

To be, or not to be: that is a question

I was very lucky to be the first student admitted to the Institute of Oral Biology. That was in 1993. This opportunity has forever changed my life. Let me tell you why. I was not a “good” student in college. I spent too much time in the activities outside of school. When most of my classmates in the senior year were preparing for the entrance exam to the master’s degree programs or postgraduate medical schools, I did, too, because I was not sure what I really wanted for my life. Fortunately, I got into the Institute of Oral Biology. Being the first student, I had the rare opportunity to set up the lab and initiate a project, which was quite challenging but at the same time, exciting. Luckily, I had a great mentor Dr. Shih-Feng Yang and many wonderful teachers in the School of Dentistry, who were very supportive and provided any assistance I needed. They guided me through the adventure in research. I learned that training and planning are essential before entering an unknown territory. With careful planning and endurance, you will eventually reach the destination and discover the new world. I could not forget the satisfying feeling when seeing the result after a long struggle. I, hence, went back to Institute of Oral Biology as a research assistant after my military service and decided to pursue a career in biomedical research. I then met another great mentor Dr. Kuo-Wei Chang, who led me to the molecular biology world and equipped me to be ready to study abroad. I could have never imagined that I was able to pursue my PhD in the US, perform research at MIT, and become a professor in the University of Cincinnati a few years later if I did not come to Institute of Oral Biology. I am really thankful for the life-changing opportunity that Institute of Oral Biology has given me.

The question I was frequently asked by students is whether the scientist career is right for you. I think that one important consideration is if you have a passion in it. If you have a desire in learning and discovering new things every day and if you enjoy teaching, this is the right career for you. However, research also involves long hours working, reading and writing, mostly alone by yourself. You have to have passion to keep you going, but the reward is great. You own the new discovery. The best way to know whether or not you have a passion in research is by doing it. In my opinion, investing your time in a graduate program is certainly worthy. The training in the graduate school is about critical thinking, research skills, and formal writing and presentation, which will benefit you for a lifetime. If you find it attractive, you shall continue the career path toward a PhD, a postdoc, and eventually a professor. If you later decide not to stay in academia, an advanced degree will open many doors for you to other career options, such as working in a biotech company, a consulting company, a big pharma, a law firm (patent law), a science publishing company, or even in a media



company. I was fortunate to find my passion in teaching and research after attending the Institute of Oral Biology that nourished me and prepared me for the real world of biomedical research. Finally, no matter what path you choose, the success only comes after your determination and hard work. There is no shortcut to success. I wish that you are able to identify your passion, stick to it, and find the best career that suits you. May the force of the success be with you!

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