

# A Snowball Effect of Opening Doors and Offering Sustained Support for Early Career Scientists

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I oftentimes tell people I would never have gotten into graduate school without my summer research opportunities in Prof. Cathy Drennan's lab at MIT; many people brush that comment off as an exaggeration or just my imposter's syndrome speaking. This statement is undeniably true, however, because I never would have even thought to apply without those opportunities and Prof. Drennan's encouragement and support. For people with historically excluded identities, it can be challenging to navigate academia and science in its traditional structure. As we think about how to increase representation and inclusion in structural biology, we must focus on how we can 1) proactively provide opportunities for these scientists to enter STEM, and 2) offer sustained support that enables these scientists to perform their best science and feel a sense of belonging in our communities.

In this presentation, I will share my own story of being matched to work with Prof. Drennan through the MIT Summer Research Program and Howard Hughes Medical Institute EXROP programs, two programs geared towards providing summer research opportunities for undergraduate students from historically excluded backgrounds. These experiences changed my life; they made me decide to go to graduate school and pursue an academic career in structural biochemistry. I continued to pursue my Ph.D. in Chemistry in the Drennan lab, and recently I have started my own lab as a Valhalla Fellow at the Whitehead Institute through the Whitehead Fellows Program.

Getting students into the door is not enough, however; as a community, we must also provide support networks and metrics to provide sustained support once they enter the scientific space. In this presentation, I will also discuss support systems that enabled me to complete graduate school despite personal hurdles, including key mentors and supportive communities. Overall, the opportunities and support I have received have inspired me to now provide the same for the next generations of scientists; this type of snowball effect could be key towards helping to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in STEM.