

## The Time of Her Life

### UNH grad's desire to try new things led to her major

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So much of life is serendipitous. Take the route Samantha Blais '16 traveled before landing a job in the sought-after pediatrics unit at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.

As a freshman, Blais decided to join the sailing team because she'd never sailed before and wanted to try something outside her comfort zone. Her words. After one season, though, she realized it wasn't the sport for her, so the following year, she and a dormmate ran a half marathon, another non-comfort zone endeavor: A three-sport athlete in high school, Blais had never

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been a runner.

“I was open to participating in a lot of organizations with the hopes of forming an idea of what I wanted to do with my life. Little did I know, running would become one of the biggest joys and successes in my life thus far,” says Blais, whose newly discovered joy led to a spot on the UNH women’s cross-country team and second-place finishes in the America East Conference 10K two years in a row. “I grew from a mediocre runner on my own to being part of an amazing team. I quickly found my passion.”

At this point, Blais was majoring in [therapeutic recreation](#), volunteering with [Northeast Passage](#) and Wildcat Friends, working at Campus Recreation and completing an internship at Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center. But something was missing. She found herself thinking about conversations she’d had with a fellow sailing team member who was going to be a nurse. She thought about diseases, and all they involve, and how stressful it is for people who are awaiting a diagnosis, as her family had been for several years with a younger sibling.

She thought about all the talks she’d had with two friends on the cross-country team who also were going into nursing. And then, even knowing it would mean five years of schooling instead of four, at the end of her sophomore year, Blais changed her major.

“I feel like I’ve gone through some challenging times that were manageable only because I had people to support me and go through them with me,” the Lyndeborough, New Hampshire, native says. “In the end, I was able to use all of my experiences and opportunities to decide [nursing](#) was the career that I wanted. I never imagined I would

**"I never imagined I would have been this successful, involved and thankful when I arrived at UNH in 2011."**

have been this successful, involved and thankful when I arrived at UNH in 2011.”

That success is reflected in the job she’ll start at Dartmouth-Hitchcock at the end of the summer. (Before then she’ll work as a nurse at a summer camp.) Pediatrics is an area of nursing that is hard to get into, especially for recent graduates. But Blais had a foot in the door: In 2014, she interned as a research assistant in the pediatrics outpatient office and the intensive care nursery at the Children’s Hospital at Dartmouth-Hitchcock. She also had job shadowed in the unit.

“I felt more comfortable with this population because I understand some of the important nuances of working in pediatrics through hearing about hospital visits from my family with my sister,” Blais says. “I quickly learned how important it is to always work with the family rather than just merely inform them of what is going on.”

As she leaves UNH, Blais reflects on her time here. She tells next year’s freshmen to be open to new possibilities.

“Don’t pigeonhole yourself into a set path. Branch out and have fun, stay motivated, be kind, take classes that sound interesting not ones that are easy,” she says. “Most importantly, don’t take any of this experience for granted because it flies by and there’s never going to be a time where you can learn about anything and experience everything that you’ve ever had an interest in like you have right now. I’ve had five years and I feel like it just started, so go out, meet people, don’t judge, be involved and have the time of your life.”

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