
ALUMNI FEATURE, May 1, 2018
Michelle Weber Laird, '03



Honors College Alumna, Michelle Weber Laird, '03

Major: Bachelor of Science, MB3: Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, & Bioinformatics

Current Title: Senior Research Sales Specialist, MilliporeSigma

Congratulations to the soon-to-be Honors College seniors. Graduation is not merely an accomplishment that lands you with a prestigious degree but a milestone that places you among an elite group: the Honors College alumni. As you have read from the previous features, our alumni are some of the brightest and best in their fields. They have and always will strive for and pursue excellence. With their minds set to perfection and their hearts dedicated to service, you are soon-to-be members in a group that is unlike any other. You will be, quite simply, among the best and as such, when you step across that stage, do not take for granted the privilege associated with receiving an Honors College degree from Towson University.

Each year at commencement, the Honors College selects a distinguished alumnus to receive the highly-coveted Distinguished Honors College Alumnus Award. As noted, "Achievement is a way of life in Honors. The same passion and motivation that is characteristic of Honors students is evident in the lives of the Honors alumnae." This year, the award, which highlights the alumnus' professional achievements and contributions to society, has been awarded to Dr. Michelle Helen Weber Laird and as such, we thought it only fitting to conclude the Alumni Feature for the school year with her.

While at Towson, Michelle majored in Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, and Bioinformatics and minored in Chemistry. As if this was no small feat, she also completed the Towson University Summer Undergraduate Research in Biology Program as a research intern, the American Society for Microbiology Undergraduate Research Fellowship (where she worked on creating malaria vaccines), and the National Institutes of Health Study Group as a student researcher

(where she worked on an anthrax vaccine model). She was also the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions, such as the Provost Scholarship, the CRC Press Freshman Chemistry Achievement Award, the Biology Alumni Scholarship, the Merck Index Achievement Award in Organic Chemistry, the Hoke L. Smith Scholarship, and the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship, which was a scholarship funded by a foundation that supported students who intended to pursue research careers in the natural sciences, mathematics, and engineering. To cap it off, she placed second in the Biochemical Sciences at the Undergraduate Research Symposium at the University of Maryland. As evident, not only did Michelle completely dominate her undergrad experience but by the time it came for graduation, she was proudly among the top, graduating with a 4.0 grade point average. The secret to this success, you might ask? As Michelle puts it, "Say 'Yes' to opportunities!" Although, as we can imagine, she was immensely busy during her undergraduate career, each and every opportunity presented to her was hers for taking; all she had to do was say "Yes," and as we can see, that is exactly what she did.

This mindset and driven focus for continued growth played an incredibly important role in her future career. After Towson, Michelle attended the University of Maryland, Baltimore, where she received an Outstanding Service Award from the Molecular Microbiology and Immunology Program, an Appointment on the university's Department of Microbiology and Immunology Training Grant, and first place in the Immunology/Toxicology/Environmental Sciences presentation at the University of Maryland, Baltimore and University of Maryland Baltimore County Graduate Research Conference. In 2009, Michelle graduated with a Ph.D. in Molecular Microbiology and Immunology and shortly thereafter began work on a two-year Postdoctoral Fellowship with the university. Upon completion of the fellowship, Michelle began work with MilliporeSigma, a company that focused on solving the toughest problems in science. Michelle serves as the Senior Research Sales Specialist, which entails serving as a scout for technologies developed by other researchers across the globe; she is also the sole account manager for Johns Hopkins University, and oversees all of MilliporeSigma's product sales, which amounts to approximately 350,000 in total. With a focus to accelerate access to better health for people, MilliporeSigma's work stretches into numerous fields, such as academic research, food companies, and even mechanical engineering.

On top of all this, Michelle lives-out her motto of always saying "Yes" by volunteering within her field of work and community, as evident through her service as a mentor to up-and-coming colleagues, volunteering with her sons' cub scouts, and always being willing to lend a helping hand. To Michelle, "If you are good at something, and it's a skill someone else needs, then you should help." Truly, this focus is rare and something so incredibly treasured in one of our alumni. Beyond this, though, Michelle also shared how the Honors College as a whole shapes and institutes an incredible set of skills and attitudes within their students, chiefly among them a strong work ethic, an inspiration to think critically, and the ability to problem solve, which are all features that continue their payoff well into the later years of life. Combine these with her motto of always saying "Yes," and it is no wonder she has completed and achieved so much.

So, dear graduates (and those soon to follow in the coming years), as you witness Michelle receiving the award, reflect on the work and dedication within her life that has led her to this

point. Draw from her experiences, take to heart her advice, and with keen understanding, thoroughly grasp the incredible work and institution associated with a Towson University Honors College degree. With the title "University Scholar" only being bestowed upon those graduating from the Honors College, do not make the mistake of assuming your work is finished but yet know it is just beginning. The world is yours for the taking and, as we have been instructed, all you have to do is say "Yes."

If you have any questions for or are interested in connecting with Dr. Laird, please contact the Honors College office at honors@towson.edu.

By: Sheariah Yousefi, Honors College Alumni, '13 Sheariah is a founding member of the Honors Alumni Council and creator of the Alumni Feature. She writes the features from her home in South Korea, where she lives with her husband, works as an ESL Instructor with the Special District for International Education through the Ministry of Education of South Korea and volunteers within the community through support and outreach programs. Have an idea for an Alumni Feature? Email Honors@towson.edu to have your idea passed along to Sheariah.