

BioWork, a flexible three-month training program offered through several community colleges, provides students with a process technician certification and a direct path to employment.

# Three months to a new career

BioWork's flexible training program prepares students for employment.

By Vernon Shoaf

North Carolina is home to a thriving life science industry with numerous opportunities to jump-start a new career. BioWork, a three-month training program offered through several community colleges, provides students with a process technician certification and a direct path to employment.

Camir Ayuso was pursuing a nursing degree at Wake Technical Community College when she discovered BioWork.

"At that point, I had to decide whether to commit to two years of nursing school or go a different direction," Ayuso says. "I enrolled in BioWork."

Created with direct input from industry experts, the 136-hour program provides students like Ayuso with a crucial foundation for employment in the biomanufacturing industry.

A new version being offered this fall includes topics such as:

- Quality & Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMP)
- Working Safely
- Measuring Process Variables
- Equipment & Materials
- Controlling the Process
- Aseptic Processing
- Biomanufacturing Production

Ayuso discovered that the rapidly growing biotechnology industry typically hired contractors through placement agencies as the primary entry point for technician positions.

"I went on several interviews and was turned down. But BioWork taught me about the whole process. After I was hired as a contractor within a local life science company, I continued taking classes offered by BioNetwork," Ayuso says.

> Ayuso's experience as a contractor with Biogen paid off when she was hired full-time in November 2018 as a Bioprocess Manufacturing Associate II in Upstream Cell Culture.

> Biogen Inc.

Biogen Inc.'s Research Triangle Park location is one of many for this American multinational biotech company, specializing in innovative therapies for neurological and neurodegenerative diseases. The Raleigh-Durham area has consistently been ranked in the top five life science clusters in the nation, and a skilled workforce is a key reason why.

North Carolina hosts over 700 bioscience companies that employ over 64,500 people. BioNetwork's company directory includes these organizations as well as 2,400 additional North

Carolina companies that support the thriving biotech industry.

Rodney Lam, Director of Fill-Finish Manufacturing at Seqirus, is hiring manager for his division of the Holly Springs influenza vaccine manufacturer. Seqirus is part of CSL Limited, headquartered in Melbourne, Australia, with operations in more than 60 countries.

Lam contributed to BioWork's curriculum development to support a continuing pipeline of skilled prospects for entry-level positions at Seqirus.

"We have a seasonal workforce for our flu vaccine manufacturing. Every summer we bring in 20 to 30 additional employees to increase production capacity," Lam says. "We have had a high level of success recruiting through BioWork and community college biomanufacturing programs."

Lam cites the core Good Manufacturing Practices skills as a great advantage when hiring from BioWork for Seqirus positions.

> "BioWork provides great, practical, hands-on experience to serve as a bridge to employment in the industry."  
— Rodney Lam, Director of Fill-Finish Manufacturing at Seqirus

"The vast majority coming out of BioWork understand good technique, documentation processes, safety practices and perspective on quality," Lam says.

Lam emphasizes that Seqirus, as part of an international corporation, also looks for employees with leadership and soft skills. "We look for capable problem-solvers, being on time, behavioral traits," Lam says. "There is a very distinct learning curve for those who have not had BioWork."

BioWork underscores these qualities, giving job applicants a higher probability of consideration for Seqirus's contract-to-hire openings. Seqirus, like many bioscience companies, views the entry-level positions as a 90-to-120-day job interview.

"If they are good and perform well, this can lead to a permanent, full-time role," Lam says.

Ayuso says that her BioWork training gave her the skills and confidence to enter and prosper in her new career.

"Everything I learned in BioWork prepared me for what I'm learning on my job," Ayuso says. "Working in upstream processing is a completely different language than in research and development. It's really exciting knowing I am part of a team working on various neurological therapies."

Ayuso plans to finish her undergraduate degree, supported by Biogen, which is a common industry practice.

"I encourage people to sign up for BioWork," Ayuso says. "The professors have a lot of industry or academic experience. And the probability of getting a biotech job increases with the BioWork certification. Even with a high school diploma, and a lot of extra work, BioWork is a great opportunity. You can take your career as far as you want to go."

> To learn more about a BioWork class near you, visit [ncbionetwork.org/BioWork](http://ncbionetwork.org/BioWork).

Questions? Contact Len Amico, Industry Liaison and Curriculum Coordinator for BioNetwork at [lamico@ncbionetwork.org](mailto:lamico@ncbionetwork.org) or visit [ncbionetwork.org/BioWork](http://ncbionetwork.org/BioWork).



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