

*Catalyst Profile*  
**Charles Turner**

After trading out his fatigues for a lab coat, Charles Turner, the WCU alumnus of 2014, is learning the techniques of biotechnology as a post-baccalaureate research fellow for the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at Rocky Mountain Laboratories.

For the past two years, this California native has assisted NIAID investigators at both the Montana-based facility and the NIH main campus in Bethesda, Maryland. While under the Research Technologies Section Chief, Dr. Steve Porcella, he has worked on Genomics Unit projects involving research on nucleic acids from humans and other hosts, pathogens alone, and host-pathogen models. Though Turner, a former biology major at WCU, was awarded the position because of his academic achievements, "life experiences" also vamped up his application.

Back in 2004, he left North Carolina State University and the North Carolina National Guard on active duty. Turner then became a Special Operations Combat Medic in the United States Army and was deployed to Iraq.

He separated from the Army seven years later with the desire to finish his degree and become a physician. The son of a critical care nurse and a now-retired Army sergeant major, the military brat still remembers being fascinated while flipping through his mother's anatomy and physiology books as a child.

Since studying science was what came naturally for him, Turner enrolled in WCU's biology program in 2011. Over the course of three years, he took electives in anything from epidemiology to medical entomology. Along the way, the veteran also found mentors in David Trigg, Brian Byrd, Mack Powell, Heather Coan, and Lori Seischab.

"My greatest achievement would have to be the act of finishing up that degree despite numerous significant challenges and obstacles along the way," said Turner. "There are many ways to arrive at the final destination, so it was important to be flexible and adaptive if things didn't go as originally planned."

Despite his non-traditional student status, he approached his work with seriousness and determination. During his senior year, Turner even worked as a special assistant in the Department of Biology, serving various faculty members.

His accomplishments, both in the States and otherwise, earned him the position at Rocky Mountain Laboratories where he currently participates in experimental design, sample processing, sample tracking, operation of instrumentation, data management, data analysis, lab management, and data handoff to investigators. He has accepted an offer of admission from the Master's in Medical Physiology Program in the Department of Physiology & Biophysics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. From his master's program, he will apply to medical school.

Though the future may still be somewhat up in the air for Turner, he knows that remaining “open-minded and humble” will help him keep charging forward.

“Dreams and goals are very attainable,” said Turner. “You just can’t let anything stop you in your tracks.”