

Kristina Borham '15

Please provide your biographical information (major/minor at WCU, town you grew up in, reason why you came to WCU).

I completed a BS in Cell and Molecular Biology in 2015 in addition to being a formal member of the Pre-medical Program at WCU. I grew up about half an hour from West Chester in Oxford, PA in southern Chester County where my parents still live today! I chose to come to WCU initially due to the constraints (financial, social, etc.) of being a first generation college student with two college-aged children in the household. WCU offered me a quality education with opportunities to achieve my goal of becoming a physician, proximity to home, and to interact with people both similar and different to me on a daily basis. After experiencing orientation and my first semester, I fell in love with the university and town – I couldn't imagine being where I am today without my experiences at WCU.

What made you go into your degree?

I elected to pursue a degree in biology in the instance that I would not gain admission to medical school in the first application cycle. I chose this because of my interest in science and the human body, my love of working with my hands, and my never ending curiosity – all things that would support a profession in the lab sciences in academics and research if medical school was not the immediate next step for me.

What is your official title and what are your responsibilities in your current position?

As of May 2020, I am now officially Kristina Lake Borham, MD, Captain, United States Air Force. This has been long in the making as I first committed to the idea of becoming a doctor at twelve years old, and is truly the greatest reward for years of hard work. I am beginning my residency training in Obstetrics and Gynecology (OB/GYN) at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. OB/GYN residencies are four year programs in which new physicians train to expand upon skills learned in medical school to become independently practicing specialist in all things reproductive medicine.

What is a typical day like at work?

In the last four years as a medical student, my schedule changed on a daily to monthly basis with responsibilities primarily as a student and exam-taker in the first two years that transitioned into a student doctor role in the latter two years. I have worked in a variety of settings and hospitals as a direct support to practicing physicians and residents, as well as on interdisciplinary teams with nurses, pharmacists, occupational and physical therapists, and other healthcare professionals and students.

As a resident physician, I will be spending my time at a military medical facility aiding patients in their obstetric and gynecologic needs. I will be working in clinics, operating rooms, and labor units doing things like counseling patients on well-women's health in adolescence and adulthood, pregnancy, and menopause (and the medical conditions that arise during these years), surgically removing benign growths, pre-cancer and cancer from the reproductive tract, managing pelvic and urinary issues, maximizing pre-natal care, supporting people in birth and the postpartum period, and ultimately, dually serving as a primary care physician and specialist for patients with these specific needs.

What have been the biggest challenges at work? What do you enjoy most about your position?

It is well known that medical school and residency can be challenging endeavors in terms of the mental, emotional, physical, and time demands. I have found reminding myself of the human aspects help me tackle these challenges. And most importantly, not forgetting who you are outside of the hospital – this means to me remembering your roots (looking at you, Golden Rams and Oxford Hornets), pursuing your

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hobbies outside of medicine (I love to practice yoga, hike, and cook!), and welcoming both familiar and new people into your life, no matter how messy or complicated it sometimes can be.

How has COVID-19 impacted you personally and professionally?

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone in over a million ways. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on the perspective you choose to take, I am not currently working in the hospital setting as I have completed graduation requirements at this time, and it has been a national trend to remove medical students from clinical and academic settings to reduce infection risk and strain on the medical system. The Class of 2020 has forfeited their Match Day celebration activities (a day in which students find out their residency training location and share with loved ones), Commencement (involves Doctoral hooding, reciting the Hippocratic oath), and a number of other award ceremonies for first generation college students, military promotion, and other prestigious recognition for the contributions to the community and health system. It is certainly a loss of tradition that I am feeling, and a lack of closure to this important chapter in my life. At the same time, I am seeing my colleagues in healthcare working in the face of the pandemic and recognize this will soon be my life, too. It is a sobering reality and one that I do not take lightly. I extend the deepest of gratitude to those on the frontlines in any capacity – and the deepest of empathy for the struggles the world is facing – job insecurity, food poverty, worsening or new onset of medical and psychiatric conditions, increases in household abuse and conflict, risks associated with incarceration and residential facilities, loss of time together and milestones shared, and more. This pandemic is highlighting the dark aspects of humanity but also the golden aspects, too. The best that I can do is to commit myself wholeheartedly to my role as new physician and work to be better – as a doctor, friend, daughter, sister, partner, and human every day.

What advice would you give to a current student who aspires to follow in your footsteps and pursue a similar career path?

The advice that I give mentees interested in pursuing a career in medicine often leaves them feeling one of two ways: mildly frustrated with the lack of specific details for success or the beginnings of self-assured confidence and inspiration. I try to stay away from conversations on what classes I took or study materials for the MCAT or USMLE that I used. Sometimes I will talk about my experiences in work, leadership, and service. But what I think is the most important thing for individuals with long term goals such as becoming a physician is that this is a *journey* made up of top-tier goals that can be met with pursuing a number of smaller, lower-tier goals. Beliefs that you are “not yet living life” or that “one day, I will finally be valuable once I achieve x, y, or z” truly hinders your own personal and professional development and subsequent well-being. There is no checklist or cookie cutter answer on how to succeed – and the more that you model yourself after these practices, the less “you” you become, and the less you have to offer to your future profession and patients. Follow your passions. Do the work necessary (pre-requisites, examinations), but focus on demonstrating your strengths. If you don’t know what those are yet, college is the best place to find out. Join clubs and organizations in athletics, arts, leadership, and service. Find what speaks to you. Use your time intentionally and ask yourself – “how is this helping to shape the person I am today become the person I want to be tomorrow?”

How has your WCU education contributed to your success?

I truly believe that I wouldn’t be where I am today without my experiences at WCU. From my time as a resident assistant for two years to working as a research assistant in Shmucker, or who I’ve become being shaped by the pre-medical program, ResLife, and the Abbé Society, I have connected with so many

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people who served as mentors and support as I found my own way. To the people who took a chance on me, to the people who saw something in me that I wasn't quite ready to see in myself, I cannot thank you enough. WCU is a community full of people who see the best in you – and will always support you, even after you leave campus. To my professors, my classmates, my sisters in the Abbé Society, the residents of West Chester, the staff and faculty in admissions, student affairs, financial aid, and beyond – you are all the reason my version of success is possible.