

BioGENEius Awards: In Kayla Evans' Words

Committed to presenting ideas and projects that address global healthcare, sustainability and environmental issues, the Champions of Science Storytelling Challenge—BioGENEius Edition invited alumni of the Biotechnology Institute's BioGENEius Challenge to share stories of their innovative and impactful work. Recognized in this year's contest, read the essays of these runner-ups.

My name is Kayla and I am a graduating fourth-year at Harvard College and Atlanta native. I concentrate in Cognitive Neurobiology and Evolutionary Psychology with a secondary concentration in Linguistics. Since being a BioGENEius, I have served as president of the Harvard Society for Mind, Brain, and Behavior, become family with the Harvard Society for Black Scientists and Engineers, and worked on research at Harvard Business School. My interest in science began when I was eight, thanks to my parents who put me in science summer programs. At that point, I don't think I had a conscious affinity toward science, but playing with gooey putties, mixing chemicals to make colorful concoctions, and excavating outdoors was exciting to me.

This, perhaps subconscious, penchant toward science grew into a full-blown-love in high school. While working at Morehouse School of Medicine, my research turned into a research project that took me to BioGENEius 2014. This then led me to Emory University's Neurobiology Department, where I was formally introduced to the mind and brain sciences. Neuroscience and Psychology does not (usually) involve much putty, colorful chemicals, or excavations, but I'm having the time of my life studying neuroscience and psychology.

Today, I am most interested in the neuroscientific and psychological bases of human decision making. Work of this field, formally called "Behavioral Science" have become fixtured in some governments, like that of the UK, Australia, and the US. It helps ensure that public and social sector interventions – may they be new services, new drugs, new policies, etc. - make maximal impact through en-masse behavior shifts. For example, I had the opportunity to work in London, UK at a behavioral insights practice in 2017, where my team helped a government organization use psychological science to create better public housing policies to help at-risk young, low-income tenants with overdue arrears.

The content and views presented here are those of the individual Challenge participant.

