Bachelor of Philosophy Sample Plan of Studies
Major: Interdisciplinary Studies

I have chosen to complete an Interdisciplinary Studies Degree at the University of Pittsburgh focused on the idea of International Health. Attached to this document you will find a copy of the official university paperwork submitted detailing both the classes within the major and the explanation for their inclusion. The major is separated into three thematic clusters designed to give the major both depth and breadth. The first cluster entails the natural sciences necessary for medical school as well as others of interest (i.e. Epidemiology). The second cluster encompasses the social side of international medicine including classes from the disciplines of medical sociology, medical anthropology, and the history of medicine. The third cluster focuses on Spanish language training in order to give a needed language aspect to this international field.

This major has allowed me to investigate the various facets of the idea of health. An undergraduate training of this varied nature will provide the background needed for individuals hoping to work within the highly diverse and changing international field. The wide-ranging subjects ensure a rigorous course load requiring a student to be able to think and work in everything from the physical and social sciences to the humanities. The freedom of this degree has also allowed me to include several study abroad experiences which have added a needed hands-on aspect to this preparatory training.

Because the major is so large and inclusive I have taken relatively few courses outside of the interdisciplinary studies degree. The only course to note was a historic journalism course taken within the University Honors College during the fall of 2005. This course, while not overtly directly applicable, taught me how to evaluate news worldwide and understand the important role of journalism. As healthcare becomes an increasingly publicly debated topic in health care practitioners must be able to both read and use the media to their advantage.

The interdisciplinary studies option at the University of Pittsburgh has presented me with an excellent opportunity to combine coursework and experiential learning from several areas into a major that specifically tailors my learning to my future career goals. I am creating a major around the theme of International Health, the chosen title of major, incorporating aspects of various sciences, history of medicine, anthropology, and the Spanish language. I am choosing the degree option for several reasons. As an incoming freshman to the University of Pittsburgh, I was very fortunate to be granted the opportunity to participate in the Medical Guarantee Program through the University of Pittsburgh Medical School. With this in mind, I know that I would like to pursue interests at the undergraduate level that may not be options in the future and will adequately prepare me for future goals. After my matriculation at the undergraduate level, I plan on proceeding to medical school and receiving my MD degree. Although I have not yet decided, future degree options beyond this include a Masters in Public Health and/or a PhD in Anthropology. This varied and interdisciplinary background will orient my career towards work abroad, either through non-governmental organizations or universities, which would focus heavily on providing healthcare access to the thousands of the world’s poor. I plan on specifically focusing on Spanish speaking countries due to my current command of the language.

At this stage an interdisciplinary studies degree would allow me to develop a broad overview of health. This would most accurately be found within both the natural and social science fields, which have then become the two major themes in my degree. The third theme brings the large global overview down to a more local and applicable level focusing on the Hispanic countries and the Spanish language.
The three clusters have each been carefully formatted to give the most comprehensive overview of each theme. The natural science cluster contains mainly prerequisites for medical school, among other higher science classes, that will prepare me for medical school. I have added several elective science and related courses. Human Physiology and biochemistry will serve as upper level science courses that will prepare me for the difficult coursework in medical school and the MCATs. The third science elective, epidemiology, has clear global applicability and is therefore an introductory course into a science that combats the various diseases that plague the world. Two math classes have also been chosen. Calculus is often a prerequisite for many medical schools and statistics is an essential course for any public health professional. This strong background in the basic and applied sciences is essential to being a competent physician.

The second theme/cluster focuses on the social science aspects of health and well being. This cluster is the most interdisciplinary of the three and draws upon numerous departments and fields of study. These include, but are not limited to: anthropology, history of medicine, sociology, psychology, history and philosophy of medicine, and public health. The anthropology courses have clear relevance in my goal of studying and learning about the cultural health systems in other nations. The history of medicine provides a background that is often essential for understanding the current status of health care related components both at home and abroad. Following this mentality, a certificate in History of Medicine will also be pursued to demonstrate a depth of knowledge in this area has been obtained. Sociology and psychology both work to provide a more in depth understanding into the causative reasons behind many of the medical practices in various cultures.

Although limited in number, I have completed several classes through the school of public health. One class in particular, From Cells to Communities, in an honors course that provides a small group of students the opportunity to study and apply the research principals behind public health to real world problems. The independent study completed with Dr. Macleod covered the topics of international health systems. Dr. Macleod traveled with semester at sea several years ago and taught a course concerning the health systems of countries that the group visited. I took this course independently with Dr. Macleod in the spring of 2003 and looked at the data and materials he collected and lectured upon while overseas.

To supplement the social science cluster described above, I traveled to Mongolia during the summer of 2004 and pursued an independent research project. My focus was on the dynamic developing in modern Mongolia between the once outlawed traditional medicine and the Russian imported western medicine. In addition, both a preparatory class prior to departure covering basic language skills and cultural themes and a class in Mongolia focusing on the same topics were taken in order to garner credit for this trip. The other study abroad I have planned will be during the spring of 2006. It is titled Global Health and the Community and is sponsored by the International Honors Program and Boston University. We will travel to China, South Africa, and India during the course of the semester to look at the health situation in each country. The included coursework can be seen in the cluster breakdown. I am also interning with Dr. Salvatore Babones of the Sociology Department on the “Pitt Inequality in Health” project. I began this research in the spring of 2005 and will continue through the fall of 2005.

The third cluster brings the very large and broad topics down to a more local and practical level. This cluster will focus specifically on topics related to Hispanic Culture with an emphasis on the acquisition of the Spanish language. Although not yet finalized, a study abroad in the summer of 2005 relating to this cluster is being researched as a possibility in several Hispanic American countries.
This major is designed to provide me with the utmost preparation for my future career as a physician concerned with the health of the world as a whole. In order to provide a sense of validity to this major, I am also seeking a bachelors in philosophy from the university honors college looking at the integration of traditional medicine into biomedical education in various countries around the globe. This will allow me to demonstrate my knowledge in the field through research and writing. In summary, this opportunity will provide me with a background not usually obtained by students who choose to follow the pre-med route. It will expand my learning beyond the classroom and incorporate hands-on learning into a foundation that will serve as a starting point of a career focused on the health of the world’s people.