



Kia Lechleitner

Majors: Neuroscience, pre-medicine

Activities: TriBeta (biology), Sigma Xi (research), Psi Chi (psychology), Omicron Delta Kappa (leadership), Chi Omega Gamma sorority

Internships: I was part of the Texas Medical Center Summer Research Internship Program offered through Augustana. I worked in the Jeanie Chin Laboratory, which is part of the Memory & Brain Research Center within the Department of Neuroscience at Baylor College of Medicine. My research examined the role of the thalamic reticular nucleus in Alzheimer's disease.

Post-grad plans: I will continue working as a hiring associate for ScribeAmerica and then apply to medical school.

“Kia demonstrates extraordinary commitment to health care and improving our understanding of Alzheimer's disease to one day find a cure. She has already made significant contributions to Alzheimer's research in her summer research internship, making critical discoveries about brain cells involved in sleep fragmentation and their relationship to beta amyloid accumulation. Kia's motivation is grounded in compassion for those impacted by Alzheimer's, combined with determination and intellect that make her a formidable foe for this devastating disease.”

— Dr. Shara Stough, assistant professor,
psychology and neuroscience

MORE THAN I IMAGINED 2018

SENIORS REFLECT ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND LOOK AHEAD

Why Augustana?

I had toured many schools that were similar to Augustana insofar as they were small, liberal arts colleges. Augustana offered academic classes, like cadaver, that were appealing to me that not many other comparable schools offered. But that wasn't why I chose Augustana.

On my tour day, I was able to sit down and have a long conversation with Bob [Tallitsch], one of the biology faculty members. After I left that meeting, I got lost on campus attempting to find my parents, and a random student, who wasn't a tour guide or anybody 'paid to be a good face' for the school, stopped to help me. That day was the start of me realizing that Augustana is filled with individuals (both students and faculty) who actually care for others in the community.

Are you where you thought you'd be when you first came to campus?

Not at all. I never thought that I would be able to work a full-time job while in school, nonetheless graduate early. Being surrounded by peers and professors who are pursuing their passions daily makes Augie an extremely motivating campus. Aside from that, all of my peers are extremely involved in multiple different activities, which encouraged me to manage my time better.

I also never thought that I would have an interest in research. I did research with my amazing neuroscience advisor, Dr. Stough, my junior year and found it fascinating so I applied for the Texas Medical Center program. Thanks to the hard work of Dr. Storl, I was placed in a lab setting that was perfect for me, and I ended up having one of the most memorable summers of my life. It was there that I realized that research is something that I really value.

When I returned for my senior year, I was able to conduct research with Dr. Gordon all year—she was kind enough to let me continue with the research even after I graduated!

Who helped you get to where you are now?

I cannot thank my professors and my advisors enough. They are always willing to do whatever it takes to help me achieve my goals and always push me to perform to the best of my abilities. I am so grateful that they are willing to share not only their knowledge, but also wisdom. I will be forever thankful for the mentorship and advice they have provided me.

There is no doubt that I could not have gotten this far without the support of my friends and family. They have always been understanding and never stopped encouraging me when I lost faith in my abilities.

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Peak experience?

My peak experience was traveling throughout Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China during East Asia term. Not only was I able to travel with some of my best friends, but I made many new friendships from the experience. I loved that I was able to take fascinating classes, learn about different cultures, and have my eyes opened to the world around me (while eating amazing food). It definitely made me realize that travel, and appreciating the different lifestyles that people hold, is something that I will continue to do in the future.

What surprised you?

I learned that I am capable of changing for the better. I had always thought that I was a pretty open-minded person, but coming into Augustana my freshman year, I was shocked when I realized how closed-minded I actually was. Being surrounded by people who truly care about a broad variety of issues—whether it be social, political, environmental or whatever—has opened my eyes and given me the confidence and voice to discuss these topics with others in a respectful manner.

How did you use Augie Choice?

I used my Augie Choice to fund part of my study abroad experience.

What will you miss the most?

I will miss all of the resources that are so easily accessible. The professors are excellent mentors and are always ready to help you when you need it. The Reading/Writing Center and CORE have been so helpful throughout my Augie career, and I wish I had utilized these resources sooner. But by far the biggest resource that I will miss is all of the people who make up the Augie community!

Advice for the Class of 2022?

Like the sayings go, "don't put all of your eggs in one basket" and "don't spread yourself too thin." College is all about balance!