

Medical Mysteries: A Journey Through the Brain and College Life

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FIYS 106 Medical Mysteries- Class of Fall 2006

Medical Mysteries: Neuroscience in Chicago, a first year class taught by Dr. Shubhik DebBurman, is fully equipped to prepare freshmen for their road ahead as college students. Although Medical Mysteries has the reputation of being one of the hardest and most time consuming of all first year classes, it is also one of the most interesting and rewarding. High expectations for the class are set at the beginning of the semester, causing students to dive head first into the college experience. However, at the end of a four month period, students learn that what may have been daunting at first is well worth the time and effort.

The first day of class is a memorable one for all of Dr. DebBurman's students, as they discover the potential for academic growth as the syllabus is discussed. Most are left feeling overwhelmed and dread the weeks that lie ahead of them. The course goals, which at one point felt more like unreachable expectations, consist of developing communication and professional writing skills, learning how to approach group projects, and partaking in outreach assignments.

Dr. DebBurman, or as students like to call him, Dr. D, is a dedicated professor who devotes his time to his classes. Although many dislike the early morning walks to class and the dark classroom while reading the endless progression of overheads, most students are inspired by Dr. D's enthusiasm and passion for science.

I had the opportunity to be in Medical Mysteries as a freshman in 2005, where I found joy in discovering the many mysteries of the brain. Besides lecture, lab met once a week, which gave students the opportunity to examine human brains with their fellow peers. Brain anatomy, the lab class and a highlight for most, allows students to develop a better understanding of the many complexities of the brain. In this lab, students are left on their own to explore the different structures and functions of the human brain. Labs are followed by weekly quizzes and projects, which range from ethics to outreach research assignments, such as the annual Brain Awareness Week.

In the fall of 2006, the FIYS106 Medical Mysteries and BIO346 Molecular Neuroscience students partook in the Third Annual Brain Awareness Week at Lake Forest College. In 2006, I was given the opportunity to peer-teach the FIYS106 class. Having been in the previous years' class, I was well aware of the how intimidating the project was and the extensive

preparation needed in order to succeed. This community outreach project, which educates a non-scientific community on current neuroscience research and mysteries of the brain, is accomplished by collaboration between biology mentors (BIO346 students), peer teachers, and the first year students. Freshman and upper-classmen use a mentoring system in which advanced neuroscience students guide medical mysteries students with research and serve as their educational advisees. After the completion of Brain Awareness Week, which is fondly referred to as the "week from hell," students have learned how to conduct research, communicate publicly, express neuroscience to the community, and accomplish goals in group situations. Participants serve as an informative tool for the community and are provided with life long skills that would not have been achieved without strenuous work. Even though the project is a challenge and one of the most demanding assignments a freshman or any college student can undertake, students feel a sense of gratification as they attain this accomplishment.

Although this class provides most students with stressful days and late nights, it is rare to hear negative comments from a student regarding the class. Medical Mysteries will not allow you to have the typical social life one may envision for freshmen year, but rather will entail a semester spent in the library or in your dorm lounges reading for class, preparing for a quiz, or getting together with your group to finish up your project. With all this work, however, it is well worth the effort. As a peer teacher and a previous student, I can say that it has been one of my favorite classes. It not only teaches basic knowledge of the brain, but you also learn time management, one of the most valuable lessons for any college student. Medical Mysteries is a harsh awakening to college life, yet it puts its students one step ahead of the game.

Overall, the class is rich in diversity and is a preview of the next three years of college. Do not be misled by the course title; this course is created for both science and non-science majors. I believe its intent is not only to provide students with all the specifics in neuroscience, but also to prepare them for professional experiences, college life, and life in general. This class gives insight into works of the scientific community, allowing students to develop a scientific appreciation and a sense of what it means to be a scientist. I myself was unsure whether to pursue a science career. After this class, however, not only was I more intrigued by the brain, but I was drawn further into the field of science itself. Science classes are time consuming, labs are mandatory, and reading and writing are a must. It is not an easy ride, but it is a fulfilling one. Medical Mysteries: Neuroscience in Chicago is challenging and exhausting, yet a pleasing and rewarding journey through the brain and the college life.

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