



Southern Methodist University

Pre-Dental Handbook



Revised March 2011

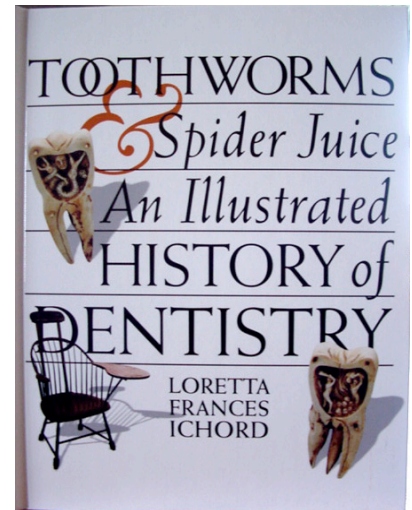
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Introduction

Over 15 years ago as I sat in a chair in the oral surgeon's office, I saw a small sign propped on a ledge near the window. I don't remember the exact wording – probably due to some anxiety as I waited. The substance of the message, however, remained with me: before we think days gone by represented some Golden Age, consider dental care.

According to a June 2010 BBC article: “This year the dental establishment celebrates 150 years since the first dental licence [sic]” The article also mentions extractions that used to be performed where not only the tooth came out but also part of the gum and bone as well. Dentistry is a lot different now, with an emphasis on prevention as well as treatment of oral diseases. Paul King, Bristol Dental Hospital, thinks the future of dentistry will be even more exciting, with advances in x-ray techniques and biological regeneration of teeth (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-10552644>).



This Application Guide is intended to assist you as you traverse one segment of your journey toward becoming a dentist – admission to dental school. Use this handbook as a road map, but keep in mind that it is neither the only resource you have available nor should it be substituted for the initiative you need in order to be an informed applicant. Make sure to look for signs. Follow directions on websites for the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDsas), the American Dental Association (ADA), the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), and individual dental schools.

Get Connected and Stay Connected

Pre-Dental Advising

As an SMU student you have access to the Pre-Med/Pre-Health Office and the advising services offered. See the Pre-Med/Pre-Health Advisor for questions directly related to your preparation for applying to dental school. Questions about your classes and the University curriculum should be directed to your academic or faculty advisor.

Dr. Karen de Olivares, Ph.D.
135 Dedman Life Sciences Building
P.O. Box 0272
Dallas, TX 75275
(214) 768-2308
kdeoliva@mail.smu.edu

Appointments can be scheduled with Dr. de Olivares by signing up on her Appointment Schedule (just inside the door to Room 135 DLSB) or phone (214) 768-2308.

Appointments are usually not scheduled via email because there can be delays in communication during which time someone else may have signed up for the time you intended to schedule.

Pre-Health Professions Listserv

If you haven't already joined the **Pre-Med/Pre-Health Listserv**, do so. This is the primary means by which you can receive announcements about workshops, meetings and when to sign up for an interview with the Health Professions Recommendation Committee (HPRC). To join the Pre-Med/Pre-Health Listserv go to Room 108 Clements Hall or Room 135 Dedman Life Science Building (DLSB). Fill out a Pre-Med/Pre-Health card.

Pre-Dental Discussion Group

Become involved in the Pre-Dental Discussion Group. The Pre-Dental Discussion Group is coordinated by dedicated students who take time out of their busy schedules to share what they have learned and done to prepare for admission. The group meets every other week during spring and fall semesters. Activities include: practicing DAT sample problems, talking with dentists, and participating in volunteer programs. Students share information about interviews, writing essays and filling out applications. Additionally, current dental school students have returned to talk about what it is like to be a dental school student. Jennifer Raad, Rishika Kapoor and Diana Revilla deserve special recognition for helping found the Pre-Dental Discussion Group. Even if you aren't able to join in the discussions every other week during a semester, you can still connect through volunteer activities.

Choosing Dentistry as a Profession



It's a big decision. The preparation takes years and the coursework is rigorous, but opportunities abound and the rewards are great. Dentistry is a profession to choose for its own sake; it is not an alternative taken up by default because medical school may be seen as too difficult to enter. Dentistry is equally difficult. You take many of the same courses as an undergraduate and admissions standards for dental school are high. In 2010 there were 832 unduplicated applications to the 3 dental schools in Texas; 384 applicants were interviewed; and, 194 offers of acceptance were extended. Thus, in Texas 23.31% of the applicants received an offer of acceptance. The average GPA for those accepted was 3.64 and the average DAT (AA) score was 19.6 (see www.utsystem.edu/tmdsas). The good news is that for SMU students the acceptance rate in recent years has ranged between 60% and 80%.

As mentioned above dentistry is a rewarding profession. You can learn more about dentistry as a profession from the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) websites and publications (see the Resources section of this handbook). The following is from the *2010 ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*:

The rewards of being a dentist are many, starting with the personal satisfaction dentists obtain from their daily professional accomplishments. Highly regarded by the community for their contributions to the well-being of citizens, dentists are often called upon to provide community consultation and services.

In addition, dentists are well compensated. The average income for a dentist is in the upper 5% of family incomes in the United States. Though incomes vary across the country and depend on the type of practice, the ADA reports that in 2007 the average net income for an independent private practitioner who owned all or part of his or her practice was \$205,960; it was \$353,280 for dental specialists. The net hourly income of dentists now exceeds that of family physicians, general internists, and pediatrician (p. 6).

Dentistry offers opportunities for people who want to engage in clinical practice, in education, in research, and in community service. Dentists go on mission trips, establish clinics in underserved areas and promote public health through programs and services that help educate. The ADEA also cites the following among reasons to choose a career in dentistry: patient loyalty and a lifestyle that is predictable and self-determined.

**University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio
Dental Student Research Program**

<http://dental.uthscsa.edu/research/dentalstudentresearch.php>

Research opportunities are available for this Summer for up to 15 dental students and incoming dental students at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The program begins at the end of the school term (end of May) and runs for six weeks, with students presenting their work in Spring at the American Association for Dental Research Annual meeting and the Dental School Science Symposium.

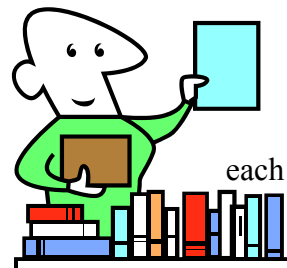
All participants selected will receive a total stipend of \$2,500 for the six week fellowship working full-time during Summer break. Students will perform hands-on research related to dental and craniofacial oral science in multidisciplinary areas such as: pain, biochemistry, genetics, pharmacology, immunology, wound healing, dental materials, implants, tooth movement, microbiology, oral health disparities, or molecular biology. In addition, all trainees will be required to participate in scientific seminars, workshops, and a lecture series.

Candidates will be selected by faculty mentors after an interview. Prior research experience is not necessary.

Reading about dentistry provides a place to start, but you should also make sure to talk with dentists and observe or work in a dental office. Meetings of the SMU Pre-Dental Discussion Group can give you a place to network and make connections you need to gain experience observing in a clinical setting. Talk with your own dentist about his or her work and ask if you can spend time observing. Shadowing, observing or working in a dental office is not about checking off a box or building a resume. It is about finding out if the profession is right for you. It's about nurturing your passion.

Undergraduate Coursework

Now that you have decided that you want to pursue a career in dentistry, there are courses you will need to take as pre-requisites to admission to a dental school. The pre-requisites for accredited dental schools are listed in the *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools* and on the dental schools' websites. You should make sure to check these out as schools vary somewhat, but in general plan to take at minimum the following science courses:

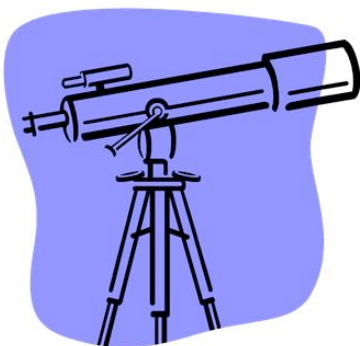


- 8 hours of general chemistry – Chem 1303/1113 and Chem 1304/1114
- 8 hours of introductory biology -- Biol 1401 and Biol 1402
- 8 hours of organic chemistry – Chem 3371/3117 and Chem 3372/3118
- 8 hours of physics – Phys 1307/1105 and Phys 1308/1106 OR
Phys 1303/1105 and Phys 1304/1106
- 6 hours of advanced biology – Biol 3304 and Biol 3350
- 3 hours of biochemistry – Biol 5310 and/or Biol 5311

The above classes are listed as a minimum. Frequently, dental school admissions committees expect much more. For example, we recommend pre-dental students take 6 hours of biochemistry and at least 2 additional advanced biological science courses chosen from among the following: Biol 3354 (Parasitology); Biol 3403 (Microbiology); Biol 3365 (Cancer Biology); Biol 5366/5166 (Vertebrate Anatomy); Biol 5325 (Virology); Biol 3306 (Physiology). Additional courses may be selected as well in consultation with your faculty advisor. Look at the courses dental schools recommend. They are listed for each school in *the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*. Check the list of recommended courses for the dental schools to which you intend to apply. There is a copy of the *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools* in the Pre-Med/Pre-Health Office (Room 135 DLSB).

The emphasis on science doesn't mean that classes outside the sciences aren't important; they are. Dental schools also may list as pre-requisites classes in mathematics, social sciences and humanities. These classes give breath to your understanding of yourself, your patients and the social world we inhabit. Enrolling in engineering and business classes are also choices students make.

Choosing a Major



Even as recently as 2008, pre-dental students were advised that they could select any major as long as they included in their curriculum the pre-requisites for dental school. Given an increasing emphasis by dental school admissions committees on classes in biological sciences, the ability to choose any major may be restricted. To be competitive at a number of dental schools, students should have a degree plan that includes recommended as well as required classes. Incorporating the recommended classes means that pre-dental students will aim toward at least a B.A. (and often a B.S.) in Biological Sciences. Doing so does not necessarily preclude taking classes for another major. At SMU students have often majored in more than one subject, or minor. Students may also arrive at SMU with AP and/or college credit that allows sufficient space in a 4-year degree plan for more than one major. Be cautious about keeping AP credit for introductory biology and chemistry classes. While AP classes can help prepare students for study at the undergraduate level, the AP test may not assure that you are ready for advanced level biology and chemistry classes at SMU. Schedule an appointment with your academic advisor to map out a degree plan that will meet your primary goal(s). It may not be possible to work in all your plans, but there are multiple opportunities to broaden horizons and have the well-rounded background valued in admissions decision-making.

Back-up Plan(s)

You read the statistics above. Applicants to dental school are not always successful, at least not the first time and sometimes not even the second or third time. Having a back-up plan is a good idea. The trick is to have a back-up plan that doesn't put obstacles in the way of potentially achieving your dream. For example, if you want to go to dental school, don't become so involved in activities that you don't allow enough time to study. You can still be part of the University and surrounding community. Pre-dental students are active in a variety of organizations, but successful students know they have to be focused. Use your first semester to find effective ways to maximize your study time. Services offered by the ALEC can help you with time management, test anxiety, note-taking, tutoring, speed reading and other study aids. Use these services! For the science classes you will be taking, plan to spend about 12-14 hours each week studying for each class. You may be in the library when your roommate is attending a social function ... but remember the rewards.

Periodically assess your progress toward your goal and ask yourself if you like what you are doing. Visit with your advisor and with the pre-med/pre-health advisor. One C grade in a class doesn't necessarily preclude acceptance to dental school, but a pattern of C grades or dropped classes should serve as a warning sign. The curriculum at dental school is intense; your undergraduate experience should prepare you to make it

when you get to dental school. You won't be able to suddenly gear up when you get there; and, gaining admission to dental school is very uncertain if you don't have a track record demonstrating you are ready for the challenge.

Your Portfolio

If what you are learning about preparing for dental school sounds like you have to do everything and do it well, you can relax a little. While doing things well is very important, you really don't have to do everything, and you shouldn't try to do everything. Select activities for the quality of the experience. Go for quality, not quantity.

On applications you will be asked to report your activities. Keep a record of what you do when. That record should include:

- Name of the Place/Event
- Date(s) of Participation
- Supervisor's name and contact information
- Number of Hours



Pre-Dental Student Michelle Clinton (left) at the Kaplan Suture Clinic

You may also want to keep a journal. This helps you to reflect on the experience and think about the meaning. Quality is about the value of an experience for others and for you. As you write about your experience think about what it meant in terms of others and in terms of your personal growth. Did it help you to understand more about dentistry? More about other people? More about yourself? About your strengths and limitations?

Key Ingredients

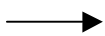
- ✚ Academic Work
- ✚ Exposure to Dental Profession
- ✚ Service/Volunteer

Whether you build an e-portfolio or keep a notebook, there are different formats you can use. You can keep a record at the beginning of an activity with the basic facts and then reflections can be written in a diary. Be careful though as you write. Use pseudonyms for the names of patients and when your comments involve other people. Additionally, distinguish between writing in different contexts. What you write in a journal to help you derive meaning from an experience may not belong in a public blog or on Facebook.

In your portfolio and/or journal you can also keep notes about the dental schools you research on-line and/or learn about by attending a special open house day sponsored

by the dental school. Some dental schools have open-house days and others do not. If you stay connected by subscribing to the SMU pre-health professions listserv, attending meetings of the Pre-Dental Discussion Group, and checking the News section of the SMU Pre-Med/Pre-Health website (<http://smu.edu/premed>) you can learn more about events that may be happening at dental schools. Additionally, look on the websites for the individual schools.

Staying on Track: Application Checklist and Timetable



Keep in mind that preparing for dental school is more than checking off items on a list. Use the Checklist and Timetable as guideline to frame your preparation. Your goal is to be a member of a profession, a life-long learner who has the academic ability, compassion and skills to practice dentistry. Aim toward being an informed applicant who will be admitted to dental school, do well once there **AND** be a dentist who earns the trust and respect of both colleagues and patients.

First Year

- Make sure you are connected, that you receive messages via the pre-health professions listserv.
- Attend meetings of the Pre-Dental Discussion Group, AED and MAPS. Meeting times are announced in email messages, flyers and posted under the News section of the Pre-Med/Pre-Health website. AED and MAPS have websites with information about the organizations and how you can join.
- Learn more about the dental profession by:
 - checking out websites such as explorehealthcareers.org
 - observing dentists
 - volunteering at clinics and special events
- Get to know your professors. Visit during office hours. Learn about their research (see the SMU departmental websites). Suggestion: instead of meeting to discuss grades, talk about your goals and what you are learning.
- Select an extracurricular activity in which you would like to be involved. Participate and go to meetings. Learn how you can be a leader in that group or for that activity.
- Attend review sessions that are offered for different classes.
- Develop connections with other students in class, and join/form a study group.

- Learn about and use the resources available through the Altshuler Learning Enhancement Center (ALEC). If you are enrolled in a section of Oracle, you will work on developing study skills, test-taking strategies and managing your time. The ALEC also offers special workshops on these topics as well as many more. You should have a time management plan that allows for plenty of study hours. Develop a plan early in the semester and try to stick to it.
- Apply for summer programs.

Second Year

- Attend Pre-Dental Discussion Group meetings.
- Join AED and/or MAPS
- Put forth your best academic effort. Work on correcting identified weaknesses in your academic skills. For example, if you are a slow reader seek help from the ALEC.
- Investigate different dental schools by looking at the schools' websites and the *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*, available in the Pre-Med/Pre-Health Office. Look at:
 - the type of curriculum
 - whether or not the school accepts out-of-state applicants and how many
 - the school's philosophy or mission statement and the patient base
 - cost of an education
 - consider statistics like the mean GPA and DAT scores for accepted applicants
 - special pre-requisites for that school
 - recommended classes
- Continue learning about the dental profession by:
 - reading journal articles
 - volunteering at clinics or special events
 - observing dentists and/or working in a dental office
- Continue to visit with professors.
- If you are interested in research opportunities, talk with your academic or faculty advisor about how you can begin.
- Broaden your knowledge by:

- attending special lectures offered by the University
 - attending lectures sponsored by faculty members
 - reading on a variety of topics and becoming familiar with the resources available through the SMU libraries.
- Continue your involvement with one or two extracurricular activities. Apply for a leadership position with a student organization or run for office.
 - Apply for summer internship/research programs, employment, study abroad programs or SMU-in-Taos.

Third Year

The following presumes you intend to apply for the entry year immediately following earning your undergraduate degree. If you intend a gap year or are a nontraditional applicant, the points listed below will be pertinent to the year you apply to dental school.

- Make this your best year academically by taking challenging courses and doing well in them.
- Continue to attend Pre-Dental Discussion Group, AED and MAPS meetings.
- November: **Attend an Application 101 Workshop** (see “The Blue Folder).
- November – December: Schedule an appointment with Dr. de Olivares to discuss your plan for preparing for the DAT and application process. If you are planning to study abroad during your junior year, make sure you communicate with Dr. de Olivares prior to leaving for your study abroad experience.
- December: Begin work on your application essay, also called the personal statement.
- December – January: Using the form provided in the Application 101 Workshop, ask professors for recommendations. Make sure you follow directions given at the Workshop and on the form. There are specific requirements for letters of recommendation.
- January – June): Intensive DAT preparation. Some students enroll in commercial prep courses; others structure their own preparation. Students in the Pre-Dental Discussion group who have taken the DAT can be helpful and there are resources available through the American Dental Association website.
- February 15: Deadline for receiving documents for the Health Professions Recommendation Committee (HPRC) interview, see “The Blue Folder.”
- Mid March: Sign up for a HPRC interview.

- Late March through early May: HPRC interviews.
- April – June: **Attend the Application 102 Workshop.** Schedule an appointment with Dr. de Olivares to review your essay (personal statement). Take the DAT.
- May – June: Begin work on your application. READ ALL instructions carefully. Be familiar with the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS) <http://www.utsystem.edu> and the American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS).
- On or before June 30: Turn in ID numbers needed to post your letters of recommendation. Your letters will be posted after your application is submitted, during the time period (usually about 4 weeks) that your application is being processed by the application service(s).

Fourth Year

- Mid June to early July: Submit your application and arrange to have your transcript(s) sent to the application service(s). Getting your application in early is important, particularly for those applying to Texas dental schools. Even though the application deadline is September 30 (for the 2011 application), submitting early and without errors, helps ensure timely processing and review.
- June – July: Complete secondary applications if applicable.
- Fall Term: Continue to do well in your classes. Attend meetings of the Pre-Dental Discussion Group, AED and MAPS. Share your experiences with new students, sophomores, and juniors.
- Fall Term: Dental school interviews. Talk with professors about the interview process and ask them about how to manage interview days that may be scheduled during class time.
- Respond without delay to offers of acceptance. You can make an appointment to talk with Dr. de Olivares if you have questions about this process. Let Dr. de Olivares know about acceptances, rejections and wait-listings.
- December: When grades are posted you may need to send a copy of your transcript to schools. Procedures vary so follow instructions from the school or schools where you have been accepted.*

*Note: While it is okay to accept multiple offers and carefully consider your choice, you should respectfully decline offers from schools when you have chosen to attend another school. Remember, even if you do not plan to attend a school all communications should

be professional. You are representing SMU and you also have an obligation to future applicants.

Choosing a Dental School

Each year there are SMU pre-dental students in the enviable position of choosing among multiple offers of acceptance. While you may seek the guidance of family, friends, and advisors the choice is an individual one and it is your choice. The following questions are suggested to help you sort through making that decision:

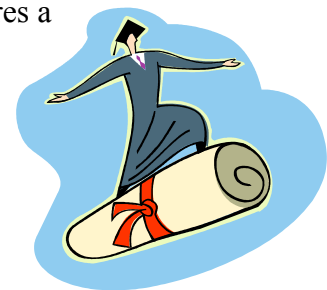
- How is the curriculum structured at each school?
- What are the testing, scoring and grading procedures?
- If you are interested in research, are there opportunities to pursue your interest?
- How much patient contact is there throughout the four years?
- What are the laboratory and teaching facilities like?

The decision you make may depend also on less objective criteria. A city or a location might hold a particular appeal. A family member or friend of the family may have attended a particular school. You may have friends who are planning to go to the school. You may need to consider job opportunities for a spouse, or schools and childcare arrangements for children. These practical and/or subjective considerations may be just as important as what you discover through objective analysis of the curriculum, grading and facilities. Don't disregard them because careful thought about your living environment may help you devote your time and energies to your dental school studies.

The Blue Folder

During the academic year in which you plan to apply to dental school, attend an Application 101 Workshop. You receive The Blue Folder at the workshop you attend. These workshops are held in November with make-up sessions in January. If possible attend a November workshop. You will then be able to work on the required documents during semester break.

Submitting a competitive application to dental school requires a great deal of forethought. If you hope to be admitted following graduation from SMU you will be preparing throughout your undergraduate years (see Application checklist and Timetable), with more intensive work on the actual process in your junior year. There is, however, nothing wrong with taking a year or two between when you graduate and entry to dental school. Ideally, this should be a choice you make ahead of time, and not one that happens due to a lack of preparation.



Components of the Pre-Med/Pre-Health File

When you attend the Mandatory Workshop you receive a list of documents needed for your Pre-Med/Pre-Health file. These include:

- Personal Information Sheet
- Expanded Resume – this includes not only a brief description of the activity but also what it meant to you
- Photo
- Unofficial transcripts from other colleges, if the work is not noted on your Degree Progress Report (DPR) or SMU transcript
- Individual Letters of Recommendation
- Individual Waiver Forms (these accompany the letters of recommendation)
- A Draft of Your Essay
- Pre-Med DPR (supplied by the Pre-Med Office)
- SMU Unofficial Transcript (supplied by the Pre-Med Office)

Health Professions Recommendation Committee

Setting up a pre-med/pre-health file enables you to schedule an interview with the Health Professions Recommendation Committee (HPRC). The HPRC interview is a service provided to you as an SMU student. Approximately 20 faculty members and staff serve on the HPRC. They represent different schools and departments throughout the University, and have experience working with pre-dental students. Use the interview to practice for a real dental school interview. The 2 to 3 person panel you meet with will discuss your qualifications with you. They help you identify strengths and weaknesses in your application and how you present yourself in an interview situation. Panel members submit their comments to the Chair of the HPRC, who writes the letter of evaluation sent to dental schools. This letter of evaluation accompanies selected, individual letters of recommendation you have requested from professors, employers and a practicing dentist, thus in many ways the HPRC interview is also “real.”

Although the HPRC letter of evaluation is not an absolute requirement, dental schools often list the Committee letter as “preferred.” It is “preferred” because some undergraduate institutions do not offer this service for students. SMU has done so for many years and dental schools’ admissions staff and faculty know it is available for SMU students. Be aware of application deadlines, requirements and set up an appointment to review your file for completeness. Once you get connected, stay connected.

On-Line Resources

This list is intended to give you a place to start. You can also find other resources through the SMU libraries, faculty advisors, and peers.

- <http://smu.edu/premed> Use the premed website to check for news, information on summer programs areas not covered in this handbook, for example see “Tips on Writing Your Essay” or check out the Reading List.
- <http://www.explorehealthcareers.org> This website was constructed and is maintained by the American Dental Education Association. You can learn about dentistry, as well as other health professions careers. Additionally, the website has information on summer programs.
- <http://www.adea.org> This website provides links to AADSAS and the DAT. Use this website to also learn more about dentistry as a profession.
- <http://www.ada.org> The American Dental Association (ADA) is the professional organization for dentists. Use this website to learn more about dentistry and keep up with news within the profession.
- <http://www.histden.org/drupal/> This is a link to a journal containing articles about the history of dentistry. Consider entering the essay contest.
[Content to be inserted]

Advice from a Dental School Student

“The main thing I would suggest to first-year students considering dental school is to become organized and have a plan.” Sara recommends students keep a folder containing their research about dental schools and questions they may have regarding dental school. She also suggests students look up and keep a list of requirements for the dental schools in which they are interested. “Organization,” Sara states, “is the attribute that will make life so much easier in terms of getting into dental school and surviving it once in.”

Sara also says that her studies at dental school require her to be very detail oriented. “I highly recommend that students start practicing and developing their memorization skills.: She states that her first year at dental school she “struggled” because she was learning “how to memorize tiny details as I was taking 15-20 science courses.” She suggest some ways students can develop skills needed to manage all the material:

- condense your notes
- make tables, charts, etc.
- repetition

Sara also recommends that students “study abroad and really immerse themselves in another culture.” She did this her senior year and states: “It was the best decision I ever made because I learned so much, not only about myself, but about others and the world at large as well.”

