

TIBBS Career Blitz Career Profile Questionnaire

1. Please provide your name and employer:

Brittany Miller – Hofstra University

2. What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?

Assistant Professor of Biology – 1.5 years

3. Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill – Microbiology and Immunology

4. Did you do a postdoc?

Yes, specifically I did an IRACDA postdoc ([SPIRE at UNC Chapel Hill](#)) and I switched departments to Cell Biology and Physiology

5. What are your main daily responsibilities?

Hofstra is a primarily undergraduate institution transitioning to an R2 with a higher emphasis on research. That means that I split my time fairly evenly between teaching obligations and my research lab/research students (and service, but as a new faculty member, my service role isn't as time-consuming as the other two). On a typical day I am either teaching, working with students in my office, working with students in my lab, or serving on a few different committees. It's a busy day and I get a lot of human interaction. The summers are different – I can prioritize research and grant writing.

6. What are the keys to success in your career field?

R2-level universities come with their own sets of challenges. You really are expected to excel in teaching and in research. This means frequent publications and external funding. Research success typically comes from playing to the strengths of the institution – prioritizing experiments that can involve undergraduates, lab set ups that are relatively inexpensive, and establishing collaborations are great ways to make sure your research is moving forward. Teaching success typically comes from being willing to explore pedagogical innovations and try new things with your students that serve to promote diversity and equity in your classroom (and in your laboratory mentorship). Overall success probably comes most from being able to manage your different priorities and saying “no” to things that won't count towards your application for tenure.

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

I knew I wanted to be a university professor and work mostly with undergraduate students. I didn't want to sacrifice teaching or research in my faculty position and so I focused my search on research-intensive PUIs and R2s. I really tailored my postdoc towards building skills and research questions that would be tailored to the kinds of programs I wanted to apply to. Hofstra checked all the boxes and was in a part of the

country (Long Island, close to NYC) where I wanted to live. The in-person interview was important for me checking out the school to make sure that faculty were supported both by each other and by the university at-large. Folks here seemed happy and hard-working – that impression really solidified my choice to accept the position.

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

So many! [IRACDA](#) postdocs are tailor made for scientists who love teaching, research, and also want to support/promote diverse STEM students. During my postdoc, I was a visiting instructor at UNC Pembroke where I taught two classes (one that I designed myself – Food Microbiology) and independently mentored two research students. As mentioned above, I thought critically about my research program to successfully pitch myself to schools that don't have R1 budget/infrastructures. I attended a summer workshop on teaching-as-research so that I could learn and implement the skills required for collecting and analyzing data on my teaching techniques. Lastly, I consistently mentored undergraduates in the lab throughout grad school and my postdoc.

9. What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?

Practically, instructor-of-record teaching experience is very important for a competitive application - consider adjuncting at local colleges if opportunities come up. Also, get eyes on your application materials! It can feel awkward to have others read something, but the peers and faculty that critiqued my materials made my application much stronger. Know the school you're applying to – if research is important, explain your plans thoroughly, but don't propose to do a bunch of mouse work at an institution that doesn't have a vivarium. You can (and should) reach out to the contact provided on a job ad to ask about existing facilities if you can't tell from their website. Involve students in as much of your research as possible to practice your skills in mentorship. Treat pedagogy the same way you do your science – read papers, implement changes, collect data – be systematic and evidence-based in your approaches.

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

I'm still relatively new, and I think (hope) that this answer might change between pre- and post-tenure. Also, my schedule is dramatically different in the summer when I'm not teaching classes. I would say that my work/life balance during the semester favors work, but not to a ridiculous extent (it's what I expected, and I'm excited to do the work). The best part is in January and the summer when my work is completely flexible. I can focus on grant writing and research; my schedule is my own!