



Quintero, Virginia

E10000018

Last, First Middle

Student ID

I came to The Evergreen State College with a clear goal in mind: to prepare myself for medical school. This decision had been a long time coming; I worked in medical administration for years before I decided to make the leap to the clinical side of medicine. Finally, I quit my job, sold my house, moved to Olympia, and began taking classes at the local community college. I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to do yet – I considered nursing school and physician assistant school at first, as they would allow me to have a lucrative job that involved direct patient care – but I knew I had to do something different.

Going back to school felt nothing like the first time I had gone to college at age 18. I had done well enough, but I hadn't enjoyed it that much. I tried taking biology classes, and even tried working in an undergraduate research lab, but I found it confusing and lonely. My classes had involved little student interaction; in the lab, after being shown how to run a DNA gel, with no explanation about what it meant or why, I was left alone with a tank of sea squirts and a bunch of lab equipment. Not surprisingly, when things got tough, school was the first thing to go; it seemed much less important than paying my rent.

Ten years later, school was surprisingly fun. My initial insecurities about being older than my classmates faded, and I remembered how much I had enjoyed learning how living things actually work. I started by taking prerequisites for nursing programs, but the more I learned, the more the idea of medical school appealed to me. I loved studying the intricacies of the human body and wanted to learn all I could. This decision led to me Evergreen, and specifically the Molecule to Organism (M2O) program.

If I thought that the science classes I had taken before were interesting, M2O was something else entirely. My previous coursework had been much more piecemeal; it covered information from many disciplines, but never put it all together. By integrating organic chemistry, biochemistry, molecular biology and genetics together into one program, I gained a much greater understanding of each component. In M2O, it's not enough to know which enzyme you use to get from point A to point B – you learn how the individual amino acid residues interact with substrate molecules to produce a more energetically favorable pathway. The Krebs cycle is no longer just a diagram to be memorized by rote; now, when I see that CO₂ is leaving, I can draw out the mechanism that makes it happen. This pattern carried forward into Matter and Motion the next year, where I integrated physics concepts with chemistry in a research project on hydrolysis as a source of renewable energy. I was able to use what I had learned in years past to help me better understand the material. This interdisciplinary approach to education changed the way that I think about science.

The other thing that is different about Evergreen is the focus on community and student participation. This is invaluable for me; good communication skills are what separates a good physician from a great one. Being a physician requires connecting with new people every day. I was able to practice that skill by getting to know my classmates and working together on problems in workshops. Practicing medicine also necessitates knowing how to convey complex information quickly and effectively. It's not enough to know how something works; I need to be able to explain it to someone else. During M2O, I earned my independent operator's license on the GCMS and FT-NMR spectroscopy machines, and the following year had the opportunity to work as an instrumentation aide, teaching the next crop of students how to safely and effectively operate the FT-NMR. I was able to hone my teaching skills over the course of the year, incorporating student feedback and my own observations to improve the curriculum. Finally, doctors must be able to connect with many different kinds of people. I was able to study both Spanish and Chinese during my time at Evergreen, and that, together with the diversity of the staff and the student body, have increased my ability to communicate across culture differences. I am grateful for all the opportunities that Evergreen has afforded me, and I feel confident that it has prepared me well for the future.