

Below is a Q&A with a student that graduated from Biochemistry at the University of Kentucky in 2013. The student just accepted a position as an Associate Scientist for a biotech company in Blacksburg, VA.

1) How did you find out about the job?

I found out about the job using [Indeed.com](https://www.indeed.com). I was using a mix of both job posting sites (the big ones like Career Builder, Indeed, Biospace, Science, New Scientist, and Medzilla) and the career section of actual company websites. I was looking only at company websites in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina that offered career sections (two great sites that give a list of companies by state that feature career sections on their site is [TheLabRat.com](https://www.thelabrat.com) and BioPharmGuy), and I applied to specific companies I was interested in that way. The job posting sites usually also featured these jobs, but they also featured a lot of contract opportunities, which I've been told are a decent way to get your foot in the door.

While I was applying for jobs, I also started asking friends, family, the UK Wildcat CareerLink, and faculty members at the department if they knew people who had gone to industry. I should note that as a UK student, you can sign up for CareerShift 5.4 that lets you post your resume, and also finds all the job postings from the above sites and brings them to one place. It's a great tool and the school pays for a 6-month subscription for you. I also updated my LinkedIn so that it was like a CV, and then chose a few companies I was most interested in within Research Triangle Park and went to their LinkedIn pages. I then selected the list of 2nd connection employees (after connecting with UK people, etc), which LinkedIn will allow you to connect to without a subscription most of the time. I then asked to connect with these people, and if they accepted, sent them a message asking them if they were willing to give me advice and tell me about their company and their career paths. I cold-called a lot of people this way and some connected with me, and one or two responded to my message and I talked to them on the phone for an hour or so. Most of these people gave me helpful advice on my CV and suggested I also look at industry postdocs or contract positions as a way to get my foot in the door. I actually was able to talk to a former student from the department and a friend of my aunt who had both started biotech companies in Research Triangle Park and were looking at filling positions in the future. Another scientist I talked to offered to forward my CV and put in a good word for me. I never asked directly that people do that for me, and instead let them offer if they didn't mind since I wanted to build a good network. Most positions are filled because someone at the company knows the candidate, so I basically worked to increase my industry-based network, which I didn't have previously.

2) What do you think got you noticed?

What interested the company in me was that I'd done a lot of cell culture and expression work and was familiar with statistics programs like SPSS. I was initially contacted for a phone screen, and when they asked me about salary, I told them a reasonable figure (50-60k/year) that was very suited to the area (which is a town of 50k people in the mountains of Virginia, not Washington D.C. area, Virginia). Other candidates had been asking for much higher salaries because they weren't familiar with the area and the cost of living. I also talked about how interested I was in what the area had to offer in terms of outdoorsy stuff, which showed them I would like living in the area. I also told them I like working in a team atmosphere, and that I'm almost painfully detail-oriented. In addition, I told them that I had no obligations in KY and was able to move and start the job as soon as possible.

3) Who will you work under?

I'll be working under the Associate Director for Project Development. The Associate Director and I will be the main people working on the project, but since it is a small company and our part

of the company has to work closely with the other development parts of the company who make the DNA constructs for us, it's pretty team-oriented. The scientists all meet about once a week and have informal data presentations where everyone can chime in to help move each person forward.

4) What was the interview like?

The interview consisted of an hour with the Senior Director of Process Development, where we mostly talked about the technical aspects of the project, where I asked a lot of questions to demonstrate my interest and also asked how technology platforms I'd learned about on the company website would come into play (showing them that I was familiar with the work they did at the company). I made sure to often chime in and tell them about previous work I had done that closely matched aspects of the project. Then I had another hour interview with the Associate Director I would be working closely with, and he showed me some data, talked about the process of data collection and some day-to-day lab details, and then took me on a tour of the building. During these two hours, I made sure to show my enthusiasm (which wasn't hard, since the project was very interesting and the labs had even their own DNA sequencing machines and such). So, I think my enthusiasm and interest in the project (as well as knowledge of the Blacksburg area and living costs) were major determinants in me getting the offer, since I knew other people with more experience than me were also being interviewed. Lastly, I interviewed with two other Associate Scientists who were my age for about 45 minutes. They had been lab techs that had worked their way up the company. They both had bachelor degrees and were making ~40k/year. Talking to them was pretty informal, and I told them how interested I was in the project, what the day-to-day life was like, how great the area seemed, reinforcing things I had already told the other two interviewers. I figured that setting me up with the two Associate Scientists was to more to assess my fit at the company, so that's where I made sure to be outgoing and friendly. The whole interview process lasted 3 hours and went very smoothly. I made sure to never let things fall into awkward silence, keeping the conversation going at all times with questions and details about past experiences and such. Everyone had a copy of my resume (I think to fall back on if there was dead air), but I made sure I was always on more of the offensive, asking questions about them, the project, the company, etc, which showed them I was knowledgeable about all of those things and also very interested in the position. The whole interview process seemed more like a fun conversation, rather than some stuffy super-formal experience where they ask you questions like "Tell me a time when you had a conflict and how you dealt with it" (which I think may happen with a big company). I was never asked those standard interview questions that you read about on the internet, and that may have been because I never let the conversation stall.

5) Did they ask you about your PhD work?

They more so told me about the details of the project, and I made sure to jump in and stress my relevant experience. I never really let them have the chance to ask me how my experience was relevant, because I really wanted them to know I was perfect for the job, which I figured was my role as the interviewee.

6) When do you start?

I was offered the job at the beginning of February, and I told them that 3 weeks should be sufficient to allow me to get moving in order and secure an apartment. While I was down there for the interview, I also took the opportunity to look at some apartments the next day that I had researched online before arriving in order to get the most out of the trip. Because my boss is anxious for me to start and has a deadline to meet on the project, until I can get down there, I'm familiarizing myself with the main protocols I'd be using as well as brushing up on the background science (textbook/review level) for the project. I'm going to talk to him after a week to see where

I'm at with that and then I might have some more things to do to prepare myself so I can hit the ground running, which I'm anxious to do.

7) Salary and benefits?

The starting salary is \$50k/year, with 2500 added to my first paycheck for moving expenses. I also have 1000 shares in the company and 3 weeks paid time off. I get health insurance, which has a fairly low deductible and a high per year covering cost, which is nice. The optional dental and vision is good too. They also offer a 401K where they match a percentage of what you put in, which grows every year that you stay.

8) Expected hours?

The Associate Scientists I talked to work ~8-5 with an hour lunch break, and said occasionally they were asked to come in on the weekends. The weekend work was optional, and they said if they were in town and felt up to it, they came in. It may be 50 hours/wk at first, but then move down to 40-45/wk.