FOCUS ON HEALTH-THEMED MAJORS

Health is an interdisciplinary field by nature; the study of public health and the delivery of health care requires the integration of such disciplines as biology, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics. In this newsletter, we feature four students who channeled their interests in health into an interdisciplinary major. While each major is unique, all of these students have supplemented their individualized major with experiential learning, including community service, study abroad, research, and internships. We hope this newsletter provides you with some insight into how others have used the Individualized Major Program to shape their career goals, and about the wide range of experiences available in the field of health!

Be sure to check out the resources listed in the sidebars: Community Outreach Office, Public Health House, Pre-Medical/Pre-Dental Advising, Study Abroad, and the Center for Career Development.

Steven Hong

*IMJR* in Healthcare and Human Rights

**Alternative Spring Break**

**Why did you choose a major in Healthcare and Human Rights?**

A lot of my motivation for choosing the Healthcare and Human Rights major came from my volunteer work in healthcare settings. While I was volunteering in St. Vincent’s emergency department (ED), in Bridgeport, CT, I saw patients who came in for serious emergencies that needed immediate attention. But I also saw patients who came to the ED because they lacked insurance, needed a place to sober up, or had overdosed on drugs.

Physicians who practice emergency medicine train to handle emergency situations. Their role is to stabilize the patient, determine a preliminary diagnosis, and if the diagnosis is particularly serious, admit the patient to the correct department for further treatment. The ED is frequently full of patients who cannot afford to see a primary care physician or those, like alcoholics and drug users, who cannot find help elsewhere. These patients have biological symptoms that are affecting them, but social inequalities have caused them to come to the ED.

Seeing how social issues have a strong effect on emergency care, I became interested in further studying these social interactions and their relationship to health. My individualized major allowed me to combine classes from anthropology, sociology, human rights, and biology in order to develop a well-rounded un-

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derstanding of health and the systemic issues that plague our healthcare system.

Tell us about your Alternative Spring Breaks with the Honors program.

I have been participating in the Honors Alternative Spring Break (HASB), a program available to all students, since my freshman year. Each year HASB brings around fifty students to an area of the United States to work on service projects that focus on a particular social issue. I’ve been to New Orleans to work on disaster relief, Appalachia to deal with rural poverty, and Mobile, Alabama to work with Habitat for Humanity. HASB, and alternative breaks in general, are an incredible way to bring together a diverse group of people with a goal of providing service to a needy community. I come away from spring break each year having made a whole new group of friends as well as the satisfaction of having contributed to something meaningful. It provides me with extra motivation to be involved in service projects during the school year, and as the director of the 2014 HASB trip, I hope to create a similar experience for all of the participants this year.

What research are you currently doing for your capstone course?

In the capstone course, my research analyzes the connection between HIV and injection drug use through a human rights lens. In many countries, the policy on combating drug use is geared towards criminalization. Governments have decided that it is best to send drug users to jail. This has created a culture where drug use is treated as a crime rather than as a public health issue concerned with the harmful effects of the drugs and the associated blood-borne diseases. Because of this philosophy, programs such as opiate exchange therapies and syringe exchange programs have faced resistance. This resistance exists despite the fact that research has shown these programs to work and that some countries have had success in fighting the spread of HIV by changing their public policies. Policies that obstruct efforts to lower the incidence of HIV among injection drug users also violate the right to adequate health guaranteed to all under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Do you have any advice for students interested in a health related major?

My advice would be to test your interest in health through volunteering, shadowing, or working in a health setting and see what interests you. Biology is very important for students interested in a health related major or those who aspire to attend a professional school in health. But other disciplines can make important contributions to understanding health, as well, and this is where an individualized major can be very helpful! Talking to your advisors, or students with a health related individualized major, would be useful.

Hilary Sullivan

IMJR in Health, Culture and Society

Director of the Collegiate Health Service Corps

Tell us about your experience in Community Outreach. How has it helped you progress toward your future goals?

Community Outreach has shaped my undergraduate education significantly, as I have been a part of it since my sophomore year. The program I have been most involved with is the Collegiate Health Service Corps (CHSC), of which I am now the director. CHSC aims to provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to learn more about health disparities through service with medically-underserved populations in
Willimantic, Connecticut. Students design and implement health education lesson plans and visit one of eight different communities each week to present them. Volunteering with CHSC has helped me to realize that I want to dedicate my career to working with medically underserved populations and reducing the health disparities that they face. It has also taught me the importance of empowerment through education: teaching someone about ways to be mindful of their health is much more valuable than treating a problem after it has surfaced.

Tell us about your experience in the Rowe Scholars program.

I am very fortunate to be a member of the John and Valerie Rowe Health Professions Scholars Program. This program is interdisciplinary in nature, and provides financial, academic, and experiential opportunities to its members. My favorite events are the monthly Professional Development dinners, in which a healthcare professional comes to speak to the participants about their career or research in the healthcare field. Additionally, the John and Valerie Rowe Scholars Visiting Lecture Series provides a valuable opportunity for a distinguished healthcare professional to come to the university once a year to speak about critical topics in healthcare.

Andrew Glick

IMJR in Multidisciplinary Approaches to Healthcare Internship in Cape Town, South Africa.

Why did you choose to major in “Multidisciplinary Approaches to Healthcare”?

My career goal is to become a physician who is involved in making and implementing health care policy. An individualized major allows me to combine my health management and policy interests with courses I need for medical school. I didn’t want to become a healthcare management major in the business school because that schedule would not allow me to take all the pre-med classes I needed to take. Therefore, the best option for me was creating an individualized major that ties together courses pertinent to health care in economics, management, the natural sciences, and the social sciences.

Tell us about your internship in Cape Town.

I went to South Africa with the UConn in Cape Town study abroad program. One great aspect of this program is that each student takes part in an internship three days a week. I worked in the Burns Unit for more information on different internship opportunities, visit http://career.uconn.edu

For pre-med and pre-dental advising, see http://premed.uconn.edu/

Public Health House: live and learn together with other students who share an interest in public health, wellness and service. Go to: http://lc.uconn.edu/
at the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital, which is a teaching hospital run by the University of Cape Town. As part of my internship I gained some clinical experience, but what was awesome was that my internship combined my interest in health policy and my prior experience working as an EMT. I worked, and am still working, on a research project which looks at pre-hospital treatment of pediatric burn patients. The results of the study will help the government in allocating the appropriate resources to the appropriate organizations.

Do you have any advice for students interested in a health related major?

Anyone who is interested in the field of healthcare should consider an individualized major. UConn offers many related classes in a variety of fields; it would be a shame to not integrate them into your coursework. Doing an individualized major allows students to pursue their own interests, more so than a traditional science major, while still being able to pursue their ultimate career objectives. In terms of the application and preparation process, I would spend a good amount of time looking through all the courses that interest you so that you can pick the most pertinent classes. I would also start talking, as early as possible, to a variety of professors so that you can arrange to have a thesis that fits all your interests.

Avani Duggaraju:
IMJR in Global Health and Disease,
Study Abroad in London

Tell us about your current study abroad program.

I am interested in healthcare systems, and hope one day to work in an international humanitarian organization engaged in reducing healthcare disparities throughout the world. I am currently studying abroad with the London Global Citizenship program, which has been an amazing experience. We are learning about how citizenship and immigration status affect health in the United Kingdom and the United States. In both my Global Citizenship and Sociology class we learn about global health issues such as healthcare inequalities, medical tourism, migration and health, HIV/AIDS, surrogacy, and obesity. I would highly recommend this program to anyone thinking of studying abroad.

I am also participating in a global citizenship placement at a non-profit organization, Body and Soul Charity, that works on providing support to people with HIV. I mainly do administrative work and assist the Head of Public Health Engagement and Impact with health surveys completed by the members. I organize the relevant information in a spreadsheet so that the staff can see how Body and Soul impacts the members' health. These surveys provide a lot of insight into the way HIV affects people’s lives and how being a part of Body and Soul improves their mental and physical health. After midterm break we are doing two days of Global Citizenship placements and I will be going to the Islington Center for Migrants and Refugees to help teach English, as well as continuing at Body and Soul.

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