

Scarlett Vandyke

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



UNC-Chapel Hill, Class of 2021

"Have faith in yourself and be flexible. Finding your first position out of college can be difficult and occasionally disappointing — don't put too much pressure on yourself."

Describe your current position:

I work for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the Office of Research and Development (ORD) as a Research Outreach and Communications Specialist. In that role I help EPA chemical scientists communicate their research and tools to both EPA program offices to inform decision-making and to the public at large. This position also includes assisting in research planning for ORD, planning for scientific conferences, and organizing tool trainings.

You can find out more about the science that I help communicate here:

<https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/about-center-computational-toxicology-and-exposure-ccte>

What skills did you develop at UNC/Collaboratory that are useful in your current job?

My time with the Collaboratory contributed heavily to my passion for science communications and, more specifically, provided me with several writing samples that were very influential in helping me get my first contract position at EPA back in 2020. On a larger scale, I had many courses at UNC that challenged me to be a better communicator, planner, and person! One of my favorites was Ecosystem Based Management with Prof. Geoffrey Bell: this course rapidly progressed my writing skills, especially in the science field. Dr. Bell can be tough but he is a great editor and teacher.

What do you miss about Carolina and Chapel Hill?

Coming from a small town, I loved that I could walk onto campus and see hundreds of familiar faces – peers that were all in similar stages of their lives and all had a common thread tying them together. We lost this pretty rapidly at the beginning of the pandemic, and for those of us that graduated in 2020/2021, it was pretty difficult to regain that sense of community. I'm extremely lucky to be at EPA where the workplace environment is really healthy, happy, and fun, but I definitely miss the closeness I felt with other Carolina students. I'm always surprised by some of the random things I miss... like sitting with your friends for long study nights, the bleary chaos of finals, a tradition of eating waffles in Lenoir, holding a table in a restaurant for *many* hours waiting for UNC vs. Duke tip off.

Can you share any lessons learned as a recent graduate about the job search process?

- Use your network! Even if 9/10 people you ask don't have anything to offer, that last person might be your connection to an awesome opportunity. They can also help with proofing your resume, cover letter, and writing samples.
- Figure out what you don't like first! If you know you hate sitting at your computer, maybe avoid office jobs where you'll be expected to sit all day, etc.!
- Have faith in yourself and be flexible. Finding your first position out of college can be difficult and occasionally disappointing—don't put too much pressure on yourself.