

Rhodes Scholarship Essay

Standing on the rocking bow of the *Viking Princess* this past August, with the midnight moon overhead, I looked at the dark water of the English Channel. As the beam from the Cap Gris-Nez lighthouse rotated, the shifting surface became only slightly more discernable. I had just swum across the notorious French current, defying its efforts to sweep me into the Atlantic. Across miles of churning 60-degree water I had battled tides, fought nausea, navigated international shipping lanes, and even avoided several maliciously-minded jellyfish, and brought my channel-swimming relay team to within a quarter-mile of land. Yet the most challenging aspect of the swim had been the frigid water, which led several experienced Channel swimmers to predict I would “go hypo.” But I had been prepared. My training regime included five-hour pool swims to competitive cold-showering – designed to see how long you could last under the frigid water. I studied biochemistry in a bathtub of 50-degree water and had the chilling experience of training amongst sharks in the Pacific. For months I had slept without sheets to help my body further acclimate to the cold.

I had planned to swim the Channel with my compatriot Usman, a Pakistani and my best friend. Swimming together, we were friends transcending the barriers of nationality, politics, religion, and culture. We named our venture the Channeling Peace Initiative and sought to increase both awareness and understanding between peoples, and publicity about our Initiative circled the globe. Articles about our endeavor appeared in newspapers in the United States, Pakistan, and even on CNN Europe. We partnered with Doctors Without Borders to raise thousands of dollars for Pakistani refugees, attracting supporters via the Internet from countries like Italy, China, and South Africa. So news that the British Border Agency denied Usman’s visa application came like a punch in the gut. Desperate to salvage the Initiative, I managed to join another relay team consisting of two Brits and a Kiwi. Adding in a young Yankee achieved the international teamwork Usman and I had initially envisioned.

I’m amazed how much my awareness of the world has grown over these last three years. I’ve gone from municipal park pools to the English Channel, from concern about playground bullies to the Tehrik e Taliban. Everything from the hospital I was born in, to the schools I attended since kindergarten, are all within a mile from my parents’ house. Matriculating at Ohio Wesleyan University, I did not appear to be courting a global experience. Yet now I have a best friend from Pakistan and even find myself heading to the “Asia” section of *The Economist* before “Science and technology.” While the world of this sheltered Ohio boy has expanded exponentially, conversely my interest in science has become more focused. Watching the *Magic School Bus* tour the human circulatory system on TV after elementary school was replaced by 14-hour days synthesizing immunogenic peptide haptens at The Scripps Research Institute. There, I witnessed what it’s like to be a part of a multi-year research project. I enjoyed working long days, returning to my apartment only to chow down on some cookie dough before collapsing onto my bed – sheetless, of course.

Despite enjoying my time at Scripps, my career goal is to become a “physician investigator,” which is a medical doctor who also engages in clinical research. Research gives you the investigative tools needed to address unfamiliar situations, to ask the right questions and carry out the proper follow up. I was inspired while working for Dr. John Duldner, an assistant professor of emergency medicine at Akron General Medical Center. He helped dozens of people each day cope with everything from stomach pains to Amish-barn construction accidents. Yet he remains actively engaged in research, evident to me by the massive amounts of epidemiological work I conducted as his intern. Leaders in their field tend to maintain a balance between research and clinical practice.

The Integrated Immunology program at the University of Oxford bridges this divide between research and medical practice, allowing me to explore both the clinical aspects of immunology and the scientific principles behind them. My summer internship at Scripps, focused on catalytic antibodies, opened a route from my study of biochemistry to immunology. I was able to apply laboratory skills developed over previous years into a specific type of vaccinology. It would be easy for me to apply these same skills in additional immunological projects. The skills taught in the Integrated Immunology program go beyond just research, such as how to properly conduct clinical trials. This can help me evaluate the countless pharmaceutical industry sponsored “studies” I would encounter as a physician. Further, the work in statistics would facilitate my transition to a second program – Global Health Sciences. While that would be a leap from my biochemistry background, such a degree program would allow me to expand my understanding of and ability to address worldwide health issues. While many of the skills acquired in the course such as epidemiology and health economics are transferable to any community, they will take on special significance as I seek out opportunities to continue serving international organizations like Doctors Without Borders.

But alas, trying to gaze into my future is as difficult as was discerning the sparsely illuminated surface of the English Channel. However, just as the beam of the lighthouse periodically showed the surface, so too do these programs briefly illuminate possibilities in my own future. I can anticipate some of my activities at Oxford, but not my altered perspectives. Even within the confines of my hometown Delaware – often derisively called “Dela-nowhere” – my world has expanded by making friends and colleagues that surpass geographic borders, cultural barriers, and even religious boundaries. At Oxford, and amongst Rhodes colleagues, I could continue to grow through multicultural collaboration. Perhaps it would be with an Indian economist, a Kenyan anthropologist, or an Australian philosopher. Assumptions fall, horizons expand, new views inspire.