

# ALUMNI UPDATE

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I had four different majors at the University of Miami: computer science, mathematics, biology, and finally philosophy. I didn't know what I wanted to do when I got to the University of Miami. When I left I had learned that your major doesn't have to be critical to what you do after graduation. I am proud to be the only student with a B.A. in Philosophy at the University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry.

I think that philosophy has helped me tremendously in my path to and through dental school. When I started, I took philosophy classes because I enjoyed them. I never really thought they were anything more than entertaining intellectual stimulation: a delightful general education credit on the transcript of a relatively lazy pre-med/pre-dental student who enjoyed something outside of evolution and electromagnetic waves. Philosophy classes were scheduled to fit my desired college lifestyle. The professors that wore Birkenstocks and rode their bikes to work didn't want to be in class on Fridays, and neither did I. By my senior year, I was tired of all those science-y classes but still enjoyed the philosophy. I decided that I could get more value from learning to express complicated ideas clearly in an advanced philosophy class than I could from botany, zoology, or whatever it is that finishing a B.S. in biology would have required. So I switched majors at the last minute and took a crash course in philosophy. That year was so valuable because I really learned how to express myself and how to understand others.

I certainly believe that my philosophical education helped me get into dental school. I believe it set me apart. UCSF received over 2500 applications the year I applied and interviewed more than 250 people. The class size that matriculated was 85. I was one of 85 out of over 2500. I have to believe that the Philosophy major must have been memorable. I tried to set myself apart in other ways as well (when everyone else had white shirts and dark conservative ties, I was wearing a blue shirt with a pink tie. "What the hell? It's San Francisco"), but I think the philosophy major must have meant something.

Once I tricked them into letting me in, I wanted to try to put some of this philosophy to use. Sure, all the biology, chemistry, and biochemistry may have helped me a bit more through the first two (rather boring) years of dental school. I think philosophy helped make those first two years a bit more interesting, and gave me a unique perspective from which to frame the information we were being given. For example, I remember thinking about Thomas Kuhn's paradigm changes during a lecture by one of our famous and talented oral surgeons as he was discussing how the way we view pain has changed over the years. It was not a lecture I will soon forget, and if you've ever been to a heavy handed dentist you are probably glad to hear that. I also believe that philosophy prepared me to interact with my patients in a way that test tubes and Bunsen burners could not. In the scientific curriculum there is very little emphasis placed on being able to present specific ideas to others without a sufficient level of expertise. This is a skill that I believe is lost on professionals with only scientific training. I continue to be happy with my undergraduate major and believe that it has served me well in my attempt to be a well rounded professional.

Continuing my pursuit of well-roundedness, after UM I returned to the scientific world. UCSF is after all the preeminent dental research institute in the entire world. I figured I should give it a try. As a bonus, last year the national research conference was in Miami, and I wouldn't want to pass up a trip back to my alma mater. The title of my presentation at the conference was: "Dynamic Light Scattering and Zeta-potential of Self-Assembled Human Amelogenins." And yes, I had to look that up as I'm writing this. I went from Aristotle to Amelogenins, but I wasn't completely out of philosophy. I got to present my work at a few scientific sessions and student research competitions. Again, I think that my previous training allowed me to present what I knew about my complicated topic to those without my specific level of expertise. I was able to explain rather than simply spout facts. I managed to win one of the competitions and like to tell people I finished fourth in the others (I only know that I didn't finish in the top three). So much like philosophy, I had no background in research, but found it interesting and took it to heart. I have since moved on, but I think the lessons from that experience should help me in the future much as philosophy has.

I would say that the lesson I most appreciate from the University of Miami was the value of being well rounded. I have tried to appreciate that value as my education has continued, and I hope to continue that trend into my professional career. I am grateful to the philosophy department for bending the rules and allowing me to take that crash course in philosophy and I would like to specifically thank Dr Harvey Siegel for all of his support. When I started this, I felt as if I hadn't done enough since graduation to fill an alumni update, but I hope to have shown how one philosophy major took a different path and still manages to use the lessons almost every day. You probably guessed that one thing I haven't done very often since graduating is write, so I'll end your suffering with a big 'Go Canes!'