

Researching His Future

UNH senior to continue cancer studies

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Travis Fischer '21 is into research. Specifically, research into diseases like cancer. He wants to help stop them from devastating people's lives by working to develop new therapies and possibly be among those researchers looking for a cure.

A [biochemistry, molecular and cellular biology](#) major, Fischer started doing research at UNH during the spring semester of his freshman year. He will continue on that path next fall when he enters a Ph.D. program in biomedical sciences at the University of Iowa.

"What interests me about research is the ability to discover something that no one else in the history of the world has ever seen before," Fischer says. "When I finish an

experiment, there is a brief period of time before I show it to my PI where the number of people who know what I know is one, and that is fascinating to me.”

Fischer decided on his major because he wanted to “better understand the complexities of life at a molecular and cellular level.” A comprehensive understanding of how cells function at a genetic and molecular level is important to the study of disease formation and treatment, the New Hampshire native says.

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He chose UNH because of the unique opportunity to conduct research early in his academic career, knowing he wanted that to be his future. Since that first year, he has worked in the lab of associate professor Sherine ElSawa, where the main focus is on developing novel therapies for cancer patients by better understanding the role of the tumor microenvironment.

“The lab deals with lymphomas, or cancers of the lymphatic system, and my research deals with a B cell malignancy called Waldenstrom macroglobulinemia, a rare form of blood cancer. I am looking at the tumor microenvironment's role in this malignancy and how an anticancer drug called pacritinib affects the cancer as well as the bone marrow microenvironment,” Fischer says.

As a first-year student in the [UNH Honors Program](#), he received a [Research Experience and Apprenticeship Program](#) (REAP) summer fellowship that allowed him to conduct his own independent research project.

“It was an amazing opportunity to get first-hand experience in the field I want to make my career,” Fischer says, adding, “My experience at UNH has been extremely positive.”

During his time here, Fischer has been involved in social and academic clubs, including the 'Cat Pack Captains, which he describes as a “good stress reliever because the whole purpose is to go to sporting events and shout.” He also is a member of Alpha Chi Sigma, the professional chemistry fraternity where he is “surrounded by like-minded science nerds who all want to drive the advancement of the sciences.” And he was a resident assistant for two years.

Fischer started taking Tae Kwon Do about eight years ago. After just two lessons, he knew that, like his passion for research, it was something he wanted to keep doing. So he stuck with it until he got his black belt.

“I enjoyed the community of people I trained with and I enjoyed learning forms and different styles. Having the goal of becoming a black belt drove me to train harder,” he says. “It was like nothing I'd ever done before, and I loved it.”

That drive speaks to his commitment to research.

“I love the research I do specifically on cancer because of its potential real-world applications where it can help people who are suffering from these terrible diseases,” Fischer says. “I haven’t fully decided what will come after I finish school, but I am leaning more towards academia because of the freedom to continuing to do research.”

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