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Summer Internship Provides Perfect Fit for Student with Dual Interests

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Sameehan Patel '12 is all too accustomed to the reaction when he tells people he is studying both fine arts and biology at Illinois Wesleyan University: "Theatre *and* science? Why put yourself through all that pain?"

But for Patel, a theatre major working towards completing Illinois Wesleyan's pre-dentistry program, combining the two seemingly contrasting disciplines isn't about pain—it's about passion.

"Ultimately I think of every class as a series of questions," explained the Niles, Ill. native. "When I'm in a theatre class understanding a play, I'm exploring why we exist and how we relate to one another. When I'm in a biology class understanding a natural phenomenon, I'm exploring how we exist and why we relate to each other. While they're extremely different in their methods, fundamentally I see both theatre and science as parts of a human investigation."

The perception of theatre and science as complementary pieces of a larger whole is one Patel shares with Delta Dental Health Theatre (DDHT) in St. Louis, Mo., where he is spending his summer as an intern acting, organizing, writing and developing science and theatre programs. At DDHT, staff members strive to promote good oral health and overall healthy life habits by designing interactive presentations, exhibits and performances with the goal of raising awareness and combating two of the most common diseases affecting American children today: tooth decay and obesity.

Searching for a summer position that would strengthen his senior-year plan to research applied theatre for children's health promotion, Patel felt he had struck gold when he came across DDHT's website. "Ultimately, I'd like to find a career that combines my interests," said Patel, who dreams of completing dental school before opening a medical clinic in his grandfather's village in India, where he plans to stage shows about public health. "DDHT was really excited that I studied in both fields, so they were more than willing to take on an intern."

Laurie Diekhoff, internship coordinator and assistant director of Illinois Wesleyan's Hart Career Center, reported that Patel joins more than 400 Illinois Wesleyan students who participate in internships each year—a popular choice for undergraduate students because of the opportunity to explore the possibilities of their futures. "Internships provide the relevant experience employers are looking for on a resume," she said. "They show that students are following up on career interests, making contacts in their field, learning about the industry or profession and developing concrete skills in preparation for a future career."

According to Director of Academic Advising Chandra Shipley, equal commitment to more than one academic subject can present obstacles, but can ultimately enrich both the classroom and internship experience. "For students with a strong connection to two major fields, the benefit of studying both is the ability to explore each discipline fully," she said. "Students might feel that one of their majors is more marketable or that one is more of a passion. But oftentimes, students are able to combine their majors into one career path, or they find the major that was once 'just the passion' can become just as marketable as the other."

Diekhoff, however, noted that unearthing an internship capable of combining skill sets in vastly contrasting fields can prove challenging. "In certain academic disciplines, it is more difficult to find advertised internship or job opportunities," she said. "Students who are looking for a very specialized career interest opportunity need to be more assertive and creative with their search."



Sameehan Patel '12 is spending his summer interning at Delta Dental Health Theatre in St. Louis, Mo.

Landing the perfect-fit internship with DDHT required a boldness Patel attributes to his Illinois Wesleyan experience. "Before coming here, I was doubtful and unassertive about my own opinion," he said. "But I think having professors who I respect and admire actually care about what I have to say has given me confidence beyond the classroom. Going to a small school has opened me up to new worlds, and being more open has changed what I demand of myself."

For Patel, balancing his two passions, while draining at times, has seemed an almost natural product of receiving a liberal arts education. "In our generation, with the combination of our curiosity and the information overload we sometimes catapult through, Illinois Wesleyan students who haven't changed their major at least once always surprise me," he said. "I think instability is a testament to our inquisitive nature and constant quest for intellectual fulfillment."

And just how does Patel manage to meet the demands of both theatre and science, without losing his drive for either? "You learn how to make time in your life for what's important to you," he said. "But mostly it's coffee."

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