



## A research internship at a global pharmaceutical changed this former college basketball player's career



by **Alena Kuzub**  
January 3, 2024



Northeastern behavioral neuroscience graduate Sade Iriah works in the Mugar Life Sciences Building MRI lab on the Boston campus. Photo by Alyssa Stone/Northeastern University

In 2022, Sade Iriah was pursuing a doctorate in neuroscience at Northeastern University when she seized the opportunity to embed

herself in industry research at Takeda Pharmaceutical, a Japanese multinational biopharmaceutical company.

Iriah worked with the imaging team at Takeda and says the experience was “amazing.”

“They really allowed me to be involved with the team in a way that wasn’t just like on-looker but actually doing and participating in the science,” she says.



Sade Iriah, who completed her doctoral degree in 2023, says the [LEADERS](#) program, a customized internship program for doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers, was a game-changer for her. Photo by Alyssa Stone/Northeastern University

However, the main thing that Iriah got out of the four months at Takeda, she says, was a network — valuable connections with top scientists.

“I got to see how they think about things, how they work through problems, how they attack different diseases in the world,” she says.

She began to think in new ways, Iriah says, which helped her during job interviews once she had earned her Ph.D. The internship exposed

her to different aspects of science besides academic science, which helped her determine what kind of work she enjoyed and wanted to continue doing.

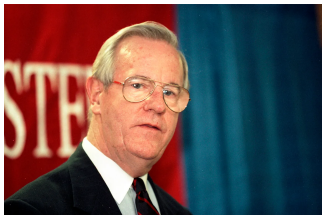
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Iriah grew up in Toronto and was recruited to play on Northeastern's basketball team. While working on her undergraduate degree and playing basketball, she says, she didn't have the time to do full-time internships.

To make up for that Iriah started volunteering at different labs at the university, eventually making her way into professor Craig Ferriss' lab at the Center for Translational NeuroImaging. She became the manager of the lab while getting her master's in public health at Northeastern.

"I was able to lead some studies," she says. "I was able to create my own questions and figure out how I wanted to get those answers. That was where I was able to publish my first few papers."

Iriah chose to stay at Northeastern for her doctoral program, she says, because of the many resources the university had to offer its students. She was conducting research on neurodegenerative diseases, addiction and different psychiatric disorders using MRI technology when she heard about the highly-curated experiential learning opportunities in Northeastern's LEADERS program.

[LEADERS](#), which stands for Leadership Education Advancing Discovery through Embedded Research, is a customized internship program for doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers that integrates leadership and professional-skills education with a research project in industry or the public sector.

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The program was developed by [Northeastern's Ph.D. Network](#) and [Gordon Institute of Engineering Leadership](#) in accordance with the university's current "Experience Unleashed" academic plan and piloted in 2020, says Sara Wadia-Fascetti, the vice provost for the Ph.D. Network and a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Northeastern.



Sade Iriah, who graduated from Northeastern with a doctoral degree in neuroscience with focus on magnetic resonance technology in 2023, credits the LEADERS program for helping her develop connections with top scientists in the industry and preparing her for the job search after graduation. Photo by Alyssa Stone/Northeastern University

"That's just an opportunity that I couldn't let go without participating in," Iriah says. "I think that's one of the things that Northeastern does very well — connecting their students with people in different industries or giving them opportunities to really go out and get that real-world experience in their field of choice."

After completing the prerequisite course, "Leading Self and Others," in the summer of 2022, Iriah was connected to Takeda.

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At Takeda, Iriah explored positron emission tomography and radiolabeling, which traces a radioactive compound injected into a vein to evaluate organs and tissues for the presence of disease or other conditions. She also became comfortable with computerized tomography, a computerized X-ray imaging procedure used to obtain detailed cross-sectional images of the body used for detection of possible tumors or abnormalities.

“LEADERS was a game-changer for me,” Iriah says.

Since earning her Ph.D., Iriah has started a new job as a scientist and study director in discovery research in nuclear medicine at Invicro, a global research partner to pharmaceutical, biotech and contract research organizations.

“I take part in managing the design, execution or analysis of certain preclinical discovery research studies across a variety of different therapeutic areas,” she says.

“The LEADERS program really was something that directly helped me post-graduation,” she says. “A lot of the people that I interviewed with actually knew the people that I had done my placement with, so I had people that could vouch for me in the industry.”

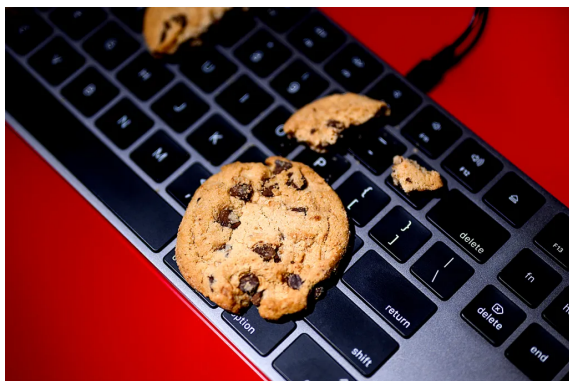
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