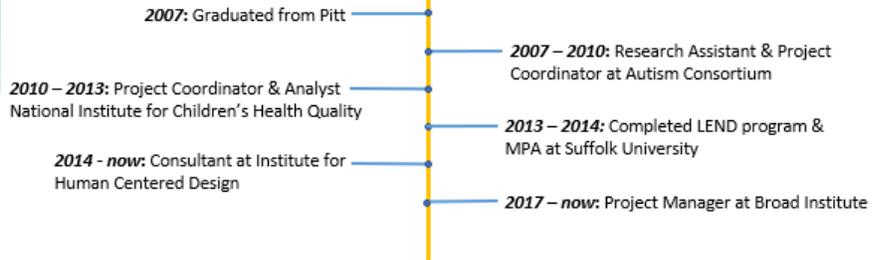


Katherine Blakeslee

Interviewed by: Susie Chen



Career Timeline



What do you currently do?

I am currently at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, in Boston. We are a nonprofit genomics organization, so pretty exciting and interesting stuff. In addition to genetics, we are looking at therapeutic approaches not just for managing different diseases, but also hoping to find a cure. Being in this space where they do both is so cool. Usually, you have Pharma on the back-end, involved the therapeutics side of things. Being involved in both the genetics all the way through to the therapeutic piece of it is really cool, and makes it such a unique, incredible workspace.

I’m the Project Manager of the Kidney Disease Initiative; we’re doing research in the rare kidney disease space. Unfortunately, not a lot of work has been done in this area. It’s unlike its counterparts of cancer and diabetes, which have a lot of attention because they’re so prevalent; the rare disease space doesn’t have that sort of attention and traction. Through scientific research and breakthroughs though, we’re hoping to show linkage to a family of diseases that are affecting a greater population.

In this role, I manage the day-to-day stuff, like project logistics and budgets, and I’m also in the patient-facing part, so I interact with patients and potential funders that are interested in funding kidney research. In general, my team is involved in researching both the biological underpinnings and treatments for rare kidney disease.

In addition to serving as Project Manager, I am also an Alliance Manager to the Carlos Slim Foundation, which is based in Mexico and provides funding to projects at the Broad. As the Alliance Manager at the Broad, I am the project liaison between the Slim

Currently at: Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard

Position: Project Manager of the Kidney Disease Initiative

Graduated: 2007

Degrees: Psychology (B.S.)

Graduate Studies: Masters of Public Administration (MPA) from Suffolk University

Project management; Genomics; Non-profit



Foundation and the kidney, cancer, and diabetes project groups. It's very exciting and extremely interesting serving in this role. So that's what I do, 9-5. I also provide consulting for the New England ADA Center which is part of the Institute of Human Centered Design. I help with their social media strategy, and figure out how to get traction in that space, as well as promote and share ideas and work on the research end of things. Right now, our grant is focused on the aging population, as well as those who are recovering from addiction. In the nonprofit space, it's difficult for them to hire employees who do this sort of work, and I care so deeply about the mission and the work they're doing, and finding the best strategic approach. The position lent itself well to an 8 hour-a-week gig, and I get to continue the work that I really care about, and that I really hope succeeds in both the research and in the mission.

What skills did you gain from completing a Psychology degree that helped in your career(s) after graduation?

I would say, relationship management is huge. It's really about utilizing your connections and maintaining them and keeping them strong. I mean, I'm in the position I am in today because I'm good at working with others, those with diverse backgrounds and who have different experiences. So as much as you can allow yourself to have those experiences with different groups, and expand yourself outside your comfort zone, do it! There's no template for when you go out into the workforce and encounter a difficult boss, or a person with a difficult personality –you're going to be faced with that, so I think your success in any field is being able to utilize relationships, focus on relationships of different kinds, and work well with others.

In terms of actual schooling, I wish I had more of an understanding of other sciences, I think it's deeply important. I also wish I had more training in statistics and statistical methods. Statistics is such a huge thing and is so applicable across a lot of different disciplines, so having had more of that training would have been helpful. With any research you do, it'll be helpful knowing how to apply statistics.

Did you engage in any extracurricular, research, etc. activities while you were at Pitt?

I had worked on a really interesting research study toward the end of my last year at Pitt, that had done fMRI studies that specifically dealt with speaking [with Professor Chuck Perfetti]. But I also





worked with a program there on the weekends called [Kinder Kinetics](#), which is an interdisciplinary program that does work with young kids with and without disabilities. I had worked with a kid with autism, and that sort of lent itself to my interest in that area and also initiated my interest in research. And having that background experience in that space helped with applying to the autism research project in Boston.

What did you do after graduating with your Psychology degree?

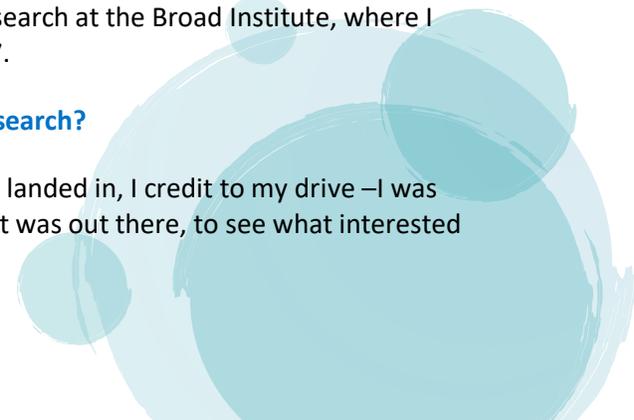
After graduating in 2007, I came to Boston and started doing research at the Autism Consortium. It was a multi-site genetic study of autism. I did basically all the research assistant stuff, and I was also the family and community outreach manager. For that, I'd go out to the community and expand recruitment, through attending lecture series and family support groups, to share the work we were doing. The Autism Consortium was really my introduction into research, both in really doing the grunt work involved with research projects, and then taking it a step further and doing the patient and medical history interview. And then taking it another step further by going out into the community and explaining the importance of research. I really had to figure out how to be a steward of the idea that "research is important, and here's why we think this collection of data you can be involved with will have a later impact."

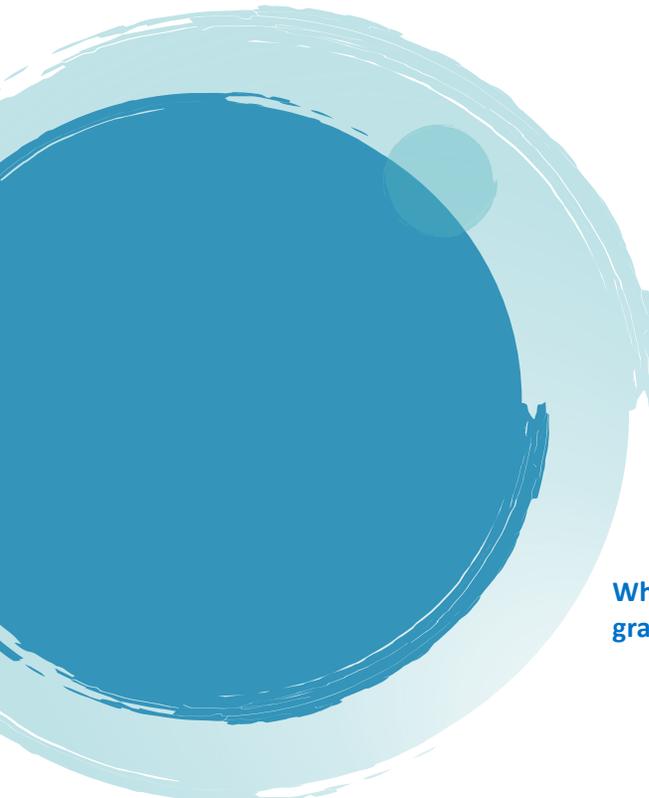
After that, I went onto the National Institute for Children's Health Quality (NICHQ), which was more in the quality improvement space, and there I specifically worked on an autism project. From there, I learned about the Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program, and applied and was accepted. I did a program through it that also gives you a Master's degree; in my case, it was in Public Administration through Suffolk University. It was here that I then did some outreach in the area that was doing similar work, so that's what led me to the Institute for Human Centered Design.

After LEND, I worked at Boston Children's Hospital as a patient educator. From there, my career kind of blossomed and then I landed back into genetic research at the Broad Institute, where I started working in July 2017.

How did you conduct your job search?

Most of the positions I have landed in, I credit to my drive—I was really motivated to see what was out there, to see what interested





me. And that sort of fueled each next step. I always thought, “Where can my career grow? What is my next step?” And then took the steps along the way that I needed.

After school, it takes a lot of motivation to find what you’re interested in. I think that after coming out of college, you’re always met with, “What do you do next? What is your next step?” Through your own motivations and drives, you can facilitate that next step.

What advice would you give to undergraduates pursuing or graduating from Psychology?

Be open to others, going back to my point about relationship management. And the second thing is, especially at your age, is to challenge yourself. Take on that challenge, that opportunity. Say yes. We’re equipped to be cautious –there’s something about taking opportunities and seeking them out, even if it feels like taking a stretch, because it pays dividends later on.

