

Employee spotlight: Lydia Griffin

by Lydia Griffin, Associate Scientist (Insect Assay Development) – Invaio Sciences, Cambridge, MA USA

Tell us about you and your journey leading up to joining Invaio?

Lydia Griffin (LG): Twenty-six years ago, I was born in a hospital in Hartford, Connecticut about four months premature. At the time, I was the smallest baby to be born at that hospital and survive. The first few months of my life were made possible by a team of incredible doctors and years of scientific advancements in medicine. Some of my earliest baby pictures are of me in a small glass box, wrapped in tubes. When I was a child, these images captivated me. As I grew up, I developed more and more of an interest in scientific research. I knew I wanted to be involved in lab work that could do material good.

At 14 years old, instead of going to my local public high school, I elected to go to a nearby charter school called the Connecticut River Academy. The school was billed as a sustainability-themed high school. While there, many of my courses focused at least partially on the growing impact of climate change and the importance of environmental protection. My vague dream of helping others through scientific work was thus refined into an attainable goal. I wanted to do research that not only helped people but did so in an environmentally friendly way.

I studied biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and graduated in 2018 with a bachelor of science. Although I learned a lot from my classroom experience, my practical lab skills were shaped in large part by the wonderful team at Dr. Vincent Cryns's lab, where I worked from the latter half of my freshman semester until my graduation. During my time at Dr. Cryns's lab, I learned that good research and development requires not only a solid understanding of the fundamentals of lab work, but also open and trusted communication within the team and respect for one's teammates.

What made you decide that a nimble start-up like Invaio was the right place to begin your career?

LG: When I started looking for a new job opportunity at the end of 2019, I didn't think working at a start-up was in my future. After explaining what I was looking for in a company, one of the recruiters I was in contact with convinced me that Invaio would be a great fit for me.

He pitched Invaio as a close-knit team committed to doing research that would help protect the planet, where everyone was given the chance to make an impact. I had never worked for a start-up before, but the enthusiasm expressed by Invaio team members Danielle Rock and Emily Mallick during my interview was incredibly infectious, and reaffirmed my recruiter's ringing endorsement.



In Emily's commitment to protecting crops in an environmentally sustainable way, I saw an opportunity to help drive innovations that could make a positive and lasting impact globally.

You've embraced the agile work environment at Invaio by contributing to many different experiments and projects. Can tell us about your day-to-day work?

LG: The challenging part was that the work I was being asked to do for Invaio was completely outside of my wheelhouse. In my academic experience and my first professional experience, I worked very much on the small scale – in cultivating cell tissue cultures, doing Western blots, and performing high-throughput liquid chromatography.

At Invaio, I was being asked to work on much larger scales – with plants and eventually insects. Jumping feet-first into an entirely new skill set required a lot of flexibility and toughening up on my part. The first time I worked with stinkbug nymphs, I flinched away from the tiny, wiggly insects. Once I became acclimated to my new, insect-filled work life, I found a lot of things about my new role to appreciate.

How have you adjusted to a learning curve of new skills, processes and insects?

LG: The tight-knit, comfortable nature of the company reminded me of the best parts about working in a small lab. The friendliness of the team served to put me at ease almost immediately. I think I am incredibly lucky to be a part of such a fantastic and smart community. Every project that we're working on at Invaio is being run by brilliant people and I'm so glad I've had the opportunity to learn from many of them.

Being a small part of so many projects has also provided me ample opportunities to grow as a person and develop my skills as a researcher. While I have been working at Invaio, it has been my privilege to learn from experts. I learned how to cultivate different bacterial strains from Dr. James Kraemer, who has been researching E. Coli genetics and physiology for over ten years. Dr. Sindhu Krishnankutty shared with me her years of experience working with insects and showed me better ways to care for and track data related to colonies. It's been a learning curve, but I welcome the opportunity to continue to grow and to continue to work towards things I believe in.

Countless others have made an impact on me as a person during my time at Invaio, either by helping me to develop new skills or by teaching me various lessons. The prospect of continuing to learn new things and build on my existing skill set in an encouraging environment makes me feel excited to come in every day.



So, why Invaio, now?

LG: When I started at Invaio, I felt completely out of my depth. But as I continued to learn, as I grew and become more accustomed to my surroundings I feel as if I have grown here. I've grown not only as a researcher, but also as a person.

I hope that as time goes on, no matter how big it gets, Invaio remains a place where people are given the opportunity to learn to make a difference.



Lydia Griffin is an innovative and flexible researcher with a jack-of-all-trades mentality. Prior to joining Invaio in 2019, Griffin worked in the lab of Dr. Vincent Cryns at the University of Wisconsin at Madison until graduating in 2018 with a bachelor's degree in biochemistry. Lydia has experience culturing cancer cells, performing high pressure liquid chromatography, and engineering transgenic organisms.

As an Associate Scientist in the Invaio labs, Griffin has performed experiments on scales as small as one cell and as large as several hundred live insects. Currently interested in designing and executing experiments that capture meaningful data, Lydia enjoys finding something new to learn every day.

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