

# the medical scholars program

Offering Opportunity and Security

BY HEATHER McCULLOCH MISTRETTA

Ambitious New Jersey students with dreams of pursuing a career in family medicine, general internal medicine or pediatrics can be rewarded for all their hard work by entering the Monmouth Medical Center Scholars Program.

Developed by Monmouth University in 1996, this eight-year undergraduate/medical school program provides five students each year with a sense of security in a highly competitive field.





TOP ROW L-R Alyssa Schlatmann, Rohan Penmetcha, Priya Patel, Darshan Patel, Dr. Datta Naik, Dr. James Mack  
 BOTTOM ROW L-R Devon Hodge, Dr. Dorothy Hutter

Upon graduation from Monmouth, the students are guaranteed placement at Philadelphia-based Drexel University College of Medicine, making Monmouth the only New Jersey university to have such a program at Drexel.

The program was started by Dr. James Mack '63, professor of Biology, and Dr. Datta Naik, professor of Chemistry and graduate school dean after being approached by Dr. Ellen Cosgrove, former head of Medical Education at Monmouth Medical Center and Hahnemann Medical School (now Drexel University College of Medicine) alumna. Since 1998 she has been University of New Mexico's Professor of Medicine and Associate Dean of Continuing Medical Education.

Joseph Jaeger, associate vice president, academic affairs at Monmouth Medical Center and associate dean, Monmouth Programs at Drexel, said, "I think this is an excellent program. It relates closely to the mission of Monmouth Medical—to take care of the patients, to educate health care professionals, and provide a regional magnet for our community."

This year's recipients were Rohan Penmetcha (North Brunswick), Priya Patel (Freehold), Devon Hodge (Titusville), Alyssa Schlatmann (Upper Montclair), and Darshan Patel (Voorhees).

"The Medical Scholars program is a benefit for all three partner institu-

tions. It brings greater visibility to Monmouth as well as help the University earn an excellent reputation," said Dr. Mack. Monmouth was recently included in *The Princeton Review's Best 361 Colleges: 2006 Edition*, citing the Medical Scholars program as one of the reasons.

**"The medical program at Monmouth University is excellent. It gives me an opportunity to pursue an undergraduate degree to its fullest extent while also having the assurance of being accepted at medical school."**

—ROHAN PENMETCHA, FRESHMAN

“This unique program attracts outstanding students to Monmouth from all over the state of New Jersey and has helped us to be recognized as a quality institution by high schools in the greater metropolitan area of New Jersey,” said Dr. Naik.

Darshan said, “It allows students the certainty of having a spot in medical school and allows them to explore other facets of knowledge. The student is given the appropriate time to mature and absorb knowledge with the same certainty of a seat in medical school.” She added that she may pursue a career in the surgical field.

At the end of the third year, the student is required to confirm his or her enrollment at Drexel. Some of the students actually finish the program in only three years and then delve into other things like research for the remaining year.

Drs. Mack and Naik fondly recalled one such student--Sireesha Kolli '99. She has completed her MD and is now in her third year of residency in the Child Psychiatry program at the University of Pittsburgh. Sireesha finished her BS in Biology at Monmouth in three years and attended graduate studies at Emory University in public health during the fourth year.

Aimee Babbin, a junior majoring in chemistry with a concentration in biochemistry, said, “The Monmouth Medical Scholars Program was the main reason I attended Monmouth. One of the greatest aspects of the program is that it practically eradicated the stress of applying to medical school and worrying whether or not I'll be accepted... Another aspect of the program I love is the class we take at Monmouth Medical Center - Experience in Clinical Medicine (MM 490). This class will give me great exposure to working in a hospital and in the medical field before I even get to med school,” adding that she plans on pursuing a career in pediatrics but is open to other fields like obstetrics.

Former student Rajesh Gupta, who graduated last May, said, “The program is very good for high school seniors who have excelled in school and are de-

termined to enter medical school and become a doctor. The science program at MU is excellent and the available biology research programs provide a great experience for undergraduate students. The program allows students to continue on a straight line path into medical school. My goal is to enter medical school and to become a successful doctor.”

And still others opt to take a slightly different route, as was the case for Susan Koren '03, who was a MMC Scholar but in her third year here at Monmouth decided to pursue her medical studies at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City.

The advantage of the program to the student is obvious, but for Drexel it allows the College of Medicine to boost their incoming student profile.

“Medical schools are seeking outstanding students committed to practicing medicine. The MMC Scholars program helps recruit high-achieving students that will enter the field of medicine and who are expected to practice in New Jersey,” said Dr. Mack, adding that those involved in the program are in the top five percent in the nation.

“This program makes Monmouth University very attractive to a higher profile student interested in a medical career,” Dr. Mack added.

During the four years at Monmouth the participants interact extensively with the faculty members who comprise Monmouth's Pre-Professional Advisory Committee so that they are prepared for the rigors of medical school.

The committee is comprised of faculty from the science departments who are available for consultations with students regarding their medical school future. They provide students with information and counseling pertaining to the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), Dental Admissions Test (DAT), and other admissions-related tests.

“They appear to be a very enthusiastic group,” said Dr. Dorothy Hutter, who teaches Biology and is a faculty member on the committee, adding that the students are learning at different levels.

“Some of the medical scholar students came in to MU with Biology and Chemistry credits, and placed into more advanced science courses, while others opted to take the honors BY and CE

“The professors and advisors are great and there are lots of resources available to us to aid us in MCAT and interview preparation. I like that we are able to form close friendships with our fellow med scholars, creating a great support system while pursuing our goals.”

—SUNAINA KAUSHAL, SOPHOMORE



Marian Gaballah and Sunaina Kaushal, women in the medical scholars program

courses being offered this semester. I had two medical scholars in the BY 110 honors course. Alyssa Schlatmann started to get a feel for research by attending the Metropolitan Association of College and University Biologists research conference along with the sophomores, juniors, and seniors from Monmouth who were presenting research projects.”

The committee also provides a composite letter of recommendation for each student who applies to professional schools. The letter includes input from science faculty as well as from three faculty members selected by the student. Prior to their professional school admission interviews, students may schedule practice interview sessions with the committee.

“I like the program a lot, the people in it are friendly and nice, and I’m looking at this program as being a step closer and a step ahead on the path towards med school,” said Tanvi Khurana, a junior who hopes to go into family practice.

During their senior year the students will also complete a semester-long preceptorship called “Experience in Clinical Medicine” at Monmouth Medical, which is about two miles from Monmouth University’s campus.

Once at Drexel, students will take foundation courses in medicine for the first two years and then clinical

clerkships at Drexel campuses in Philadelphia and Monmouth Medical Center for the remaining two years. The first clerkship is at Monmouth Medical.

But this program is not for the faint-hearted.

“They’re not only the best and the brightest. They’re leaders,” Mr. Jaeger said. “We develop them into the physicians we would want at our hospital.”

Candidates must pass through a rigorous selection process that involves three stages of review. The first of these stages is conducted by Monmouth University, which selects approximately eight to 12 students from among the incoming freshman class as candidates for the next stage in the selection process. Monmouth Medical Center next interviews and evaluates the candidates recommended by Monmouth University and selects six to 10 who will move on for final evaluation by Drexel University College of Medicine. Drexel conducts the final evaluation and notifies five candidates of their admission to the program.

Open only to New Jersey residents, the program requires a GPA of at least 3.5 and an SAT score of at least 1270 with neither individual score lower than 560.

The selection committees also look at the candidate’s desire to practice medicine and the likelihood of seeking a job at Monmouth Medical following graduation.

If selected, the student over the next

three years must then maintain a GPA of 3.45 in both science courses (biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics) and non-science courses, respectively. No single grade can be less than 2.0. The minimum GPA for the senior year must be at least 3.25.

But, Dr. Mack and Dr. Naik noted, Monmouth’s program fosters a well-rounded student, also requiring students to take two or more humanities courses like anthropology, ethics, philosophy, or sociology.

Drs. Mack and Naik run the medical scholar program in addition to their full-time positions here at Monmouth, making it obvious how dedicated they are to this program.

Drexel admits approximately 250 students each year into its medical school. Today, with more than 1,000 medical students, it is the largest private medical school in the country. There are about 550 residents, 600 clinical and basic science faculty, and more than 1,700 affiliate and volunteer faculty. While it is customary for medical schools to wait until the third year before allowing students patient contact, first year students at Drexel are given the opportunity to interact with patients almost from day one. A variety of teaching methods are employed by the school’s faculty including laboratories, small-group sessions, lectures, discussion groups, and clinical practice.

The Queens Lane campus, which opened in 1992, features lecture halls with sophisticated audio-visual equipment, a library, rooms for small group learning, a clinical learning laboratory that simulates doctors’ offices and hospital rooms, computer facilities, a fitness center, and student lounges.

Monmouth Medical Center, one of New Jersey’s largest community teaching hospitals, with 110 residents in eight accredited residency programs, offers healthcare services through 16 clinical departments with over 500 physicians and dentists.

“I don’t see an end to this program. I see it continuing to grow,” Mr. Jaeger enthusiastically said. **MU**