

Name: Monica Molinaro

Past Area of Study(s) : Honours Life Sciences – McMaster University
Master's of Science in Kinesiology – Wilfrid Laurier University

Date of Graduation from McMaster Science: June 2014

Current Area of Study: PhD in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences (Health Promotion Stream)
University of Western Ontario

I graduated from McMaster with an Honours Life Sciences degree and in my time there, I found that it was slightly more difficult for Life Science students to obtain experiential opportunities such as research or thesis positions. While opportunities did exist, it required **determination and effort** to obtain a position. It was really a matter of putting yourself out there, and if you're a shy person, you needed to come out of your comfort zone. I was very fortunate that I was able to complete a thesis project and work as a TA with Dr. Kimberley Dej during my 4th year. Having those opportunities helped me to develop teaching and research skills that prepared me for what was to come in graduate school.

After graduating from McMaster, I attended Laurier for two years to complete my Master's of Science in Kinesiology. I focused my Master's thesis on the *Late Effects of Pediatric Cancer on Pediatric Cancer Survivors and their Support Persons*. Being able to have research experience during my 4th year at Mac opened me up to this whole new world of Science. I remember when I was applying to my Master's, I thought: "I could do research for a really long time and have absolutely no problem with it".

When you're applying to grad school, you try to find supervisors with interests that match yours. I went through schools' faculty lists and saw what their research interests were. One night, I came across my future supervisor at Laurier, and I saw that her research interests included pediatric cancer research. What piqued my interest in this field was my volunteer work at the Ronald McDonald House where I met many children and their families. I sent her a simple email that night; 'Hi, my name is Monica, this is my resume and these are my grades, and I have experience working with families in pediatric cancer; what do you think?' She emailed me back within 20 minutes and she was like '**this is great, let's have an interview.**'

In terms of my current PhD program, I knew that when I finished my Master's, I didn't want to be done with research and academia.

When you complete a Master's degree, you learn about the process of obtaining a PhD and whether you want to continue pursuing a postgraduate education. This is important because you want to make sure that you conduct research or complete another degree because you love it,

and not because you are doing it for the sake of doing it. Four years is a really long time to do something you're not entirely passionate about.

My ideal scenario when I complete my PhD would be conducting research and teaching as a professor, since academia is very close and dear to my heart. However, I also know that being in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences also opens the door to other areas, such as working in the healthcare field or in the community. Nevertheless, my dream would be to be in academia, and to hopefully become one of those profs that guided and inspired me throughout my undergraduate and graduate education to be where I am today.

I know that so many undergrads, especially in Science, are having a really tough time trying to plan their paths after undergrad. My advice would be that first and foremost; you need to work hard. I understand how life can quickly become overwhelming when you're in undergrad - I've been there. But staying motivated is key, and I promise that you will soon reap the benefits.

Then, when you have these good experiences, celebrate them! It's so easy nowadays to compare yourself to others and continually feel like you need to work harder and do better - I felt that a lot too. But, you also need to remember to take the time to celebrate your accomplishments - you've worked so hard for what you have so you should be incredibly proud of what you've done and where you've gotten.

The last thing that I would say is a quote that is so cliché and so overused, but ***'find what you love, and let it kill you'***. As long as you love what you do, even though it may not have the prestige or the pay, you're happy at the end of the day. So more than anything, you need to do what makes you happy. Just find your niche and put all your energy towards making it happen, because you'll never regret doing something that you love.