



Portrait of a Graduate

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- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Morehead-Cain Scholarship Recipient
- Finishing Master's of Science in Public Health (MSPH) in Environmental Sciences and Engineering '23
- Fulbright Scholar '22
- BSPH in Environmental Health Science and B.A. Anthropology '21
- Hutchison School '17

8th Grade, GSL

My main focus this semester at UNC-Chapel Hill is writing and defending my technical report, which is the equivalent of a thesis for my degree path. My report analyzes the health impacts of disaster response activities on fishing communities in Bahia, Brazil, following the country's largest documented oil spill, which began in fall 2019. I'm working with data from epidemiological questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, most of which I collected last year while doing my fieldwork in Brazil with support from a Fulbright Research/Open Study Award. My core research team includes a professor at UNC-Chapel Hill and two professors at Brazil's Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) in Salvador, Brazil.

In a few years I'll return to school for a Ph.D. in environmental epidemiology or behavioral health. I just started applying for jobs in environmental or public health nonprofit roles. Right now, two graduate student peers and I are developing an environmental crisis training to help community members access more resources when incidents similar to the oil spill occur. We received a Community Engagement Fellowship from UNC's Carolina Center for Public Service that will allow us to return to a few of the communities where I did fieldwork last year to pilot the training. Working with the fishers is definitely the most rewarding part of my role, so I'm really excited that I will have another opportunity to visit these sites and share what our team has learned. Sometimes the research focus in academia can seem more important than putting the findings in action, so it's really exciting and meaningful that our team will get to use our results to meet a community-identified need.

So many things at GSL impacted my work in high school and college. For research papers in middle school, there was a really specific writing process that we had to learn. Finding sources online and documenting where every idea came from seemed so tedious. Turns out, I had to use those skills for nearly every assignment in college and graduate school, so I'm grateful that I started learning them early on. It made the research process more accessible, and pursuing a research-oriented degree less intimidating.

The community-mindedness of GSL has had a big influence on my current work. Artisanal fishing in Brazil is very collaborative; all the fishers know each other, work together, and have their own community organizing systems. Growing up in a tight-knit community like GSL helped me understand why that matters and motivated me to help these fishers preserve their lifestyles and communities.

When I think of influential teachers at GSL, the first that comes to mind is Mr. Boyd, my 7th/8th grade science teacher and track/cross-country coach. I was quite a perfectionist and very goal-oriented at that time, and Mr. Boyd really challenged me, not just in the classroom but also in sports. I think he wanted me to chill out a bit and realize I would be okay even if I didn't meet every one of my goals. There's no way I would've been confident enough to move to Brazil last year if I had held on to that level of perfectionism!

I would tell current GSL students to be open-minded! Your interests will probably change a lot over the next few years, so follow what's exciting to you, and be open to something new if that excitement fades.



Francie Sentilles at far right with research colleagues in Sergipe, Brazil.

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