TIBBS Career Blitz Career Profile Questionnaire

1. Please provide your name and employer:
    Gabi Griffin, Syntensor

2. What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?
    Founding Bioinformatics Scientist and 8 months

3. Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?
    UNC-Chapel Hill, Curriculum in Genetics and Molecular Biology- my focus was on the genetics of neurodegenerative disorders

4. Did you do a postdoc?
    I did a postdoc at Columbia University in epilepsy genetics where I spearheaded the creation of the somatic variant calling pipeline and identified novel variants and mechanisms in epilepsy.

5. What are your main daily responsibilities?
    As the founding bioinformatics scientist at Syntensor, I formulate our data acquisition strategy and lead the modeling of complex biomedical datasets as a mechanistic graph that is used as the input to machine learning models for predicting the efficacy and safety of small molecule therapeutics. I also contribute to our validation strategy, product development, and the creation of services between the data layer and product layer such as our metrics layer and entity resolution service. As we grow, I will also lead the growth of our bioinformatics and drug discovery teams.

6. What are the keys to success in your career field?
    ● A willingness to learn and iterate- new techniques in bioinformatics are being introduced every day so it's important to stay on top of new advances in the field. You may need to revisit problems multiple times to optimize the solution.
    ● An ability to work on cross-functional teams- As a bioinformatics scientist, I have worked with engineers, machine learning scientists, and drug discovery scientists, and I enjoy serving as the bridge between the tech and the science.
    ● A commitment to quality- As a bioinformatics scientist, I build trust in the output of our machine learning models by evaluating predictions with a biological lens. Creating the right metrics to allow for data-driven decision making is important to ensure quality in both the data and the model.

7. What were the most important factors in choosing your career path and current employer?

I chose my career path because I enjoyed the challenge of leveraging diverse datasets to generate new insights about human disease; I also enjoy working in a cross-functional role that allows me to combine multiple skill sets and bridge the gap between drug discovery and machine learning. I chose my current employer because I wanted to tackle important challenges in drug discovery such as the prevention of adverse events and the prediction of which drugs will be successes and failures using the latest approaches in systems biology and machine learning. Having worked at a mid-stage biotech company and a large pharma, I also wanted to apply my learnings to establish best practices and build a team at an early stage company.

8. What activities (if any) did you participate in that helped you be successful in obtaining your job?

I was contacted about my current position by a former colleague, and I was contacted about my previous position by a fellow UNC alum. I think it's important to stay in touch with former colleagues when moving positions; if I see a paper that I think somebody would be interested in, I make a point to send it to them via Linkedin or email.

9. What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?
   - Learn how to code- While a lot of bioinformatics workflows use R, python is more popular in industry for software development.
   - Become familiar with major biomedical datasets and data repositories

10. How is the work/life balance in your career field and how much of a factor was that in your career choice?

Because I work at an early-stage startup, I sometimes have weeks that are very intense, but those are balanced out by a generous leave policy. Overall, the work-life balance can be very good because my position is fully *in silico.*