

Throughout my life, I have noticed that one of the first things that come up in conversation when meeting someone for the first time is asking where they're from. I have always had a tough time answering this question because I had a rather unique lifestyle growing up. My name is Mikayla Connery, and I am proud to say I had two hometowns. I was born in a small town on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where I lived amongst my entire family. However, shortly after I was born, my mom's side of the family moved to Culpeper, Virginia, about an hour outside of Washington D.C. My mom has never been the type of person to let anything hold her back, and for this reason, I spent the next fourteen years bouncing back and forth between Virginia and Massachusetts. I finally was able to settle down in Virginia once and for all just before starting high school. After graduating with high honors from high school, I decided to continue my education at Old Dominion University in Virginia Beach. In May of 2020, I graduated *cum laude* and received my Bachelor's in Biological Sciences. I am currently a second-year student at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center pursuing my Doctorate of Pharmacy degree in the Class of 2024. I have had my mind set on becoming a pharmacist for many years due to the positive influence of my grandfather who was a well known and loved pharmacist in my small-town community. I was able to see the first-hand impact that he had on so many patients lives, and it made me want to do the same. Upon graduation, my career goal is to become a clinical pharmacist working directly with patients in the hospital setting, providing the best patient care that I am capable of to overall improve the quality of life for my patients.

During my first year at UTHSC COP, I was truly exposed to the pharmacy profession for the first time. Before beginning my time at the College of Pharmacy I had never had any actual pharmacy work experience. Initially I thought this may set me behind in my learning experience, but it has only motivated me to work harder to succeed. In the first part of the year, I was fortunate enough to join Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical Fraternity (Psi Chapter (KΨ)). Being a member of this organization allowed me to gain some valuable experience working out in the community. One of the highlights of the past year and working in the field so far has certainly been volunteering to give COVID vaccinations to the members of our community at large drive through clinics. During one shift at the clinic, I was able to prepare and administer at least 30 vaccines which made me very proud considering I was able to face my fear of giving vaccinations in the first place. Another memorable experience came in the summer following the academic year when I started my two-week summer community IPPE rotation. I was originally very nervous going into the experience having had no prior experience working behind the counter, but it proved to be very educational and informative and overall, I feel like I was able to learn a lot from my preceptor. My first year at the College of Pharmacy was very busy and took a lot of hard work and motivation, but in the end, it was all worth it when I was awarded a place on the Dean's List for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Although school is a big part of how I spend my time, I have always tried not to let it get in the way of my personal life. In my free time I can be found spending time with friends and family or indulging in one of my many hobbies, but my favorite times are when I can intertwine the two. For example, I have always loved singing, dancing, and acting, and when I was very young, my family introduced me to musical theater. I have been hooked ever since, and now one of my favorite things to do is go with my family to Broadway shows or other smaller musical shows. I am also a huge advocate for getting outdoors and being active. My favorite outdoor activities tend to differ with the seasons. In the warmer months my favorite thing to do is ride my horses, and in the winter, skiing is the best. Overall, I have found that my favorite way to decompress in life is to travel. Having family and friends spread all across the United States only makes me even more motivated to see new places and try new things. One of the main reasons I was so excited to move to Knoxville is because it was going to be a whole new experience for me. Now that I live here, I am very excited to get out and see what East Tennessee has to offer!

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