

How does a person with a career in sales for the elevator industry make the giant leap to the healthcare industry? With a little help from the Purdue's Biotechnology Innovation & Regulatory Science (BIRS) program.

Meet Maria Hult, quality assurance lead at Roche Diagnostics in Indianapolis, Indiana. Previously a project manager and sales representative at an elevator company, Maria entered the healthcare industry in the middle of her career, seeking a deeper purpose and pride in her work.

"There's an aspect of meaning in the work you do and I've found since joining Roche that I'm so deeply proud of what we do. But, the move from the elevator industry to healthcare was challenging," added Maria. "A lot of the regulatory and quality concepts that peers were aware of, I wasn't as familiar with."

Through colleagues and other leaders within Roche, Maria became aware of the BIRS program and decided to pursue the program in a Roche cohort.

"Having spent the majority of my career outside a regulatory environment, the program was extremely beneficial for me," said Maria. "The knowledge base you can grow in such a short period that applies to quality and regulatory is beyond what any other program would offer. It would have taken me twice as long to gain that amount of knowledge through the workplace alone."

Not only did she gain a deeper knowledge of biotechnology and regulatory sciences, but she also grew her network of contacts within Roche.

"Because my role is supporting all of the business areas across Roche, the program provided me a great opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of what my colleagues do in their businesses and what we can do locally to support them."

For many students, the hybrid program – part in-class and part online – is an attractive feature. Having given birth to her second child a few weeks before the beginning of the first semester, Maria was grateful for the unique program.

"I really appreciated the flexibility of the program but also having that in-person time. I don't think I would have gotten as much out of the program without interactions and sharing ideas with my peers," she said. "I'm thankful that my professors were very understanding. It is evident that they recognize that we are working and have families and other commitments besides the program."

Flexibility proved to be a necessary trait as her schedule for her final semester changed drastically due to COVID-19 restrictions.

"The program leaders did a great job trying to understand us as people and our needs as students. Even in the last semester, they asked what topics would be most beneficial and then changed the course strategy based on student feedback. I wasn't expecting that coming into a grad program, but I'm so thankful to all of them for being open to changing content so that it was beneficial for all of us and relevant to our jobs."

One of her favorite parts of the program was the student-directed research project. Maria worked on an algorithm redesign for assessing temperature excursions during shipment. Her goal was to make changes that would ultimately reduce human error and increase labor and time savings. She successfully updated the algorithm and was asked to present her ideas to the Vice President of RDO Quality.

“I don’t know if I would have reached so high had it not been for the program. It forced me to do the legwork, project planning, research and other details that I may normally skip due to time constraints. This made the student-directed project overall more successful.”

She plans to take this experience and her newfound knowledge to improve other processes in her workplace.

“Now I use the tools they provided for us in this project for other projects at work. My first instinct at the beginning of a project wasn’t to use a project charter or other internal process tools before I took this grad program. My colleagues thank me for being organized and I am more equipped to perform my job responsibilities successfully.”