SOURCE Champion of the Month November 2015

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Tyler Mains
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine
4th Year Medical Student

"Look for opportunities that provide multiple opportunities to engage with a certain group of people and commit to them. In turn, you'll have a huge impact."

What do you do as your community engagement activity? MERIT (Medical Education Resources Initiative for Teens)

How much time do you spend on service per week/month? When I'm a full-time student, 15-20 hours per week.

How did you begin to work with your community-based organization (CBO)?

I started MERIT when I was a high school biology teacher in West Baltimore because of the disconcerting inequalities I saw in my classroom. I had one student, Trevor, who began the year without knowing the heart's function but ended with one of the city's highest scores on the Maryland Biology High School Assessment and a newfound desire to become a doctor. Breonna, another student, had Type I Diabetes. She was hospitalized seven times in one year and did not have a primary care pediatrician. These two students sparked an idea. If we could find students like Trevor who are interested in health careers, we could prepare them to become leaders in their own communities to ensure everyone including Breonna has access to high-quality health care.

What do you enjoy about or gain through community service?

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I have gained tremendous insight on how to build an effective nonprofit organization. To create MERIT, I had to learn management, fundraising, governance, accounting, and so many other leadership skills. I can now graduate from medical school with the experience of running a business, so I feel confident in my abilities to lead even more systemic change in the future.

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How do you find time for service in your busy schedule?

MERIT was my priority before medical school began, so I knew I would make time for it. I found it made school more enjoyable and more manageable because I had to create a very structured study schedule. If I only had two hours to study, I would make the most of those two hours and probably learned more than if I had five hours to study.

Besides finding the time, what barriers related to your service have you had to overcome?

Like all nonprofits, funding is always a concern, so I decided to take a year away from medical school last year to focus on MERIT full-time. In that year, I raised nearly \$2 million and hired six employees who will continue to scale MERIT in Baltimore and beyond.

How has your training in Hopkins influenced the way you approach service?

Hopkins is unique in the diversity of patients we serve. On morning rounds in the hospital, I can see a homeless man from East Baltimore, an elderly woman from the Midwest, and an international family concerned about their grandfather. As a result, we must never make assumptions about a patient or his/her life outside of the hospital. This mindset applies to service because we never know what our MERIT Scholars encounter before our Saturday sessions or summer internships. We must always enter conversations with an open mind and a goal of learning how we can be most useful.

How does your service shape your development as a health care professional?

MERIT has taught me even more about health disparities and the lack of diversity in the health care workforce. In addition, my passion for medical education at all levels has been enhanced through developing MERIT's curriculum. In the future, I see my career intertwining all of these themes. MERIT has really defined my future trajectory.

What advice do you have for prospective students who are interested in community service?

Find something that gets you excited and make a commitment. School is busy and stressful, so you need a way to decompress and use a different part of your mind. Don't do something because it will look good on your resume. If you do, you'll likely become more stressed. Also, don't be afraid to do something out of the box. Learn about what organizations exist around Baltimore-- don't limit yourself to what your friends and classmates are doing! Finally, don't stretch yourself too thin, so choose your service activity wisely.

What would you say to someone who is unsure of the impact his/her service would have on a community?

I am not a fan of "touch and go" service opportunities. In my opinion, you need to form longitudinal relationships with community members to really make an impact. Look for

opportunities that provide multiple opportunities to engage with a certain group of people and commit to them. In turn, you'll have a huge impact.

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What is the community service accomplishment that has affected you and/or your community the most?

MERIT has truly transformed the lives of Scholars and their families. For the past few years, our retention has been 100% and four-year college matriculation rate is 100% (compared to about 20% in Baltimore City overall). Our alumni excel in college. While we're too young to have alumni in graduate school now, several of our juniors in college are preparing for the MCAT and other graduate school admissions tests. They are well on their way to becoming positive change agents in their communities.

Final Comments

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We're currently recruiting MERIT mentors! The application is on our website, www.meritbaltimore.org. The final deadline is December 13.



SOURCE.jhu.edu
