

Meet the Fellow

Peyton Merriman

Host Lab: Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Public Health Laboratories - Tampa

Degree of Study: Chemistry

Graduation: December 2023

School: University of South Florida



Tell us about your educational background?

My educational background is a bachelor's degree in chemistry with a concentration in biochemistry and biotechnology with a minor in nutrition.

What brought you into laboratory science?

What brought me into laboratory sciences was hearing my older brother talk about his experiences in an academic laboratory. As a chemistry major, an academic or public health lab is a very different experience than a chemistry laboratory. Hearing my brother discuss the COVID testing he was performing for everyone on the University of South Florida (USF) campus inspired me to join a Malaria laboratory on the USF campus. Working in this laboratory pushed me to apply for the fellowship, as I wanted to perform my own project while also allowing me to experience what a laboratory that services the public is like.

How did you hear about the Public Health Laboratory Fellowship Program?

I heard about the fellowship from my APHL internship mentor and from the APHL fellows that were currently working in the public health laboratory where I was an intern.

How did this fellowship match or exceed your expectations?

This fellowship has exceeded my expectations as it has allowed me to explore many different aspects of public health that I never thought that I would see or experience. I have been able to work with the epidemiologists in my laboratory and go on case investigations with them. I have been to the Department of Health (DOH) state laboratory and met many different department heads. Lastly, I have been able to meet, visit, and make connections with many of the different specimen providers for our laboratory.

Tell us what you learned from your mentor.

I have learned a lot from my mentor. He has taught important aspects of biosafety, has taught me how to conduct a risk assessment, and has taught me how to

better communicate with others and to ask questions.

Tell us about your project assignments/laboratory roles.

My project is to validate an assay on the QIAcuity (digital polymerase chain reaction system) for West Nile and St. Louis Encephalitis. I am also working with another fellow within my laboratory on a compare a contrast project where we are comparing virology departments at Wadsworth, the NH state lab, Bureau of Public Health Laboratories (BPHL)-Tampa, and BPHL-Jacksonville. Some other projects I participate in are an autoclave validation, ISO 35001 meeting and implementation, and preparation of risk assessments to be uploaded to our new document control system. Lastly, I help within my host laboratories sentinel chicken program, enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) section, and virology departments.

How would you describe the APHL Fellowship to other students?

I describe the fellowship as a great opportunity for students to experience the many different aspects of public health and to have a mentor that can help facilitate experiences and projects that will help them achieve their career goals.

Aside from the laboratory and the science, did you gain any other beneficial life experiences?

Through my fellowship, I have gained beneficial life experiences. I am normally a shy and more reserved person, but the fellowship has pushed me out of my comfort zone and has helped me to grow. I am now much more comfortable talking to others and navigating new and unknown situations.

