**JANUARY SPOTLIGHT**

Dr. Aaron Specht, Research Associate, Harvard University

Dr. Aaron Specht has a BS in Physics and PhD in Medical Physics and Exposure Assessment from Purdue University. Following his PhD, Dr. Specht has worked at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health where he is currently appointed as a Research Associate and Director of the NIEHS HSPH Trace Metals Laboratory. The primary focus of his work is threefold: 1) Developing new technologies for measurements of biomarkers and sources of elemental exposures; 2) Applying new elemental exposure assessment technologies in health studies to identify detrimental and beneficial effects on a population level; and 3) Development of biomarkers and identification of relationships between mechanisms of detrimental action, intervenable source exposures, and body kinetics.

**What is some of the advice you would give to current students/postdocs?**

Enjoy the time you are in right now and set realistic short-term goals for yourself to accomplish. It is easy to get caught up in the idea of wanting something more and forget about the joy that is right in front of us. Many of my favorite times were in graduate school with so much to be learned and meeting new people everyday.

**What are some of the valuable skills and experiences you gained from your time at Purdue?**

I wrote my first grant applications at Purdue. I started taking research trips to different places and conferences and learned a lot about the world outside of where I grew up, which I think was important.

**What do you miss most about Purdue?**

Mad Mushroom cheese stix. More seriously, I miss the one-on-ones with Dr. Nie. I learned a lot from her and those discussions helped to keep me grounded and keep me moving forward. She was always the best person to talk through any problems I was having, but I am sure that is how most people feel about their advisors.

**What is your typical day like now?**

With COVID my days looks a little more busy in terms of computer work, whereas I used to travel quite frequently. I typically fall asleep with my laptop out on my bed messing with some data or reading papers. Particularly with COVID weeks (months?) go by in a blink of an eye.

**What are your overall responsibilities, as well as day-to-day tasks?**

I have two grants I am taking the lead on now to develop new technologies for exposure assessment tools in occupational health and military settings. On top of that I am involved with lead testing in Flint, Michigan, which is taking up a great deal of time as well. The majority of my day is spent keeping a number of projects afloat (a number that is maybe too high), managing a few student projects, writing my own papers, and responding to emails.

**Where do you see yourself in the future? What are your next steps?**

I really enjoy what I am doing right now and can see myself continuing on. I would love to get a tenure track position, but there is no rush right now. I have plenty of funding and am doing well, so may as well enjoy myself. I am applying to positions as they come along to see if I can find one that would be a good fit for my future.

**When you’re not working, what do you like to do for fun?**

I run every day with my dog Lilo and lift weights. I love hiking and being outdoors and take a lot of my work calls while doing walks through the parks near my home. On the weekends, I will take a book to the park and read by the lake or take a weekend trip somewhere in normal times. I appreciate the quiet and relaxation when life can be so hectic at times.