zimbabwe, Research in Cristea Lab, Matriculate, CONTACT

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** Being premed at Princeton is tough—there's no doubt about it. I feel like the institutional culture of Princeton intensifies the already forward-thinking nature that most premeds adopt, where they are constantly thinking about their next steps and what they need to do to get into the best medical school possible.

The biggest piece of advice I have is to remember that you only get to do Undergrad once—make sure you make the most of it. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you have to be constantly doing more and more to bolster your application. Treasure the little free time you get at Princeton, especially as a pre-med, and use it do things you enjoy—this passion will come through in an application, and interviewers will be drawn in by your excitement. Additionally, as being premed is tough, there will be lows. No one goes through Princeton having a perfect premed journey. In these times, it is super important to remember why you want to be a doctor, and how your motivation to go into medicine makes all these trials and tribulations worth the struggles that being a premed is. Finally, find people to lean on, as they will be a critical part of your journey. Reach out to those older than you, and they will almost certainly be happy to offer helpful advice, and even be a mentor. The application process especially is stressful, and takes lots of hard work. One of the things that I found got me through it was having an application buddy—one of my best friends was also went through it at the same time as I did, and having each other to lean on made the process so much easier.



**Lydia Zhong '20, Molecular Biology with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**  
Pursuing an MD at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis



**Significant college activities:** Residential College Adviser (Mathey), Big Sibs, McGraw Head Tutor, Ascend Hospice, PICS intern, Health Grand Challenge intern, thesis research in Mallarino Lab

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** Hey there! No matter where you are in your premed journey (even if you haven't started it yet), I hope you are able to enjoy it! College is a time of great growth and change, and you have the opportunity to choose your direction. Along the way, you will find incredible people and learn incredible things. Maybe you've heard of something like, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." I don't know if that's exactly true, but the spirit of the message remains: surround yourself with healthy relationships and people that inspire you. I find myself much happier and better when I'm with my "five people",

and I hope you can find yours too.

**Favorite classes:** Not in any particular order, Professor Howard's ACA class, Professor Notterman's Diseases in Children, and Comparative Physiology.

**Choosing a major:** Pick something that you want to write a thesis in. If there's not a particular subject or topic you're passionate about, prioritize finding a research mentor that will compliment your learning experience.

**Remaining balanced:** For me, my "five people" helped me with that :) Even if you're "unbalanced", it's not the end of the world, you can always re-calibrate.

**Resources:** HPA!! Peer mentors!! Faculty mentors!! Sometimes you'll need to take that first step to introduce yourself, but there are so many people rooting for you (myself included!!)

**Gracious Obiofuma '18, Psychology with a certificate in Neuroscience**  
**Pursuing an MD at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine**

**Significant college activities:** Wilson Residential College Advisor; Princeton Neuroscience Institute Research Assistant in the Gould Lab; Co-Founder of Princeton Kidney Disease Screening Awareness Chapter; Program Coordinator for Brooklyn College Awareness Program; C.P.U.C Resource Committee Member; Camp Kesem Counselor; College Counseling Program Mentor; Princeton Faith and Action Worship Leader; GlobeMed Community Director; Sociology Research Assistant; Atlantis Project Fellowship in Spain; Harvard Summer Research Program in Kidney Medicine; Summer Volunteer at Piedmont Hospital; Biological Psychiatry Publication; New England Science Symposium Poster Presentation



**Post-college activities:** Princeton Project 55 Fellow; Caseworker at New Alternatives for Children (2018-2019); Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care Volunteer (2019-Present); Polaris Spine & Neurosurgery Center Clinical Assistant (2020- Present)

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** "When I finally finish this paper, I'll take a break." "Just let me submit my Calc problem set, and I'll rest." When I get through this Orgo exam and land that internship, I'll exhale." I imagine, in a community of high achievement, I am not the only one who has entertained this line of thinking. When I reflect on my pre-medical experience, I vividly recall a lot of shuffling, taking in Princeton in bursts, trying my best to cram everything into a schedule. As an underclassman, I recall restlessly moving from office hours to Firestone, pausing only to field a conversation about how busy everyone was before transitioning to a different library, my version of shaking things up.

"Balance" and "self-care" were buzzwords until I made the intentional choice to find meaning in them, coinciding with my decision to become a Residential College Advisor. How could I care for a group of students if I was not properly caring for myself? I learned that asking how to find balance was not quite the question I needed to be asking. Finding balance is fluid and ever-changing. Thus, I realized prioritization was most central to navigating stress and responsibility.

As my advice, I implore the prioritization of wellness and self-care first and foremost. I know this task is easier said than done, especially with heavy workloads and urgency to stand out to medical schools. To choose oneself is a conscious, intentional decision, for which I am so much better. Engaging in self-care enabled me to better support those around me because I had the energy to do so. As I grew in self-assuredness, I pursued passions rather than just what "looked good". Surprise, medical schools can tell the difference! Moreover, I learned to rely on others for support, knowing that doing so was not weak or a sign of failure. As I cared for myself, I increasingly trusted myself, entering fully and unapologetically into different spaces. Princeton, post-grad, and medical school can test any person, and in my opinion, self-care, self-love, and self-trust are practical steps to thrive. Good luck, everyone!

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## Self-Care Resources at Princeton

- [UHS Taking Care of Your Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (pdf)
- [UHS Mind-Body Programs](#)
- [UMatter Tools for Self-Care](#)
- [Ten Ways to Build Your Resilience](#) (via verywellmind)