

A Woodruff Lab Experience: Summer 2015

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All throughout high school, my career direction was singular. I was inspired by my many experiences with the Oncofertility Saturday Academy. I had definite plans to become a physician, and I was so excited to begin my academic journey. But by the end of the first semester of my freshman year, all of that had changed. After adding a second major, engaging in new service opportunities, and pushing myself to the limit at a top 20 university, the only thing I was certain about was that I had a lot of experiential learning to do before I settled on anything. And so, I began my quest to determine what I was meant to do. Through three years of experiences that included home improvement projects in rural Appalachia, landscaping management in urban St. Louis, extended research in an architecture lab setting, and an unexpected passion for the academic discipline of sociology, I found myself exactly where I had always thought I would end up—with a position in the Woodruff Lab. Though the journey to my summer internship in the Woodruff Lab was far from what I had ever expected, I immediately knew upon walking through the doors on my first day that this is where I was always meant to be.

The Woodruff Lab is unique in that it is committed to an immense breadth of endeavors, but with a well-defined focus. Oncofertility's inherently interdisciplinary nature has always captivated me. While working in the lab this summer, I was able to experience this interdisciplinary nature first-hand. At weekly lab meetings, biomedical engineers, chemists, and biologists offered insights and challenged ideas. During these meetings, various *Science* journal covers hung around the conference room and served as a constant reminder of the intellect by which I was surrounded.

My lab mentor, Dr. So-Youn Kim, made sure I felt welcome and part of the group. She never failed to greet me with a smile and attended to all of my questions, no matter how trivial. I had previously convinced myself that I didn't belong in a lab setting—that I was destined to work in a career that is more people-centered and my future work needed to have immediate consequences for society. The Woodruff Lab, however, challenged all of these preconceived notions concerning what lab work and research entailed. Our lab was vibrant—it was never quiet, and collaboration was both encouraged and necessary. Everyone required the help of others in order to be productive. I was inspired by this workplace camaraderie.

During my time in lab, I focused most of my efforts on two projects. My primary project consisted of counting and classifying ovarian mouse follicles to determine the integrity of treated ovarian tissues. My responsibilities consisted of organizing tissue slides, imaging slides, and then quantitatively assessing the integrity of tissue. The ultimate goal of the project is to establish the best chemical inhibitor to use to preserve natural ovarian function during chemotherapy and radiation. Though it seemed like more traditional "lab research", the implications of such work had direct, transparent clinical significance. It was clear that work done in the Woodruff Lab filled a critical gap within the medical community. The second project I worked on was Northwestern University's MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) *Introduction to Reproduction*, serving as a TA for the production of this online course. I worked with two medical students and one other

undergraduate to create a student-friendly script to accompany the course. We helped advise the production team on decisions that would make the material more student-accessible. This course is a perfect example of the outreach efforts that are embedded in the fabric of the Woodruff Lab's mission. Reproductive health is typically glazed over and avoided, but the Woodruff Lab is committed to removing this negative stigma and providing important information to the general public so that people can make more informed decisions about their own health.

As I prepare to apply to graduate programs in genetic counseling, I cannot help but reflect on my experiences in the Woodruff Lab. From the first time I visited the lab in the summer of 2011 to my internship experience this summer, it seems like I am destined to be a part of their mission in some way. Oncofertility has had a lasting impact on my life; I am so grateful for the experiences it has provided me, but most importantly, I am thankful for the purpose it has given me.