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## **Class of 2021 | David Cottrill Defends His Dissertation Then His Country**

Ohio University College of Arts & Sciences

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### **Recommended Citation**

Ohio University College of Arts & Sciences, "Class of 2021 | David Cottrill Defends His Dissertation Then His Country" (2021). *All Forum Articles*. 8298.

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# Class of 2021 | David Cottrill Defends His Dissertation, Then His Country

April 20, 2021

Categories: Alumni, News

Tags: biological Sciences alumni, biological Sciences news, Class of 2021, congrats!, David Cottrill, happy beginnings, molecular and cellular biology alumni, Molecular and Cellular Biology news



David Cottrill

Just as **David Cottrill** was finishing his dissertation and getting ready to defend it, along came the Army National Guard with call-up orders.

The race was on.

But Cottrill has successfully added Dr. to his salutation, in addition to his officer rank of Capt.

He completed his [Ph.D. in Biological Sciences](#) with a [concentration in cell, developmental and microbiology](#) at Ohio University this spring. He also was part of the [Molecular & Cellular Biology](#) program.

**Q: What are your next steps/future plans?**

A. I am currently deployed to the Middle East with the Army National Guard, where I am an engineer officer. Once this deployment is complete, my goal is to return to OU to conduct some post-doctoral work with [Dr. Sarah Wyatt](#). Then I have ambitions of working full time for the WV Army National Guard as a science officer and potentially pursuing the [Astronaut Candidate Program](#) through NASA.

**Q: What was your ah-ha moment at OHIO—that point where you said to yourself, “I’ve got this!”?**

A. When my committee informed me that I passed my defense. Failure isn’t in my vocabulary, but the seemingly endless stream of adversity that the last 18 months of my studies presented made me as uncertain as I have ever been of success. Hearing them say congratulations was one of the most emotional and memorable moments of my life.

**Q: What stands out in your mind as you think about graduating despite COVID?**

A. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated changes to daily life and operations it caused brought to the forefront the ability of people to excel in the face of adversity. Despite significant constraints to our way of life and our ability to carry out our jobs, we improvised, adapted, and continued to move upward and onward. Adversity must be met with resolute and unyielding determination and innovation.

**Q: Who were your favorite professors and how did they make an impact on your life?**

A. Ohio University is filled with many amazing faculty and staff, many of whom had lasting impacts on me during my time as a student. Chief among them would be Dr. Wyatt and my adviser [Dr. Xiao Chen](#).

Dr. Wyatt constantly encouraged me, expanding my mind outside of my discipline. This not only served as a phenomenal means of exposure to new ideas and techniques, but also served as the catalyst for innovation within my own studies. Her high standards of professionalism and caring for students serve as continual example what I strive to be as a scientist and person.

Dr. Chen continually inspired me to stay the course, no matter the difficulties I faced. Through learning about his life experiences and wonderful family I was shown that we can achieve whatever we want, whenever we want, independent of the challenges presented to us. His consistent calm, even in the face of significant stress, served as a lighthouse in the maelstrom that was my life during my studies.

**Q: What was the hardest hill you had to climb (not counting Jeff Hill) at OHIO? And how did you overcome challenges or obstacles in your path?**

For as long as I can remember, I have always been sure of success in any endeavor that I have undertaken. No matter the difficulty I have pushed through to success. During my time at OU, I was faced with adversity after adversity, culminating with the COVID-19 disruption of my research and notification of pending deployment with the military. My committee and lab mates proved instrumental in my success through their unfaltering guidance, research support, and expectation management.

My wife and sons were what kept me grounded and sane through the hours of work and lost sleep. I cannot articulate how much all these individuals mean to me, and I will never forget their contributions to my success.

**Q: What are your favorite OHIO memories?**

A. I have four that I'll list in chronological order:

- my first day in Dr. Chen's lab
- presenting a paper on calcium signaling in plants to the MCB seminar
- being awarded the Kopchick Research Fellowship
- hearing my committee tell me I passed my dissertation defense

**Q: What's the one thing you would tell a new OHIO student not to miss?**

Do not miss out on the phenomenal opportunity to experience the ideas and people across campus. All too often we cloister ourselves into interactions and experiences within our chosen discipline. I can tell you that some of the most significant impacts on my growth as a scientist and person came from meeting people and being exposed to ideas outside my comfort zone. OU has endless opportunities for this, USE THEM!!

*Editor's Note: The Happy Beginnings series features recent College of Arts & Sciences graduates who are getting started in careers, graduate school and service.*