

## EPISODE 3 Practicum Pods Transcript:

Hannah 0:10

Hello everyone and welcome to episode three of the global disease biology practicum pods. In this podcast series, we will be talking practicum projects with current and former GED students, all students in the major are required to complete a practicum project before graduation. This project involves students finding a faculty member conducting research, under the mentors guidance and turning the research experiences into a publishable scientific manuscripts, tune into practicum pods to learn more about research mentors in the GDB practicum experience. Welcome to the pod, I am your host gdb pure advisor Hannah. Today I am joined on the show by the lovely Lauren Santoro. Lauren is a 3rd year gdb student and they are currently in the process of finding a practicum mentor and project. Hi Lauren. Good to have you on the pod today, how are you.

I'm good how are you

doing well, thank you. I'm so excited for you to be here. So before we get started, can you tell us a little bit about who you are and your background.

Lauren 1:26

Yeah, so, like you said, I'm a third year undergraduate. My major is GDB, and I'm also a minor in sociology. Let's see, I, I'm very interested in. I guess like the forensic pathology aspect but also like public health that like, like in Davis, I've been able to like learn a lot more about public health, and that's been like very interesting to me. And, yeah, I'm just like, I'm also involved in just like a few like clubs, and I like I've had like a few internships during like the past few years at Davis. And so, yeah, I'm currently like interested in either going into forensic pathology or going into like a career in public health, I'm still trying to figure out, like, exactly what I want to be doing like after UC Davis.

Hannah 2:27

Right, yeah. So, which stage of your practicum journey. Are you currently in, and what steps have you taken to get to this point.

Laurel 2:36

So since I'm a third year, my plan is to complete the practicum during my fourth year. And so because of that I'm still like, I'm still like figuring out exactly what I want my practicum to specifically focus on. And also I do have practical mentors in mind and, but I'm waiting, I'm really waiting to like get a better idea of like, what I want to focus on in order to officially be placed with a mentor. And so, yeah, I'm still kind of like in the stage of brainstorming and figuring out. Yeah, just like figuring out like okay, which which specific topic should I look into, Like, if I'm going to be like looking at this project for like, like for a good amount of like a good amount of the year.

Hannah 3:26

Right, yeah. So have you started this process of searching for a practicum mentor and project, all while being virtual, or did you start this project, or start your search before.

Laurel 3:39

It was partially in person and and virtual so let's see. So during my it was during my second year that I started, I started interning as like an autopsy scribe under a medical examiner. Her name is like Dr. Judy Melinek, and because she used to work in Alameda County. And so I got

connected with her and I was kind of like a student intern under her, and yeah so I would, I would scribe for autopsies like either once a week or once every two weeks. And so that's how like, I got like, I got involved with, kind of like the field of forensic pathology, and I got like very interested in it. And so, but because of COVID. That, that internship, like was like put on hold. Since like they didn't want like students going into the medical examiner's office, and so. And so actually, she ended up, she ended up moving to New Zealand, like because you. I think she got she got hired in New Zealand and so, so I'm still like, I'm still communicating with her but it's, it's all virtual now, and just like with the timezone difference, it kind of like makes things a little more complicated, so I ended up actually finding like a student internship for for an organization called Public Health Institute. And so, I've been working, I've been working with them so they're a team that focuses on like helping underserved populations and everything with that has been like virtual so I've been like, I've been helping out like the health educators and like learning about how they, how they analyze their data online.

Hannah 5:33

Cool, so you kind of have a mix of in person and virtual practicum during the experience. I'm interested to hear more about how you landed the position of a scribe in the is it. The, can you tell us more about that experience because I'm really interested in how you got involved in that. Do you have an initial interest in that or did it just come across your path?

Lauren 6:03

Yeah for sure so it was, um, so actually, I've been, I've been interested in forensic pathology for a long time. Let's see even. Yeah, even when I was a kid, there's always just been something that I've been interested in. And so, When I was in high school, I read, so Dr. Melinek she has a. She has a book called "Working Stiff", and it's basically about her life. After she completed residency and it's about her forensic pathology fellowship, and like her time in New York, and so I read that book in high school, and I thought it was really cool that she was like, yeah, she's just like a really cool person and then in UC Davis, I took the ETX 20 class. It's the intro to forensic science, just because like I wanted to like get a sense of, I guess like what the forensic science community at UC Davis is like, and so it was kinda like a step in and Professor wood he taught that class, and then he was telling us. Also, um, during the year. We're gonna have a guest speaker, her name is Dr. Judy Melinek, and so I was like oh my god and then so I actually went into his office hours one day and I just because I was just curious, I was asking. Oh, do you happen to know, like just Do you happen to know any more information about forensic pathology that I could look at. It was just one thing where I was like, I was like you know I was like, I'm not gonna be nervous. I'm just going to go to like professor's office hours and just kind of like, just talk to them. Ask him like, kind of like who he knows in like the forensic science community, and that's what he said he was like, oh yeah so I actually, I know Dr. Melinek because like you know she's gonna be a guest speaker, I can give you her email, and then you can try like reaching out to her because she likes to help out students, or that's her big thing she likes to teach. And so I sent her an email, just kind of like telling her like you know like introducing her to myself, and saying like you know I have like, I've been interested in this for a long time. I was just wondering if you know of any opportunities where I can like, I can kind of like, figure out like, if this is the right the right path for me. And then she responded and said, Why do I let students come in to scribe for some autopsies. If you're interested, here's the information like here's everything, and then, yeah, and then I saw I went in one day, and I just thought it was the coolest thing ever. It was, yeah, it was, it was crazy. It was just like, it definitely, it was like an amazing experience, and then after that, she kind of like, she kept me and then, and basically said like, you know, if you want to be like a student intern under me like, I'd be more than happy to help you out. So that's kind of how I got started with her.

Hannah 9:11

Yeah, that's super interesting and it's great that you took that leap. Sometimes it takes out one leap of courage to just push your comfort zone a little further, to reach out to that professor and say you know what I'm interested in this, I'm going to do it and so I think that's great experience and advice for students to implement into their own experience practicum journey and experiences that if there's a class that is really interesting to you, professors really have connections and networks that you can kind of latch on to. Just by being in that class, and I think that that's a really cool way that you got into the field, knowing that that was something that you're interested in that you carried in from high school and then you acted on it by just seeing who you like could reach out to via your current network. So yeah that was super unique, and also a very unique field. So now that we've talked about how you kind of narrowed down your field of interests and kind of what you speak to your academic interests and goals. How are you planning on maybe carrying that interest into your practicum project Do you have any ideas currently about what your research would actually be on or what kind of data you would like to collect, or do you kind of in the midst of figuring that out?

Lauren 10:46

I would say, I'm still in the midst of figuring it out. However, some, like, some aspects of forensic pathology that really interests me are like how I guess like how certain either certain causes of death or certain health issues impact like impact communities like how it ties in with public health. And so, that's always been, that's always been something that's something that kind of like, I always have been interested in but like being in like the GDB major and taking like classes that talk about like population health, and public health, and kind of like reinstated that. And so that's why I'm hoping to like, when it comes to like, how, like, getting the data. I'm still like, yeah I'm still trying to figure that out too like is that going to be something where I'm going to look at, like mainly public health data, or is it going to be a meta analysis, it's still kind of like a question of how, like, what's going to be the approach for that, but I wouldn't like my, I would prefer that that my practicum does like touch on how like a certain health issue, can impact either communities, or even like underserved communities. Yeah, just how maybe how something like how something that like involves death can also impact the living like how that can still tie in and you can possibly prevent either prevent violence prevent mortality like, yeah, what things can be prevented based on what we know.

Hannah 12:32

Yeah. Very interesting. So, in that, do you find that there is a lot of forensic science research going on at Davis, or would you say that it's been difficult to find people, faculty members at Davis, doing work in the field that you're interested in.

Lauren 12:58

I feel like it just depends on what you want to focus on when it comes to like faculty at Davis, because with because forensic pathology is a very like, it's very medically based. And so, if you want to specifically look at forensic pathology I feel like a lot more people either who work at possibly the Davis Medical School, or like people like in medicine will likely know more about it. However, like, there are ways to find those people you know based just based on mutual mutual connections at Davis, because either people who are in like, like faculty in the College of Biological Sciences will know people in like the medical school, so it's kind of like, I thought we can, those people are outside of Davis, but it's like, it is possible to find them, like through Davis faculty, but also with like or forensics, I know that like the forensic toxicology department is very like, it's a very strong department at Davis, so if, Like, if you're interested in that that would

definitely like, you can definitely find people like within UC Davis faculty who are like involved in that. And even, or even on the forensic side if you're looking more at like genetics. There are people like I UC Davis who like do specialize in that. So it kind of, I feel like it kind of depends on, I guess which, which some parts within kind of like the umbrella of forensic pathology and public health, you're looking into.

Hannah 14:38

Gotcha. Yeah, so would you say that to get to this point where you kind of like had some opportunities in this forensic science forensic pathology field, and are kind of moving forward in your search for an actual project with a mentor. Would you say that your search in this journey has been mostly aided by mutual connections that you've just had during your time at Davis, or was there another resource or technique that you learned along the way and utilize that helped you find these opportunities and speak with these people that you have.

Lauren 15:19

I feel like it's been a little bit of both, like both with UC Davis faculty, but also outside because definitely I wouldn't have found the people outside of UC Davis if it wasn't for UC Davis, and then I was able to, because even with. Yeah, I was Professor Matt wood like who taught like at x 20 He's very involved in like, forensic toxicology, but I have been able to just like to have discussions with him about, I guess the field of forensic science, or like because bring him he took like the PhD route so I kind of asked him like, oh, Like, how was that for you like. And then he you know he's been like open about it like you know like helping me, like, like figuring out what I want to go into after undergrad, but also like without him I wouldn't have found Dr Melinek or I wouldn't been able to like kind of reach out to her. And so, and even with, like, because currently I'm, um, I'm interning at the Yolo County Coroner's Office. And so that's been like, it's been very new, I just started like a few weeks ago and so, also with that I want to know. I wanted to found out about that if it also wasn't for like UC Davis.

Hannah 16:33

So it's kind of like a branching pattern of like connections, and obviously like big network of kind of moving you forward in the fields just based off of the steps that you've taken to like to put your foot forward and reach out to people.

Lauren 16:50

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

Hannah 16:52

Yeah, very cool. So I'm also interested in your experience so you're taking this ETFs class is that part of your research, like goods that you've chosen to take.

Lauren 17:09

It actually wasn't because it was a lower division class so I took it during my freshman year. Yeah so that was, yes it was gives us ETX 20 So it's a lower division class so it doesn't count for my restricted electives. However, through like my time as like an autopsy scribe. I was able to get units for that, I was able to get internship units for that so it counts as a GTX 192 So it's like upper division and so yeah so that's how it does count for my restricted electives and also for my restricted electives. I've actually I take that back since I declared a minor in sociology. So, because originally my plan was, um, my restricted electives, like, a lot of them would be classes on like criminology in the criminal justice system. Since like when I became an upper division student I was like these classes seem really interesting and like, if I want to be involved

in, like forensic pathology I feel like knowing about the criminal justice system is like, you know, it's important to like, be educated on it. And like since then, since those two fields do like intersect out like a good amount of times. And so, yeah, so those. Now I think about it, account for the minor, I think, isn't one of them overlaps one of them counts for the restricts that like those. but with my restrict electives, I have. I know that, like anatomy and physiology, counts for those, I think that I'm, I know that I did add like cha one one and PB one one, and then even like some public health classes to write the SBH department.

Hannah 18:57

Yeah, so that kind of like ties in a nice little, like, unique set of course. Courses that pertain to your interests specifically. So yeah, it sounds like those will really help you figure out, and also conduct your research when you get into a position where you feel like the research project is what you want to do, of course as a UC Davis student. I feel like we're because it's a research institution we're like bombarded with opportunities left and right, especially when you start branching out and reaching out to people say, and they say oh I have this going on. Did you have any experience where you either took on or or rejected an opportunity for some reason, like how did you discern that you didn't want to go forward with being a scribe or working at the coroner's office versus getting involved in something else at Davis, did you have any of that going on where you were conflicted as to which opportunities to take advantage of because it seems like there's so much Davis to do.

Laurel 20:12

Yeah, a little bit, I was, I think for me like a big thing was just like, I kind of wanted to apply to everything kind of just like, because there were, There's so many opportunities like as you said, and so that was having a big thing where I was just like, I know I went through a phase where I was just kind of like applying to a bunch of stuff. And then, within realizing like, honestly like am I like genuinely interested in that, though, so it was kind of like, I had to like had to have that conversation with myself, you know, cuz like when you're on handshake, there's so many you know you see so many. There are so many openings there's like all like for this lab in this lab. Yeah, I remember there was one for like a there was a veterinary, it was veterinary Pathak veterinary pathology I believed, like a lab assistant and so I remember I I think I got I got interviewed for that, but like, after like, because of the things like you know I went in for the interview. When I left I was kind of like, I don't know if I'm like genuinely interested in this, though. And so, and it was funny because right after like right after I got interviewed for that that was when I had my first day as an autopsy scribe. And then, just like seeing the difference I was like okay I know like, this is what I have to do, you know,

Hannah 21:39

right yeah so having that like self reflective nature. Throughout the process of getting experience and then cutting into your practicum project, but it's probably really beneficial for you. Yeah, so how are you feeling just in general going into the practicum project now with all of this experience and coursework that you've taken does do you feel like those prepared you for your practicum project are there any prospects that you are still apprehensive about or curious about going forward or that you're excited about.

Lauren 22:17

Um, yeah, I'd say like, it's a lot, it's a big mix of like, all of that I do feel that I, I do feel prepared in the sense, when it comes to like, like when I get to finalizing. What I want to focus my practicum one. That's definitely. Yeah, I feel like all the, all the courses at like Davis that I've taken so far, and with kind of like my past experiences. There's a lot like, I guess there's just like

a lot of ideas that I have now, or there's a lot of, like, because now I know that there's so many. There's so many things I could possibly like read this towards. And so it's gonna be. I feel like it's gonna be tough because for me, In general, like, it's hard to make decisions like this, just because like when there's so many, like there's so many great ideas out there. Yeah, but I do feel that like in the end, in the end it's going to work out. I'm going to I'm going to finalize something that like, I'm going to be really like excited to work on for like the next year. Let's see yeah I'm just like, I'm really excited for the practicum, I really am. And that's like, I'm just the one part that I'm like, oh my god like, It's like gonna be a little nerve wracking is actually like finalizing who I'm going to be placed with Kelly, asking like the question like, oh, like you know like would you be interested in, in being like my practical mentor for this. And so, but other than that, Like, I'm just like, overall I excited for what's going to happen.

Hannah 24:04

Yeah, yeah, it's just based off of going through it myself and then also hearing from a lot of other students. It's, it ends up being an experience that you can mostly like anticipate you know it's not much different than you would expect it to be but it still has its, you know uniqueness about it as an undergraduate, a lot of undergraduate students. A lot of students, general students don't get involved in research or don't have the opportunity to or don't have the time to. So, it's really great that I gdb pushes us to get involved in something like this because it's really expediting your process of like finding your interest, and it sounds like that started for you in high school, And then, you know, as you're anticipating a project and reaching out to your professors in classes that specifically interests you, you were able to kind of narrow down and chisel away down to your core interests, and so I'm excited for you and your journey. And the fruition of your project, and best of luck to you, Laura. Is there anything else that you would want to say or any advice to students regarding your practicum journey.

Lauren 25:24

Oh, let's see, so advice. my one like little like spiel, like to talk to like faculty members. I just don't be scared to, like, put yourself out there and say like, Hi, I'm like, I'm interested in this like would you be willing to like to talk about this because even something that like has been helpful for me is what I've done is I've even just like set up I mean that now with COVID Like, it's on zoom but like, you can just like email professor and say hi, like, I'm, I'm just like genuinely interested in this, or like, I kind of want to know like, the educational path that you took to get to where you are now and like, Would you be willing to set up like to, like, be on the Zoom call with me for like 20 minutes to talk about it. And so, like, just don't be afraid to do stuff like that and she's like, because obviously like they're here to educate you, you know, they're like, even though like they see like, oh my god, they're so like, you know, it's so scary like they're the one like leading the class like Zoom meeting with like, 150 students, it's like they're, they're here to teach, like in the at the end of the day. And so, like, just don't be afraid to like to utilize that.

Hannah 26:48

That is great advice, and I hope that our students learn some valuable insight, and it was great to hear from you, Lauren, thank you so much for chatting, but that's about your gdb practicum experience. Our students are so excited to hear about these projects and learn how to approach research in a large university setting, you can visit [gdb.ucdavis.edu](http://gdb.ucdavis.edu) To access the rest of the podcasts in the series, or find us on Spotify. If you like listen to practical pods and have suggestions for future topics for the pod please let the GDD advising staff know at [gdb-advise@ucdavis.edu](mailto:gdb-advise@ucdavis.edu) Thanks everyone, and have a great week.