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Confident Fleres '16 Prepared for Rigors of Medical School

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—As a little girl, Tina Fleres '16 remembers when her mother, a nurse, came home from work and spoke about her job with a sense of satisfaction.

“When she talked, I could tell she felt like she was doing something worthwhile, something important,” Fleres recalled. “I knew from an early age I wanted to work in the healthcare field.”

This summer Fleres takes another step toward that goal, as she enters the University of Texas Health Science Center School of Medicine in San Antonio. It’s a big step for Fleres, who says she hates change. In fact, she said she chose to go to Illinois Wesleyan partly for its small size and because it reminded her so much of her beloved high school in the northern Chicago suburb of Mundelein. The two-and-a-half hour trip from Chicago to IWU was also a plus.

“I knew I would get to know all of my teachers and my classmates,” Fleres recalls of her early impressions of Illinois Wesleyan. “When I visited, I got such a great vibe from students and faculty. I also thought the campus was beautiful.”

On her first day at Illinois Wesleyan, she met other first-year students who would immediately become close friends. On the fourth floor of Ferguson Hall, making new friends right away helped alleviate her fear of change and her nervousness about leaving home. “I lived with several of those friends all four years of college, and I’m still really good friends with all of them. Some of my most memorable moments of college happened by just hanging out in the Ferguson-Munsell fourth floor lounge. One night in particular we played sardines out on the Quad and stayed up all night talking on the hot spot.”

In the classroom, the adjustment took a little longer. She said she was afraid of her general chemistry professor James House until they became better acquainted. Fleres now calls House “a hilarious and talkative guy who genuinely cares about his students. I can go into his office at any time to talk about anything.”

The rigor of Illinois Wesleyan’s curriculum also took some adjustment. At the end of her first year, the biology major nearly quit the pre-med track. “I thought I wouldn’t be able to get through it,” recalled Fleres, who graduated magna cum laude. “I’m so glad I stayed on track and didn’t quit so easily.”

Professor House even recruited her as a teaching assistant. “This was an amazing experience helping students through ‘General Chemistry’ labs,” she said. “I was also able to spend more time with Professor House,” whom Fleres now calls her favorite professor.



Tina was inspired to pursue a career in healthcare by her mom, Arsenia.

developed with professors at a small liberal arts school, and the emphasis on communication skills and critical thinking. I believe medical schools in general are taking a more holistic approach in applicants as well as in their teaching, so I think having a liberal arts education made me an interesting candidate.”

For someone who says she hates change, she nevertheless talks positively about the transition to medical school in a city more than 1,000 miles from her home. “I just remember that I was so worried to come to IWU even though it was only two and a half hours from home, and that once I got here, I was fine,” she said. “I will remind myself of all I’ve gone through and who’s at my side – my family and friends, who are so supportive. I’m prepared, and I know I’ll be fine again.”

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Tina Fleres '16 says, "I was always asked what had prepared me for medical school, and in each interview I spoke of the close relationships I developed with professors at a small liberal arts school, and the emphasis on communication skills and critical thinking."

Helping others – whether in chemistry labs or in one of her many extracurricular activities – is a recurring theme in Fleres’ IWU career. She participated in Best Buddies, Alpha Phi Omega national co-ed service fraternity, and Unite for Sight, a nonprofit dedicated to eliminating blindness in people in developing countries. The IWU registered student organization raises money for eye clinics and to pay for sight-restoring surgeries in India, Ghana and Honduras.

“These surgeries are very inexpensive in U.S. dollars, so raising even a small amount of money goes a long way,” she said. “It felt good knowing I could do something that would have an impact on the health of someone I didn’t even know.”

Fleres took her talents outside of the healthcare field as well. A gifted pianist who often accompanied student vocalists in the School of Music, Fleres volunteered to play in the atrium of Advocate BroMenn Medical Center. “When I’m in a bad mood, playing piano always makes me feel better,” Fleres explained. “How much more would soothing music help someone who is waiting for a loved one in surgery or just needs calming to ease their worries? It’s always made me feel good to do something I love, but if it also helps someone else, that’s even better.”

She’ll take her many talents to medical school in Texas, where Fleres said she touted the benefits of her liberal arts education in her interviews. “I was always asked what had prepared me for medical school, and in each interview I spoke of the close relationships I