



BIOMASS COORDINATOR: KIRSTEN SLETTEN '16

BioMass

Biology Student Newsletter

March 2016

The Journey of a Pre Med Student

by Tiffany Eisenbach '16

I entered St. Olaf interested in being premed, and knowing that I loved biology. With this in mind, I naturally decided that Biology might be a good major for me. However, I have also always loved history, and began to pursue the history-related major options. That was when I came across another option: American Studies. I liked that the major entailed taking courses in different departments and thought that understanding the factors that shape American life from multiple perspectives might prove helpful to understanding my patients better someday.

I next decided to try and get involved with some campus organizations, and I naturally

gravitated to the Pre-health Club. I liked that they put on events that included both speakers discussing their insight into their healthcare careers as well as informational sessions for shadowing or volunteer opportunities. That Interim Break, I went on Ole Medical Brigades to Honduras. This was my first encounter with poverty in a developing nation, and thus was quite shocking and emotionally taxing for me – but this experience was also what first piqued my interest in global medicine, and convinced me that I wanted to pursue it further.

And pursue it further I did. That fall, I went on the semester long Biology in South India program.

Nothing makes you develop independence and communication skills like getting dropped off in a foreign country where most people have limited English and the traffic is ultra-crazy. However, India was the change of pace that I desperately needed, and I can confidently say that I learned more in my four months there than in any other

four month period of my life. I didn't just learn information related to my research projects or the culture – I learned about human nature, happiness, spirituality: what it means to live. ("Journey" continued on pg 2)

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Student Naturalist Article:

Minnesota Eagle Spotting

by Katie Myhre 16'



If you spend time with the Student Naturalists, you'll most likely experience a fair share of bird watching. Personally, I'm more plant-oriented. So, on our phenology walks I inevitably find myself blankly following fingers pointing into the sky and straining my ears to hear woodpeckers.

Last weekend I had the chance to pretend, just for the afternoon, that I had those bird watching

tendencies. On my way back from La Crosse, WI I followed along the Mississippi River through the river bluffs. As I looked out onto the bluffs, I started to see brilliant white specks soaring through the sky. Those white specks turned out to be bald eagle heads. One solo eagle turned into a couple, then soon we spotted a group of 4 eagles soaring over the bluffs. As we continued to drive north, the tally kept climbing. We even spotted a group of crows sharing their latest victim with the bald eagles on the river's thawing ice. It seemed like we were pulling over every 10 minutes with a new eagle spotting,

and by the end of the trip, our count was nearly to 30.

Little did I know, what I was seeing on that gorgeous Saturday afternoon was not due to luck. I found out that I was driving through one of the top eagle migrating areas in the Midwest. And more importantly, my tally confirmed that the bald eagles are once again thriving. The unfrozen water of the Mississippi River draws the eagles in on their journey northward. While the surrounding ecosystems provide a wide variety of prey and refuge for our national bird, making southeastern Minnesota a prime bird-watching location. So, have no fear - grab your binoculars and get out there to see the eagles this month as they stop by our region, bird-watching eyes or not!

("journey" continued from pg 1)

That Interim, I decided that I had seen a lot of poverty in developing nations but was ready to see how this issue affected Americans domestically. During the Health and Social Inequality course, I learned just how blind I had been. Witnessing this for the first time prompted me to do the Pura Vida internship with Healthfinders over the summer. I rekindled my old love of speaking Spanish, and helped address health inequality at the preventative level by leading free exercise and nutrition classes to Hispanic immigrant populations.

However, it was during the Peruvian Medical Experience the following Interim that I at last affirmed my ideas for my specific vocation as a physician. While helping to serve very high-need populations, I learned that providing care to those who need it most is incredibly rewarding for me, and that I love the challenge that Spanish brings to a clinical setting. While I definitely want to address the health needs of the underserved in our own American communities, my experience in Peru taught me that I want to make healthcare work abroad a part of my life as well.

All in all, I wouldn't be where I am today and I most certainly would not be the person I have become without the people and opportunities that have helped me along the way. And for that, St. Olaf, I am truly grateful.

Senior Reflection Q and A: with Erin McCoy a Biology and Psychology Double Major

By Kirsten Sletten 16'

Q: What inspired you to major in both biology and psychology?

A: I started out definitely being biology and sort of thinking about psychology. And now I'm kind of coming out definitely psychology really glad I did biology. I have always liked biology and figuring out how the world works and I think I took psychology because I like to figure out how people work. I think they are very similar just on different levels.

Q: What has studying both biology and psychology at St. Olaf taught you?

A: So many things! One of my favorite things they have taught me is to be able to appreciate all the little things going on. Like in biology allow you to understand what goes on in your body on a cellular level, so you know what's making you breathe or eat. Psychology is the same way, only it's knowing all the different things going on in your brain that allow you to function every day. Knowing how that all works and understanding how complicated the world is one of the amazing things I have learned.

Q: Which biology class at St. Olaf has been your favorite?

A: Animal Behavior. I loved the subject because it combined psych and bio very well and emphasized how similar humans and animals are through many concepts that were applied to both. One of my favorite topics was how socially complex animal behavior can be sometimes, which we usually don't think about.

Q: How has psychology impacted your study of biology?

A: I would say it is more the other way around. Usually it is more helpful for me to know the molecular and cellular stuff that I will learn in biology and apply it to psychology. A lot of people in the psych major don't have that background. That stuff is the hard stuff, but for me I get it and it connects the two fields. It allows me to understand things such as depression on a more molecular level and why medications make a difference and can come with a lot of side affects, and other things like that.

Q: Being both a biology and psychology major how have you kept balance in your life?

A: Dance! A whole lot of dance. Dance is super important. I have taken ballet the whole time I have been here, which is my meditative exercise. I am involved with Swing Club, which I have a leadership position in and has taught me a lot about how to work with people, how to teach, how to organize, and other administrative duties.



***The 83rd Annual Meeting & 29th Winchell Undergraduate Research Symposium will be hosted on Friday, April 29th, 2016 at Coffman Memorial Union at the University of Minnesota. If you have conducted research and would like to present, please ask your research supervisor before registering. More details to follow in an email soon.
<http://www.mnmas.org/annual-meeting/2016-annual-meeting-winchell-undergraduate-research-symposium>

Biology Distinction Process Timeline

Research Paper Submission	March 14	Student submits final version of the research paper to Lisa Bowers at bowers@stolaf.edu.
Research Paper Review	March 14 – April 14	Each research paper will be read and reviewed by two members of the Biology faculty (the student's mentor will not be one of these two faculty).
Spring Research Poster Session	April 4	This is the Biology Department poster session at which candidates for Distinction must present their research posters.
Notification of Distinction in Biology	April 22	Candidates will receive a letter from the Biology Department indicating whether or not they have been awarded Distinction.

Biology Interim Abroad Pictures

(lots of opportunities for next year, think about it!)

