



The Path Less Traveled

Rachel Hurley is among a select group of undergraduates who will begin the prestigious M.D.-Ph.D. Program at Mayo Medical School this fall. On the other side of the rigorous, eight-year program, she will be able to practice medicine and conduct research.

And, as she says, 'Make a difference.'

At some point during college, we all choose a path – a direction we push toward to begin our futures.

We search our souls; remember our childhood dreams; consult with trusted friends and advisors; research and investigate; and, in the end, we make decisions about what to do with our lives.

The path-finding process for biology, chemistry and physics majors works much the same way, except for one difference. Call it the proverbial fork in the road; the million-dollar question: to pursue a career in healthcare or to pursue a commitment to scholarship.

It has to be one or the other, right?

Technically, yes. But, there are always exceptions.

Meet Rachel Hurley, class of 2011, an exceptional exception to the rule of path-finding.

This fall, Hurley, a native of Canton, S.D., will be among the entering class at the prestigious

Influential Teachers

As the oldest of Lynn and Marilyn Hurley's four children, Hurley remembers playing "the typical stuff as a kid – house, school, doctor and Barbies."

But she credits taking chemistry from Ruel Eneboe, Augustana class of 1974, at Canton High School, with fueling her interest in science.

"[Eneboe] really encouraged me. At that point, I decided to major in chemistry and began to think about what I could do with it. From there, I began to explore medicine and the different possibilities."

She was drawn to chemistry, she says, because "it just made sense."

"I think about things very conceptually. [In chemistry,] I can think about things in the larger concept and break them down into pieces."

After arriving at Augustana, Hurley says she was set on majoring in chemistry and was leaning toward a career in physical therapy. But, after

she'll spend the summer researching and exploring the cellular basis for the spread of cancer.

Hurley says the study of cancer is one area in which she's extremely interested. As a volunteer at Sanford Children's Hospital in Sioux Falls, she also developed an interest in pediatrics after watching doctors, patients and families interact.

"I'm definitely interested in cancer research. I'm leaning toward pediatric oncology, although I have a long time to decide. In pediatrics, there's a real sense of hope and urgency. [When I think of the opportunity] to see patients and then go back into the lab [and study what's happening], I feel a real sense of transition. It's really inspiring and motivating."

Life at Augustana

In addition to the time she spent inside Gilbert Science Center and volunteering at Sanford, Hurley was actively involved in student life

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– Rachel Hurley, Class of 2011

Mayo Medical School – a select group of 50 students from across the globe who, according to Mayo, "possess superior academic credentials, leadership characteristics and a sincere dedication to service."

Among her medical school class, she is one of six students selected for Mayo's acclaimed M.D.-Ph.D Program, a curriculum through which she'll earn her medical degree and her doctoral degree. When she's finished, she will be able to practice medicine and perform medical scientific research.

It is, as she says, the best path for her.

"My goal is to see a specific set of patients and do research that correlates [to their conditions]," she said.

Her program will involve two years of classroom-based medical school and three-to-five years of work on her Ph.D. From there, she'll complete her final two years of medical school (which will include hands-on, patient-based work), her residency and her post-doctorate work.

"Life is about the journey, not about the destination. If it takes eight years to get there, I'm sure those eight years will be exciting."

multiple conversations with her advisor, Associate Professor of Chemistry Dr. Jetty Duffy-Matzner, she began to consider her options. Factoring in her love of research, she made the decision to double major in ACS (American Chemical Society) chemistry and biology.

Research

Hurley has participated in research projects each summer during her time at Augustana. Following her freshman and sophomore years, she conducted research alongside Duffy-Matzner that explored greener methods to chemical synthesis. The project was sponsored by the Biomedical Research Infrastructure Network (BRIN). She spent last summer at the Mayo Clinic researching potential treatments for thyroid cancer. She also spent a week shadowing a physician who specialized in thyroid cancer.

"The summer at Mayo was a phenomenal experience. It allowed me to take what I was learning and see how it was applied in the clinic and how it mattered to patients. I got to see how closely the patient and research sides were integrated."

Before beginning her program at Mayo this fall,

activities. She played bass clarinet in the Augustana Band and Wind Ensemble, was a member of the Chapel staff and served on committees for Viking Days, Faith Fest and New Student Orientation (NSO). She served as a chemistry lab assistant and tutor and was also a member of the Student Chemistry Group and the Pre-Med Club.

She participated in two study-abroad opportunities, taking a course in India during her freshman year and performing with the Band – and witnessing a revolution – in Egypt earlier this year.

In honor of her achievements, she was awarded the Covenant Award for Excellence this spring.

For Hurley, celebrating her graduation alongside her classmates in May was bittersweet – an exciting, but emotional end to four memorable years that led her to the journey she's about to begin and, to the path she's confident is the right one for her.

"Ultimately, this is about using my gifts to help others. To know that I'll be working to make a difference in someone's life – that's a real sense of motivation."