

Young talent & emerging technologies come together at BioCamp

University students majoring in the life sciences or business often have trouble imagining the direction of their careers.

By [Karen Moline](#) | Oct 27, 2013

University students majoring in the life sciences or business often have trouble imagining the direction of their careers. For example, a future physician may only be able to see himself in a hospital or medical office setting, while a business major may dread the idea of being walled off inside a tiny cubicle. Even students studying cutting-edge technologies such as bioinformatics and genomics may have trouble seeing exactly what their day-to-day working lives might be.

BioCamp changes all that.

Novartis headquarters in Basel, Switzerland, has four times been the site for the three-day International Biotechnology Leadership Camp, or BioCamp. It's a summer retreat that gives brilliant young students interested in biotechnology or business careers an unprecedented introduction to the inner workings of a leading-edge global pharmaceutical company, showing them the array of career opportunities that await them.

"As a final-year medical student, I had always thought that if I were to work within the pharmaceutical industry, my role would be limited to a clinical one, primarily in early clinical trials," says Michael McDermott, who studies at the University of Glasgow in Scotland and was one of three students selected to win BioCamp's annual prize. "Following BioCamp, I now appreciate that there are many opportunities available to medics within industry, including senior executive positions."

BioCamp looks inside global pharmacology

The idea of BioCamp is to show the range of available career options to the 60 lucky students selected to attend each year. "These campers see pharma for the first time from the inside and actually, from a very human point of view, but also from a very strategic point of view," says Susan Gasser, the director of the Friedrich Miescher Institute in Basel, Switzerland, and a professor at the University of Basel. "They ask, 'How could my career or my life goals intersect with this very fruitful part of the economy?' That BioCamp hits them at this stage is absolutely perfect."

BioCamp winners are chosen based on their overall performance during the three-day camp, leadership skills and contributions to their teams.

Another 2013 BioCamp winner, Nehul Saxena, who is pursuing a doctorate in cancer biology at the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology at New Delhi, India, found the experience intense and life-changing. "BioCamp has transformed my outlook towards science," Saxena says. "I feel blessed to be associated with a dynamic field which promotes the exchange of brilliant ideas, acknowledges innovators for creating life-saving drugs and touches millions of lives through sheer hard work."

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Nehul Saxena, Doctoral student in cancer biology at the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology, New Delhi, India

Anna Gould, a chemical engineer who is studying for her master's in process engineering at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, was a member of the winning BioCamp team in 2013 and also an individual winner. For her, BioCamp was rewarding on both a professional and a personal level. "BioCamp really helped me clarify what I want from my future career," Gould says. "I learned two important things from this experience. First, that being part of a motivated team is the best working environment for me. I find the brainstorming, immediate feedback and team spirit very energizing and inspiring, and I definitely want to avoid a job where I would be marooned alone in an office all day long."

Gould says the business and entrepreneurial skills she learned at BioCamp are invaluable. "The world of business is something new to me and not something I'd ever expected to be interested in," she says. "But thanks to BioCamp, I am now considering career paths beyond the default scientific career I was previously headed towards." Gould has even added some business classes to her curriculum this year to expand her career potential even more.

An eye-opening challenge

All three winners said the camp project, which challenged them to develop a workable business plan for a hypothetical biotech startup, was their favorite part of the program. "It was challenging," McDermott says. "Everyone had different ideas about how to approach the task. The hardest thing was combining eight people's ideas and innovations into a succinct 10-minute presentation."

"It was totally foreign territory for me," Gould adds. "But I was lucky enough to be on a great team, and together, we came up with a solution."

And as for those personal rewards Gould mentioned? She is already planning a trip in 2014 to visit some of the friends she made at the 2013 BioCamp.

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