

Early one Sunday morning, I walked into Dr. Bennett's UPenn ophthalmology lab, and was immediately captivated by students and postdocs hard at work slicing tissue samples and using complex microscopes. Maybe it was the two generations of PhD biochemists before me (or the mixed smell of antiseptic procedure and mouse feces in the air), but the discipline of scientific research began to intoxicate my mind.

The next school year, I was able to engage this fascination into a passion in my high school's Honors Advanced Research class. I endeavoured to design a vaccine and somehow help solve the pandemic. I spent hours reading papers by Dr. Alessandro Sette and Dr. Bjoern Peters, attempting to reproduce their results and master peptide-based bioinformatics. I watched all of the Immune Epitope Database's recorded conference sessions, eventually navigating their MHC Binding Predictions Tool with ease. Finally, after months of literature review, I had probed comprehensively into every part of this field. My research hypothesis then appeared like a spotlight, the idea that non-structural proteins rather than the spike glycoprotein could be used within a peptide-based vaccine.

As I transformed the proposal from a school hypothesis to an AAPS conference presentation to now, an AJAS fellow poster, I fell in love with the research process. Research is a science that, by its nature, embraces slowness, amidst the frenzied rush of high school. It excites me that an extension of myself, almost emotionally connected despite its objectivity and citability, is now part of this living research organism.