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## **Biological Sciences Alumna on Frontlines Combatting Virus**

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# BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES ALUMNA ON FRONTLINES COMBATTING VIRUS

June 1, 2020

Twenty-four-hour days. Just three 30-minute breaks. Constant exposure to the deadly coronavirus during an unprecedented pandemic. This is how Taylor Bragg-Brock ('19) has chosen to spend her "gap year."

Bragg-Brock, a Lindenwood University alumna, works as a laboratory assistant, with the role of lead phlebotomist, at Avera McKennan Hospital and University Health Center in Sioux Falls, S.D. Her duties include swabbing patients at the drive-thru coronavirus testing facility, taking blood samples of COVID-19 patients, and processing the samples in the laboratory.

Bragg-Brock graduated from Lindenwood with a Bachelor of Science in biological sciences with an emphasis in cellular and molecular biology in May 2019. Seeking a career in medicine, she decided to take a "gap year," or a year away from school, before applying to medical school.

"I wanted a year of experience in the medical field and also a year to mentally regroup after four years earning my degree," Bragg-Brock said. "I wanted to make sure going into medical school I wasn't mentally exhausted or burnt out so that I could perform my best."

Working those 24-hour shifts at the hospital, Bragg-Brock uses techniques she learned at Lindenwood to perform her tests. One test, polymerase chain reaction, makes copies of DNA so it can be properly analyzed. Bragg-Brock performed tasks like this while assisting Dr. Alison Albee, associate professor of biology at Lindenwood, with her research on ciliary development in *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii*.

"Academically, Taylor excelled," Albee said. "She gets it. She doesn't just memorize to ace an exam. She learns so that she can satisfy her continual curiosity about how things work and fit together. Taylor definitely benefited from the small class sizes and one-on-one interactions that are part of Lindenwood."

Able to perform many of the required procedures at the hospital thanks to her experience at Lindenwood, Bragg-Brock was promoted a month into her job.

“Running transformations every two seconds for Dr. Albee’s research was definitely helpful,” Bragg-Brock said. “Everything from my classes has come back. I’ve had to take every part of my degree seriously.”

With a constant flow of patients to test – though testing only those who are showing multiple symptoms of the virus – Bragg-Brock wears heavy personal protective equipment (PPE). She wears three layers of gloves, hospital booties, a respirator, and a helmet, which is sanitized after every visit.

“I look like (I’m from) Ghostbusters,” Bragg-Brock said.

While she is constantly swabbing people in the drive-thru ambulance garage and testing their samples, Bragg-Brock said people need to take the virus seriously.

“Social distancing and staying at home really matters,” Bragg-Brock said. “The virus doesn’t discriminate. I’ve seen a patient as young as 10. It isn’t just the elderly or people with compromised immune systems that are getting sick.”

Avera McKennan Hospital has dedicated an entire floor to coronavirus patients. Visitors are not allowed.

“It’s disheartening to see that they don’t have anyone there with them,” Bragg-Brock said.

Recently, Bragg-Brock spoke with several faculty members about her experiences.

“To say that I know Taylor well is an understatement,” Albee, who invited Bragg-Brock to share with the Lindenwood community, said. “In addition to the time spent in class and lab, she has also spent countless hours in my office. Part of that time was spent as a student and professor going over complex topics in biology and the other part was spent as friends chatting about our lives, dreams, pop culture and world events.”