

Manlius Pebble Hill School

#becauseMPH Interview with Tia Tummino '12

1) Where are you working currently? What is your title?

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in pharmaceutical sciences and pharmacogenomics with a focus on Neuropharmacology at the University of California, San Francisco. I am in the laboratory of Dr. Brian Shoichet and am in my fourth year of graduate school.

2) Where did you go to college? What was your major?

I have a B.A. in neuroscience from Colorado College, where I graduated with distinction in neuroscience. However, attending a liberal arts college afforded me the opportunity to take many diverse classes in both STEAM and humanities fields. For example, neuroscience is an interdisciplinary field where I was fortunate to study biology, chemistry, psychology, and neuroscience. I also studied music history, Italian language, cultural astronomy, and Confucian history.

3) Were there any MPH faculty members who, or classes that played a role in helping foster your interest in your current professional path?

I loved all my science professors at MPH: Ms. Krauss, Mr. Gregory, Doc-O, and Ms. Foster. They taught me to love the scientific process and how connected different areas of science are. However, my advisor Mr. Preston, an English/Literature teacher, was especially important to my growth as an academic. He taught me how to read critically and how to write persuasively. These skills are essential for scientists but are taught less formally, or sometimes not at all. He also encouraged me to work hard and try new things and was always a source of encouragement and kindness.

4) Tell us about the work you do now and why it is so important to this community.

A major focus of my dissertation research is the discovery of non-opioid analgesics. The goal is to find new proteins that are involved in pain signaling, and to develop new drugs that can modulate those proteins for the relief of chronic pain. This area of research is

especially important to our community because of the opioid epidemic that is heavily affecting our country, with a disproportionate effect on low-income and minority communities. Developing effective and non-addictive therapies will help push the medical field away from over-prescribing opioids but will assure patients receive relief from chronic pain disorders.

5) Were there lessons learned at MPH that you have carried with you and continue to draw upon today?

MPH taught me many important lessons, including how to be independent at a young age, how to work hard toward my goals, and how to be a good community member. MPH values their students and gives them the freedom to express themselves, to think for themselves, and to ask lots of questions. These skills are essential after high school, and I felt well-prepared to take on new challenges because of the training I received at MPH.

6) What was the most impactful part of your overall MPH experience?

Going to MPH changed the path of my life by exposing me to people who cared about learning, cared about their community, and cared about making a difference in the world. When I got to MPH, I didn't even know what a getting a Ph.D. meant let alone the value of a liberal arts education. I am eternally grateful to MPH for exposing me to different ideas and perspectives from my own.

7) What a “pearl of wisdom” you would share with today’s students?

In life you have to learn how to be open-minded, flexible, and to try new things because you never know how something will work out or if an experience will spark something inside of you; there are many great experiences to be had if you explore outside your comfort zone. Similarly, these skills will foster resilience which will help you navigate uncertainty and unexpected challenges.