

"You bet!"

By Travis Matheney

I was recently giving an admissions tour of DMS to a group of prospective medical students. Over lunch, the typical questions ensued. "What are the call rooms like?" "Is there any on-campus housing?" "What is the general interaction like between faculty and students, and how do you think that it affects the overall quality of your educational experience?" (Wow! Great question!)

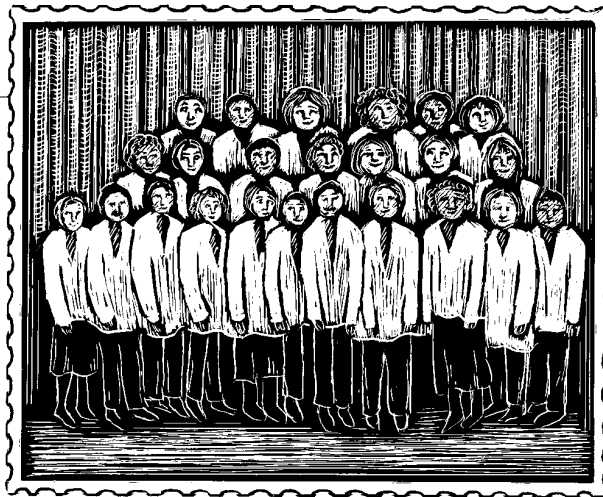
I think my favorite question, and unfortunately one that many applicants forget or don't think to ask is, "Have you had a good time here?" I can feel a smile spreading across my face, prompted by the many recollections behind it, as I answer, "You bet!"

At this point, I usually launch into an almost nauseating demonstration of how much one person can regurgitate on a given subject in a fixed period of time. I will, however, confine my comments here to what I believe to be the *greatest* reasons to attend this particular Ivy League medical school.

Education: As a student representative to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), I have had an opportunity to interact with many students from medical schools all across the United States. When we see each other at meetings and communicate via a national Internet listserv, we generally talk about issues related to medical education. I have been truly impressed that DMS has addressed, and often solved, a lot of the educational issues or problems that many other schools are just starting to look at. My predecessors and I have been able to further the Dartmouth name by describing how things work here. For example, one school in the South was struggling to fit a problem-based-learning (PBL) section into their basic science years. At DMS, during the second year, small PBL groups meet one afternoon a week outside the scheduled morning classes. The Southern school now plans to try that themselves.

Although the majority of big changes have already taken place with the move to our "New Directions" curriculum, DMS continues to hone the program. For instance, the faculty recently fine-tuned the fourth-year course on Health, Society, and the Physician, adding seminars suggested by students. In short, the educational experience here remains on the cutting edge.

Diversity of experience: I was awestruck when I heard my classmates described by DMS's director of admissions during his orientation speech four years ago. What an incredible display of experience the typical DMS class brings with it! One person had taught English in Poland, another had served as a firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service, one



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classmate had founded a women's health center in Washington, D.C., another had worked with Oakland teenagers to paint a 300-foot mural. And the list goes on. What's more, DMS makes it possible for students to add to their already terrific experiences while they're here. They can participate in a whole variety of student-run community service projects or electives, start their own research projects, take international electives, learn new outdoor sports, or explore a number of other activities. Such diversity has not only added volumes to my own life

experience, but—more importantly—it helps each and every DMS graduate become a more empathic person, someone who brings life experience as well as science into a patient's room.

Family: Another common question asked by potential DMSers is "So why did you decide to come to Dartmouth?" Having revisited the process very recently through my residency interviews, I think the answer to this question may, perhaps, say the most about an institution. Before I enrolled at DMS, I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to visit several times (I used to come up from Boston to visit a good friend who was a student here). DMS students seemed to be friendly, hard-working, bright, and happy, and I could sense the bond and friendship they had. I wanted to be part of that "family."

One of the biggest assets DMS has is its students. When I started here, it was as if I had adopted 84 new brothers and sisters. Sure, we have divided into small study groups and have formed stronger friendships with some of our classmates, but when we all come together we're still like one big family.

Best four years: In the summer of 1996, after I had finished graduate school in Boston and before I headed up to Hanover for my first-year orientation, I stopped by a lab where I had worked to say good-bye to friends. One physician congratulated me, but added, "Boy, I sure don't envy you. Med school was four of the worst years of my life!" As I prepared for a very depressing ride north, another doc caught me in the hall. "Hey, I heard what she said and I don't know where *she* went to school, but med school was four of the greatest years of my life. You're going to have a wonderful time." And I have! These have truly been the best four years of my life. I not only have DMS to thank but my classmates and other students as well. ■

Travis Matheney, a DMS '00, has served this year as president of the DMS Student Government. For the past four years, he has been a representative to the Association of American Medical Colleges' Organization of Student Representatives.