

Sunday, September 10, 2006

## med school

Dr. Borgmann-Ingwersen asked me to write a little synopsis about the life of a medical student, which she could then post for others interested in medicine to read and gain a little insight into the life of a medical student. I have never been very good at journaling, so I will try my best not to make this sound too much like a paper.

I think I will begin with a little bit about me. My name is Joel Michalski and I graduated from WSC in 2005 with a biology degree. I am not what I consider an average medical student. By average I mean that most pre-med students know they want to be a doctor well before they graduate high school. That was not the case for me. I come from a working class background of painters, plumbers, machinists, electricians and carpenters. Naturally, I was influenced towards these trades and that's the direction I took in high school. I tailored my schedule around shop class. In fact, my senior year I had five shop classes! So, when I graduated I thought I would follow the family tradition of becoming a tradesman.

Well a few months into my summer vacation I began having second-guesses about working with my back for the rest of my life. So I hastily applied to the University of Nebraska at Omaha and entered the pre-engineering program. I thought I would like designing machines, but still the second guesses were lingering. Because of these second guesses, I lacked drive and really did not apply myself to me first year of college, thus I received poor grades.

I should probably now mention that in elementary school and the first part of high school I loved and excelled at math and science. However, once I discovered shop class these subjects received little to no academic attention. I still watched the discovery channel and read science related books, but I never took any more math and science than was required to graduate from high school, and becoming a doctor was the furthest thing from my mind. So, after my first year at UNO I enrolled at a community college to just stay academically active so I could remain on my parents insurance. There I took a biology class and an anatomy course. This re-ignited my love for science and began me thinking about a career in medicine. I read a few book about medicine and spent quite a few hours researching the requirements to get into a medical school.

My sister had just begun her college career at WSC. I researched the school and then visited it. I decided that Wayne had everything that I needed to get in. There was one problem though; I was behind compared to the average pre-med student. I entered Wayne three years after I graduated high school. I wanted to graduate within 2 years and begin medical school right after. Through my research, I discovered that medical school is incredibly competitive. I knew that I needed to get great grades and do a lot extra to get in.

In order to graduate within my two-year goal I would have to take a lot of classes, in fact I would need to average around 20 credit hours a semester. I would also need to take the MCAT the summer after my first year. I took all that was covered on the MCAT as far as classes are concerned except for physics and zoology, which I couldn't fit into my schedule. Naively, I thought I could do fine on the MCAT without these classes and I could just review the physics on my own (physics is roughly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the MCAT). I reviewed the physics and took the MCAT for my first time. I didn't do quite as well as I thought I would and received an average score. I was a little bummed but I still decided to apply any way. I didn't get in my first time (I only applied to UNMC).

So what was I to do? I still had another year of college left and would have at least one

year of school off before I could start medical school. First off I went to UNMC and had a meeting with a lady that works in the admissions office about some things I could do to make me a better applicant. She said that my MCAT score would need to come up and I was lacking in clinical experiences. So the after I graduated from WSC I took the Kaplan review course for the MCAT. I also got a job as a research technologist at UNMC. Working at UNMC gave me many opportunities to gain valuable clinical experience. I also shadowed half a dozen doctors of varying specialties. I also began volunteering in the emergency room twice a week. I felt by working at UNMC and via my shadowing and volunteering opportunities I sufficiently made up my clinical experience disparities for my application. Also, by retaking the MCAT and actually spending a good deal of time studying for it, via the review course, I got back a score that was much more competitive.

Ok, well that section took a lot longer than I thought, so I apologize. This brings us to today. I just found out at the beginning of February that UNMC accepted me into the next medical school class, yaaa!!! Currently, I still work at UNMC doing stem cell research and I am just waiting until school starts. I feel quite relieved that I actually got in; it seems pretty impossible during the whole process. However, as August approaches, I find myself getting more and more anxious about actually starting. I sometimes question if I am smart enough to actually make it through since it took me two times to get accepted. I do feel better when I think about a 4<sup>th</sup> year student I know that is about to graduate with honors. She didn't get in her first time, nor her second. In fact it took her three times to get accepted and now she is graduating in the top of her class. This gives me solace that it is possible to get in and it is possible to excel once in.

I think I will sum up with a few tips that I think will help people who are considering medicine. Some tips I did some tips I wish I did!

- Decide early (I wish I did)
  - Good grades
  - Plenty of clinical experience early (I wish I did this)
  - Take physics before the MCAT (I really wish I did this!!)
- I highly recommend the Kaplan course if you have a hard time self motivating to study for the MCAT
  - If you are certain of UNMC for you college do the early acceptance program
- Periodically review notes and flashcards from previous classes to "keep up" on information that will be in the MCAT. (I wish I did)
  - Don't give up!
  - Volunteer
  - Have plenty of extracurricular activities (I did)
- Do summer research programs (I did, UNMC's SURP program is excellent)

Well I think that is all I have for now sorry so long and boring. I promise once school starts I will have much more interesting stories. I imagine the first day of gross anatomy should be interesting© If anyone has any questions about UNMC, research, the application process, the MCAT or stem cells drop me an email:

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-Joel