

Cancer Biologist Joins Faculty in Biology and Biotechnology Programs

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Cancer biologist Dr. [Kristen C. Johnson](#) of Moultonborough, N.H., joined the University of New Hampshire at Manchester faculty this fall as assistant professor of biotechnology in the [biological sciences](#) and [biotechnology](#) programs.

Johnson's research focuses on pancreatic cancer and understanding the genetic alterations that lead normal cells to change into pancreatic cancer cells.

"I was excited to join the university because the Manchester campus offered a small community feel and the students and faculty were very engaged, particularly in the biological sciences and biotechnology programs," said Johnson.

[Kyle MacLea](#), assistant professor of biology at UNH Manchester, says students in the bio programs will learn a lot from Johnson's expertise.

"Dr. Johnson's general experience with the biotech industry and experience with biomanufacturing, in light of the new [Advanced Regenerative Manufacturing Institute \(ARMI\)](#) in the Manchester Millyard, will only enhance the student experience in both of our programs, but particularly for biotechnology majors," said MacLea.

In addition to teaching Principles of Biology, Cell Culture, and Molecular Biology and Biotechnology, Johnson has already brought research opportunities for undergraduate students interested in studying cancer cell biology. This fall she is working with six students who are doing research in the lab. Each of them is studying a different gene which has been found to be altered in human pancreatic cancer.

Johnson said it's important to her that her students understand the big picture and the human side of cancer.

"We start with the experience of a patient who has pancreatic cancer, then we look at the cells and then begin to study the genes in the lab," said Johnson. "I want to lay the foundation for students to understand cellular biology and molecular biology at the basic level but to also appreciate the human side of what cancer patients are going through."

Since joining UNH Manchester, Johnson has moved into the college's new Cell Culture Research Laboratory and nearby molecular biology space, and is using that space to engage in cancer research with human cancer cells.

Prior to joining UNH, Johnson taught molecular biology research, advanced and AP biology as well as introductory biology at Phillips Academy in Andover, MA where she worked for more than six years. She was also an adjunct instructor at both NHTI –

Concord's Community College and Rivier University.

Johnson earned a Ph.D. in cancer biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where her dissertation focus was the analysis of the molecular function of the *Nf2* tumor suppressor protein, Merlin. She earned her undergraduate degree in molecular biology and biochemistry from Dartmouth College.

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