a year of paid leave, for example, and under UK national policy, institutions must provide statutory maternity pay — a percentage of average weekly earnings — for up to 39 weeks and leave of up to a year. The United States has a few standout examples. At Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, many departments offer mothers three months of full pay for childbearing and adoption leave and another three months for child rearing. "I never felt pressure to be in the office during maternity leave," says Yarrow Axford, a geologist who had a son last year. "Of course, I had to keep up with what was happening in my lab and with students conducting independent research. But that is just part of doing the business of science." Northwestern also grants a one-year extension on the tenure clock to mothers after the birth of their child and to both parents following an adoption. Furthermore, it offers three months of paternity leave — so Axford's husband, Christopher Kuzawa, a biological anthropologist at Northwestern, also stayed home for three months after their son's birth. "Those early months are so formative," says Axford. "If more dads could take substantial time away from work to be home with their children in the early months, I suspect there would be more dads out there who are 100% comfortable being left alone with their kids, and moms comfortable leaving them."

"The scientific community could do a lot about this period when you are pregnant and you cannot be in the lab."
Maria Granberg

Kuzawa notes that the time at home allowed him and Axford to jointly figure out the intricacies of caring for their son. "We established all the patterns together," says Kuzawa. "So it never felt like one of us was the primary caregiver and the other was kind of in the passenger seat." Axford heads out to Greenland this summer for three weeks of fieldwork, but she and her husband feel somewhat less anxious about her impending absence. "We were faced with everything that comes with being a parent — all that middle-of-the-night stuff, weird naps, crying for no reason, won't eat," Kuzawa says. "We had to come up with solutions to all of that. And we did." ■

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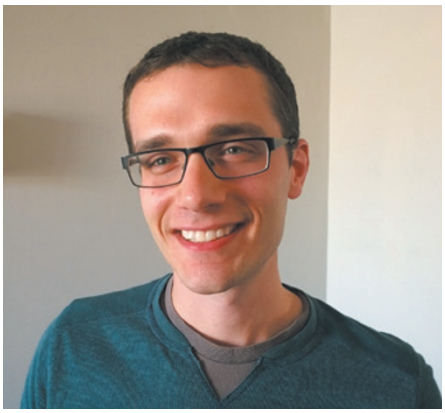
TURNING POINT
Collin Diedrich

Collin Diedrich has overcome learning disabilities to carve out a promising career researching HIV and tuberculosis (TB) co-infection. He talks about what prompted his move from the United States to the University of Cape Town in South Africa.



What challenges did your disabilities present?
I was diagnosed with reading and learning disabilities in primary school in St Louis, Missouri. But my parents got me private tutors right away, who helped me develop strategies to improve my reading comprehension and organizational and memory skills. Given the stigma and feelings of inadequacy that can come with a learning disability, I have struggled with impostor complex, cycling through phases where I feel completely out of place and inadequate, as if it is only a matter of time until I am 'found out'. Luckily, I am driven and have an amazing support network in my advisers, colleagues, my wife and my family, who have all been helpful and patient when my mind is racing.

What drew you to a career in science?
I didn't really think of science as a career option until I took a biology course at university and realized how much I liked the idea of becoming a researcher. The more I learned about HIV, the more fascinated I was by this virus that can attack your immune system. I read books about it, but what intrigued me most were the first-hand accounts of people with HIV. Before I read them, I couldn't understand why anyone would engage in the risky behaviours that could lead to HIV infection, but I came to understand that the threat of death a decade or more later was not often an immediate concern, especially among those with already-risky lifestyles.

Did you discuss your disabilities with any potential advisers?
When I started my PhD at the University of Pittsburgh, I didn't want to tell people about my learning disorder — I was nervous and intimidated about mentioning it. Then I met JoAnne Flynn, who was head of the molecular virology and microbiology department, and working on simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) and TB co-infection. Our conversation went so well, I felt comfortable telling her. Without missing a beat, she directed me to the university's learning-disabilities centre. After spending time in her lab, I decided to do my dissertation with her, focusing on the cascade of immunological responses that follows SIV infection. She expected as much from me as from anyone else, and was approachable and helpful — which helped me both scientifically and emotionally.

Why go to South Africa?
I wanted to work on co-infection in human samples, which are in greater supply in South Africa than in the United States. I knew that Robert Wilkinson was working on co-infection at the University of Cape Town, so I secured funding to do my postdoc there.

What did you find hardest about the move?
When you start a postdoc in a new lab, you have to learn where things are and new techniques. I had cultural differences and practical concerns to figure out, and I also had to determine how to get access to the samples necessary to research how HIV alters the granuloma, the inflamed tissue.

How did it change your perspective?
Seeing the effects of these devastating diseases first-hand has been a powerful experience, even though I am doing basic research. I have also learned that just because US scientists do something one way doesn't mean it is the only way. I've replaced my US-centric views with a broader appreciation of research approaches.

What do you plan to do now?
I hope to continue working here throughout my career, at least half-time. I have funding until the end of 2015, and have developed strong collaborations. I would also like to be an advocate for students with learning disabilities and help university admissions officers find ways to look beyond examination scores to include candidates, such as myself, with research aspirations. ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN