#3: Apply for HHMI Funding

The HHMI grant is an attractive incentive to get into research. The awarding of funds is very selective. Thompson’s advice for a competitive application is a strong, thorough proposal. “If the proposal is really strong, they’re probably going to get funded,” Thompson said. “If their proposal is weak, no matter how good their grades are, no matter how good the kernel of their idea is, the proposal is what carries the application.”

Current HHMI fellows admitted that the application process was difficult but rewarding. By writing the proposal, they were able to bolster their understanding of their research. Erin Kodis, who is researching protein-DNA energetics in Biochemistry Associate Professor Jason Kahn’s lab, found that writing the proposal focused her research. “I wrote the proposal really early on in joining the lab and that was sort of the ‘this is what I’m doing, this is why I’m doing it’ moment,” said Kodis.

#4: Put In Time

Research and hands-on experimentation require a large time commitment. The members of Team Antidote scheduled intense bouts of data collection over winter and summer breaks at the NIH for their cell culture studies. As full-time students working during the school year, undergraduates have to expertly balance their time between classes and research. “I put in about 20 hours a week,” said Kodis. “It’s time management, but for a lot of days, you think, ‘Oh, I have to wait for my gel for two hours, I can do homework in this time.’”

#5: Rock and Roll

Kodis does not regret the large portion of the week that she dedicates to lab work. “It’s something I really enjoy,” she said. Research requires great effort: to get into the lab, to obtain funding, and to work during the school semester. However, throughout the symposium, the HHMI fellows were all smiles about their final products. Some fellows, like Kodis, plan to continue research in graduate programs, and others hope to incorporate research into their careers. Schwartz is applying to medical school, but she is now reconsidering her options. “I don’t want to give up research,” said Schwartz. “I really love it.”