

Career Insight from a Venture Development Analyst

Alec Santiago, PhD, a 2022 alumnus of the Microbiology and Infectious Disease program, transitioned from lab research to venture development. As a venture development analyst at The Ohio State University, he shapes ideas into impactful companies. His journey from the lab to venture development exemplifies the power of innovation and determination.



Can you describe your current role and key responsibilities?

In the Venture Development department, we dig deep into all the technology created in labs across campus, then try to make startup companies from it. We assess the strength of the data, measure it against competitors, outline the path to generating revenue, find business leaders to steer the company, and find venture capitalists to provide funding. We serve as a link between the innovation of brilliant scientists and the creation of products and services that improve the lives of real people.

What inspired you to pursue a career in this field?

During grad school, I participated in [Enventure](#), which is a local organization that connects professionals to life science entrepreneurship. Every program was inspirational to me, and I found a phenomenal community of people like me; all itching to build and create. Building our first company during grad school was the first time that I had felt such a strong sense of agency and control over my reality, and the challenges of ownership were a thrill. The ability to bring something up out of nothing, through only the diligent work and action of the founding team, was powerful. I began to understand that hard work was never the issue, it was work without purpose that was draining, work without intention. I realized that creating companies was something that I wanted to keep doing, because it is the space where all action is meaningful.

What skills have been most instrumental to your success?

Relentless optimism has been foundational. Times will go badly, that's a guarantee. Everything operates as a pendulum, going from bad to good, from light to dark. Being able to recognize that each new day has the potential for things to turn around has been a lifesaver. A high sense of agency is also critical. Being able to go out into an open world and follow a path of small breadcrumbs and clues to get to your ideal destination is something fully within your capability. The only difference is in having the mindset of resourcefulness and determination that gives you the freedom to keep moving forward.

What advice would you offer to current GSBS students who are considering a career in venture capital?

It is possible for you to start something new. Start small, with a personal project based on an interest or an opportunity. Give everything at least 100 days of effort before throwing in the towel. Show it to people, without shame. Decide early what skills you want to develop from each project, because that takes the pressure off general success. There is no failure in learning, and being able to add to your skill set along the way will increase your likelihood of future success. As you go, pay attention to what you're good at and not good at, and what calls to your attention the most. That's where you can naturally make the most impact. If you want to start a company, pay attention to the patterns of business. Learn how to spot an opportunity by soaking up the stories of other founders. There are endless books, podcasts, movies, and articles about founder journeys, and over time distinct patterns will jump out. At some point, a project will take off, whether that is a side hobby

project, or a university technology spinout that gets VC funded. Between then and now, keep building skills (sometimes through failing), gaining information, and maximizing your chance for luck to strike by meeting people and attending events. Then just keep showing up for yourself and remain curious and optimistic until it clicks.

"If I knew then what I know now, I would..."

Start to clearly describe what it is I value in life. I had vague ideas, but they were too vague to be actionable or directional. If I had a clearer picture, I could have forged a much cleaner path and not spent so much time chasing my tail. Once you feel like you have a solid description, go even deeper. There's always another layer, and it will likely get more granular. That's great, because the more granular, the easier it will be to focus your energy on, and the steps to make it happen will begin to present themselves. Those small steps will take you to big places, the places where you genuinely want to be.

Alec's journey inspires us to create, innovate, and impact. From lab coats to entrepreneurial ventures, he embodies the spirit of GSBS alumni.

To learn more about Alec's journey as well as other alum's paths, be sure to register for the Alumni Career Symposium! [Registration Link](#)

Interview conducted by Laura Rademacher, MEd, with Alec Santiago, PhD