



Spring 4-28-2017

Pre-Med Students Gain Experience in Cadaver Lab

University Communications
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

University Communications, "Pre-Med Students Gain Experience in Cadaver Lab" (2017).
News and Events. 3537.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3537>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Pre-Med Students Gain Experience in Cadaver Lab

April 28, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Vishnu Velupula '18 was in high school when she made her first cut into a cadaver.

As an Illinois Wesleyan [biology](#) major in the [pre-med](#) program, Velupula returned to the same cadaver lab where she made that first cut, but this time as a content expert. The lab is the Cadaver Academy, an initiative of the McLean County Medical Society, local physician and attorney Dr. Tom Pliura, and the LeRoy Public Schools. Organizers believe the lab is the first ongoing cadaver dissection lab in the United States for high school students.

The lab opened in 2014 as a learning opportunity for advanced-level high school students interested in the medical field. This semester Illinois Wesleyan pre-med students became involved, thanks to the [Hart Career Center](#). Velupula and more than 30 other IWU students interested in careers in medicine volunteered in the lab by answering the high school students' questions, quizzing the high schoolers on anatomy, serving as assistants to the local physicians and high school science teachers who proctor the lab, and helping maintain an efficient lab environment.

The Illinois Wesleyan students participate in the dissections as well. With the exception of Velupula, none of the IWU students had ever participated in a dissection prior to their experiences at the academy.

When the volunteer experience became available, Tana Smithsakol '17 signed up immediately. "It's a really rare and valuable opportunity," said Smithsakol, a native of Bangkok, Thailand. His most memorable lab experience occurred on his first day with newly acquired cadavers, which are obtained from the Anatomical Gift Association. "I was honored to be able to make the first cut and to help in guiding the high school students through the dissection," said Smithsakol.

The lab experience gives Illinois Wesleyan pre-med students a chance to develop their leadership skills and medical knowledge, and to network with health care professionals, according to Abby Reel, assistant director of career development and pre-med liaison to Illinois Wesleyan's Department of Biology.

"Today's students are expected to demonstrate a diversity of health care experiences on their medical school applications to be considered competitive candidates," said Reel. "The chance to volunteer in the cadaver lab is one of many unique and educational experiences that prepares IWU students for the profession."

The experience also helps students – high school and college – affirm career plans. Participating in the lab experience is a great opportunity to confirm, or change, the decision to go into medicine, said Velupula, a native of Bloomington, Ill. "Sometimes, when students see a cadaver in front of them, they decide that the health care field is not for them," she said. "This decision is important to be made as an undergraduate rather than in medical school where it would be more difficult for someone to change a path he or she has worked so hard to be on."

Brock Taylor '18 (Mattoon, Ill.) said the exposure to the cadaver lab has confirmed his decision to pursue a career in medicine. "In addition, any experience that allows you to integrate information and explain it to others is something that helps you learn," he said.

Taylor said, however, his most important takeaway from the experience was emotional rather than intellectual. "Even though students are engrossed in learning the specific veins, arteries, muscles and bones of the cadaver, one should not forget that this was a living person," said Taylor. "Working with the human body requires the utmost respect, attention and care — qualities that physicians should possess to a high degree."

Illinois Wesleyan pre-med students will continue to have the opportunity to volunteer at Cadaver Academy. The experience complements the rigorous science preparation IWU students receive – challenging coursework in the liberal arts, personal instruction from a well-qualified faculty, and hands-on experience with state-of-the-art equipment. More than 80 percent of Illinois Wesleyan's pre-med graduates are admitted to medical school on the first try, compared to just 50 percent nationally.

▷ MORE: [Read a related story in the Bloomington Pantagraph.](#)



IWU pre-med students Fabian Jano '18 and Brooke Koebele '19 examine a heart following cadaver dissection. (Photo by pre-med student Tana Smithsakol '17)