

> IUBMB TI – Your Monthly Minutes

Your favorite monthly newsletter



And here we go again!

Today we will get to know Victoria – we had a very enjoyable meeting, and she shared some more insights about what research in Africa looks like. Also, on the backside a little but delicious surprise waits for you ;)

> *Who Victoria is*

I am born in
South Africa

–

I just handed in
my PhD thesis



Former
patisserie
chef

–

The new
region leader
for FASBMB



My family has its roots in the UK, but I grew up in Port Elizabeth. In South Africa, it is typical to do a three-year undergraduate followed by an honours for a year before a two-year masters. I started studying Biochemistry in my home town, and then completed my honours and masters in medical physiology at Stellenbosch University.



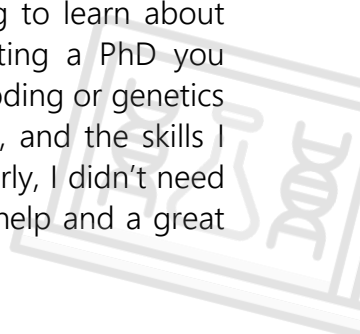
I finished my PhD thesis already and now I am (excitingly) waiting for my gradings. I studied genetic aberrations in esophageal cancer at the university of Cape Town. We had some patient samples and searched for the mutations which might underlie this cancer.



After my bachelors, I studied to be a patisserie chef. I had had enough of science at the time, and I wanted to try something else. Therefore, I decided to make some fancy birthday and wedding cakes! It was super interesting and if I had more time (and money) now, I would definitely bake more often still.

*If you investigated mutations in patient samples, then you probably have been coding?
Tell me a bit about your Bioinformatics journey!*

Uff, it was quite a change of fields for me. Although it was exciting to learn about Bioinformatics, in the beginning it was very frustrating since starting a PhD you normally have a solid background in the field but I had never done coding or genetics before. Therefore, I learned some Python basics and bash scripting, and the skills I needed for my research. As I was then able to handle my data properly, I didn't need to rely on others to do the analyses for me. That was indeed a big help and a great learning experience.



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Focusing Tradition

South Africa has 11 official languages. In schools you can learn the African language specific to your region, as well as Afrikaans which is derived from Dutch. You can also learn French in high school, but this is not one of the official languages. English is probably the main spoken language across the country. Currently, there is a big push for people to learn more tribal languages. I'm from a region where Xhosa is the spoken tribal language.



An idea for you

Personally, I would advise every researcher to learn Bioinformatics asap. I did so relatively late in my career, but I discovered such an interesting world, it is amazing. To my mind everybody should learn computer science from school age on! Interdisciplinary research especially connected to Bioinformatics. It enables so many new possibilities and perspective on findings. For everyone who cannot take a course, start with free programs such as [codecademy](https://www.codecademy.com/).



Feeling Culture

The part of Africa I am living in is very westernized. I had no idea that Africa overall would be so different to other parts of the modern world when I was young. However, it is. Africa is very split, probably also because of the steep language barriers. Unfortunately, in research you often feel two steps behind the rest of the world. Whether you need a machine to be repaired in Germany or you are waiting for sequencing results from the UK, it sometimes takes months to years. But even so, you feel like you're doing cutting-edge research!



Our Future

It gives me goosebumps to meet people from all over the world within the IUBMB TI. It excites me that since we are on similar career stages we talk the same language. In my research in Africa I often felt isolated, thus, the IUBMB TI really gave me a new place to connect and engage! I wish I have had something like that also in my undergraduates, it is so motivating.

> Spreading the feeling

Especially during our early years, we have little exposure to what a life in science can be. People often get demotivated in their current lab. I think having a channel to share motivating posts, stories and quotes would be so helpful to many. We could really engage with our audience and show each and everyone that they are not alone, but we all share the same passion and the same struggles!

An impression from Victoria's
patisserie arts:



Impressive, and yes ... delicious