

Jon Gilbert Fox



CHRISTOPHER NAVAS

class of 2016

“On a good day, there’d be an elevator. On a bad day, there’d be stairs.”

Christopher Navas was more surprised than anyone to find himself at Dartmouth, but now that he’s here he feels right at home.

THE FIRST YEAR OF MEDICAL SCHOOL IS NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT. Still, it’s understandable that Christopher Navas was a little skeptical about how hard it could really be, given the work he had been doing prior to arriving at Geisel.

For much of the past decade, Navas worked for a New York City boiler manufacturer. Every morning, he’d make the 10-mile drive to work, which in heavy traffic could take an hour and a half. Once he arrived, he’d spend the day building and delivering steel boilers for companies all over the city.

“On a good day, there’d be an elevator,” he says. “On a bad day, there’d be stairs, and you’d just be dragging and pushing and using brute force.”

He liked the people he worked with but didn’t exactly love the job. “It was rough work,” he says. “And there weren’t many young guys. I was the only one. Everyone else was in their 40s and 50s, and they’re like, ‘Why are you even doing this? You’re a smart kid—why’d you choose this?’” After a while, he started wondering, too: “Why *am* I doing this?”

That’s when Navas started taking classes, first at a community college and then at Queens College, working during the day and taking classes at night. The more he learned and the harder the classes got, the more interested he became.

“I started taking chemistry and neuroscience, and that’s when the ball started really rolling,” he says. “And the higher up I went, the more I was surrounded by premed students and really driven people. It’s almost contagious. You want to do as well if you’re around people like that.”

People started to suggest that he go to medical school, an idea that he dismissed at first. “The thought was so foreign,” he says. So he tried volunteering in a hospital and then began working as an EMT. “All the pieces were falling

into place,” he says. He took the MCAT. That went well, so he applied to schools, still not sure that he’d actually get in anywhere. He couldn’t believe it when he started to receive acceptance letters. “This is crazy,” he thought. “This is not really how it’s happening.”

Navas had felt so comfortable during his interview at Geisel that he hoped he’d get in. Once again, things fell into place and he found himself on the verge of becoming a student at Geisel. Even then, Navas wasn’t done preparing. He left the boiler company and took a job at a hospital working in a surgical intensive care unit, once again starting at the bottom, just to get some clinical experience.

Friends who were medical students told him how hard it would be. “It’s crazy,” they’d say. “All you do is study.” His response: How hard could it be to read books all day? He was used to working a full day hauling huge pieces of steel and then doing hours of schoolwork.

It didn’t take long for Navas to realize that, even with his strong work ethic, medical school was going to be hard, even compared to dragging boilers up stairs. But this time he loves what he’s doing, so it doesn’t feel like a job. And, after all, he’s not afraid of a little hard work.

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