

Ingram Scholar Alumni Spotlight



FOREST OGÚNYÀNKÌN, Class of 2016

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DEGREES

B.A. in Neuroscience (minor in Medicine, Health and Society), Vanderbilt University

Master of Public Health (in progress), The George Washington University- Milken Institute School of Public Health

CURRENT LOCATION

Atlanta, GA

CURRENT EMPLOYER

Marcus Autism Center

CURRENT OCCUPATION

Research Analyst

DESCRIBE YOUR CAREER PATH

It's been a winding road so far! As an undergrad, I tried to learn everything I could about severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia, and the ways they contribute to health disparities. I completed a CDC internship program right after graduation in 2016, then joined a research team at Emory that was looking for genetic markers of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder in African-Americans in Atlanta.

I switched focus to developmental disabilities in pediatric populations, and joined the Marcus Autism Center, where I've worked in the Severe Behavior Day Treatment Program, and the Behavior Analysis Research Core. I learned that some youth with Autism are prescribed psychotropic medications traditionally used for mood and psychotic disorders, and I've been working on a review of prescribing patterns at the center to hopefully contribute to investigations of their safety and efficacy.

I'm about one year away from earning an MPH, and I hope to continue studying topics in pediatric health-- particularly neurodevelopmental disorders, and the effects of pre-natal exposure to substances such as opioids. In the meantime though, I'm also doing my best to contribute to Atlanta's response COVID-19 with the Fulton County Medical Reserve Corps!

HOW DID THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM PREPARE YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE DOING TODAY?

The program (especially Marshall) always pushed us to find ways to apply our academic interests to the community. I wasn't sure how to apply neuroscience to community service when I first started at Vanderbilt, but I just tried to keep learning from all the people around me. I started to work with Nashville International Center for Empowerment, and Nashville's refugee communities. That period helped to broaden my focus to community health, and I realized that science really can bridge community problems with new solutions. It all finally clicked during junior year with my summer project. I worked at a psychiatric hospital in Munich, Germany, and adapted their exercise programs for adults with psychotic disorders for the Park Center in Nashville. That experience really solidified my thinking, and ultimately pushed me to pursue a career in public health.

IF YOU COULD DESCRIBE THE INGRAM SCHOLARS PROGRAM IN THREE WORDS WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Embrace the process.

WHAT DOES THE INGRAM SCHOLAR COMMUNITY MEAN TO YOU?

Ingram was one of my favorite parts of undergrad. There really isn't another community like it once you're off campus! I'm always proud to see the awesome things my friends are doing in the world, and I need to reach out more often.

BEST INGRAM SCHOLAR MEMORY

There were a lot of great moments, but I remember I was the only person to catch a fish during one of the summer retreats. Of course, only three of us brought fishing rods...but still.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR CURRENT SCHOLARS WHO WANT TO MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR INGRAM SCHOLAR EXPERIENCE?

Find ways to bring people together. Also, take a break every now and then!