

Dr. Michelle Bezanson

Written by Sarah Greening, Ph.D. Trainee



Michelle Bezanson completed her PhD in Chemistry at McGill University working under the supervision of Professor Nicolas Moitesser. Her thesis work involved the synthesis, reactivity and application to asymmetric catalysis of small to medium sized heterocycles. From the beginning of her degree, Michelle knew that she had no desire to stay into Academia – why? Although she saw the value in fundamental research and the freedom to research whatever you want, she had no interest in spending most of her time teaching and writing grant proposals, as a career as a research professor would entail. So, industry was her option.

However, during her PhD Michelle had no way of knowing if industry was suited for her or not. Fortunately, during her second year of graduate school, she had the opportunity to participate in a 6-month internship with the pharmaceutical company, Intellisyn. One of the reasons Michelle chose to do her PhD in Montreal was the large pharmaceutical base in the city including Merck and AstraZeneca. However, during Michelle's time in graduate school, these companies shut down their Montreal research facilities and many talented chemists were left without jobs. Those chemists gravitated towards these start-up companies, which would allow them to stay in the city and continue the work they were trained to do. At the time, Intellisyn was a start-up company that had only been operating for about a year when she joined. Start-up companies have a “do or die” environment; if they fail, people's livelihoods are on the line. When she joined the company, there were only five other research scientists: two PhDs and three MScs, four of whom had >10 years experience at AstraZeneca. During her internship, Michelle



learned how fast-paced industry is, especially medicinal chemistry. You synthesize as many compounds as you can, as fast as you can, all with little chance of ever seeing your products go on to clinical trials, let alone to market.

Currently, Michelle is a Senior Research Scientist at Eurofins Alphora based in Mississauga, Ontario. Eurofins Alphora is a contract process chemistry company for niche small molecule Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs). As a process chemist, her role is to develop and optimize a synthetic route of an API for production in the pilot plant. Michelle finds this role to be most satisfying because, unlike medicinal chemistry, the chances of working on a drug that will make it to market are very high. Alphora Research Inc. was acquired by Eurofins in June of 2017, six months after Michelle joined the company. The company currently has approximately 150 employees. This is quite a contrast to the handful of employees of the small start-up company that she interned with during her PhD. As a Senior Research Scientist, Michelle can report to anyone above her, but it is easiest to report to the Group Leader as they have the most time available, unlike the company president. Within the company, Michelle has several roles which she says helps keep things interesting. In the lab she is a bench chemist utilizing her synthetic chemistry skills and in the office her deskwork involves preparing paperwork required for filing with regulatory agencies such as the FDA. Some of her other responsibilities include keeping a good notebook where every detail must be recorded in accordance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), attending client meetings and teleconferences, and providing weekly update reports. Michelle believes that her internship with Intellisyn was the most valuable part of her PhD experience, as it helped her prepare for her current career.