

# Biology Program Pays Off for Graduate

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Friday, August 22, 2014

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The Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences' Optometry program is challenging. And that's only if one manages to be one of 55 students admitted to the

program each year. UNH Manchester 2014 graduate Stephanie McQuaid is one of them and is confident she is up to the challenge.

"When I got my acceptance letter, needless to say I breathed a sigh of relief," McQuaid says. "And I immediately went and told all of my UNH Manchester professors. They were all like 'Didn't we tell you that you could do it!' It was a pretty amazing experience."

After graduating from Bedford High School in 2010, McQuaid, 22, says she chose UNH Manchester specifically for the [Biological Sciences program](#).

"I chose UNH Manchester, because as a biology major you want everything as hands on as you can," she says. "And having such small class sizes, it helps you to kind of develop your own skills while being hands on. And that's a huge, huge advantage in comparison to the large universities with a large lab."

Further, she says, she credits her advisor [Stephen Pugh](#), the biology division chair, program coordinator and associate professor, for his assistance navigating the program. She says she was able to tell him exactly what she wanted to accomplish and he gave her step-by-step advice on how to achieve it.

"He told me it was going to be very difficult, but he was there for me the entire time," she says. "I really appreciate his guidance, because he was awesome."

The program was hard, she says, but that is by design. At UNH Manchester, the [biological sciences program](#) is a great choice for those students who will be going on to pre-professional studies such as optometry, veterinary medicine, pharmacology or physician assistant studies. With that in mind, the classes are designed to give students all the tools they need to get accepted into those programs.

"When I was applying to grad schools, they want to know your experience, how do you respond to certain situations, how skilled are you at actually doing certain procedures in the lab and things like that," which McQuaid says her classes at UNH Manchester prepared her for. "All of the biology professors, they want to do what's best for you. And they know that when you go on to grad school, it's going to be incredibly intense. So they kind of prep you for that right off the bat. They're very hard but at the same time very constructive with you."

At the same time, she had enough room in her schedule to enjoy all that the UNH Manchester campus had to offer. She was very active in student life, in particular with the campus a capella singing group Milling Around. Though she sang in the choir in high school, McQuaid says when she came to campus, she was nervous about joining.

"I was a little bit skeptical at first because college is totally different than high school," she says. "I don't know, I tried it and it was just awesome. The people there were really friendly, they are like one big family and it kind of just helped me to be myself."

It also helped her to discover her inner leader and develop those skills.

"My first semester in there, I was a little bit on the shy side," she says. "But after that first semester, I kind of was speaking up a little bit more, kind of giving my input on styles of songs and then I started orchestrating rehearsals for the most part."

After that, her fellow group members regularly voted for McQuaid as group leader.

"I definitely flourished after that," she says. "It was definitely a no judgment zone and I feel like that's helped shape the group as well."

McQuaid will begin studying at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Studies this fall.

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