

As an applicant, the major appeal of SUNY Downstate to me was the strong and incomparable clinical experiences for students. Prior to medical school, I had worked in another one of HHC's large urban county hospitals that was very similar to Kings County, and having the opportunity to begin my medical training in such an environment was very important to me. I really enjoyed working with underserved patient populations – patient education and teaching patients about their bodies, illnesses, and health preventive measures is not only important for helping those in need, but also an amazing learning opportunity for physicians in training to have as they develop their own knowledge about medicine and their own style of practice. I also thought that the unique challenges that come from working in an extremely busy public hospital would prepare me better for residency and a future career; this stood out to me about Downstate compared to many other schools. I am also a native of New York who wanted to be close to family and friends during medical school. I knew that it was going to be a very challenging four years, and having a strong support system outside of medicine was very important to me. Downstate being close to home was an added bonus, but definitely something that I benefited from during my time here.

Now as a fourth year medical student who is a few months from graduating, I can confidently say that I made the right choice in deciding to come here. The Integrated Pathways Curriculum that Downstate introduced during my first year allowed us to spend only 1.5 years in the classroom during our preclinical years (compared to the traditional 2 years), therefore allowing us to start our clinical rotations earlier, which gave us more time in the hospital. The 1.5 preclinical years were rigorous, but the faculty was very supportive, and perhaps the most valuable resources during this time were my fellow classmates. This was probably one of my favorite things about Downstate – my classmates. People were always willing to share study guides, work together, and just help each other out after a long day. I have made many lifelong friends, but also found that the culture of Downstate is such that even those students who you may not know as well are just as willing to help each other. The opportunity to have a longer clinical curriculum was also great, as it added time to our fourth year schedule. This was especially helpful in regards to giving students time to enroll in more electives and time to explore more fields as we were making decisions about what fields to go into.

The third and fourth year clinical experience as a whole was fantastic. I had a very diverse experience. Most of my rotations took place at Kings County Hospital, which provided me with the urban public hospital experience I was looking for, but also allowed me the opportunity to rotate at a few different hospitals, including the Brooklyn Veterans Affairs Hospital and Northwell Health, which I found to be a helpful and important part of my education. Each hospital had a unique patient population and a different structure that allowed me to see how different health systems were run, and I also learned the challenges of caring for and interacting with those of many different cultural backgrounds. In a borough as diverse as Brooklyn, I learned a tremendous amount about cultural competency and the importance of incorporating patients' unique social needs into their care, something that may not have been emphasized as strongly elsewhere.

The strength of the clinical experience also lived up to and at times exceeded my expectations. During the first year, students are all assigned to a primary care preceptor who they work with once a week. During October of my first year, at my first visit with my preceptor, I was able to see a patient and take a complete history on my own, with great feedback and guidance from my preceptor – as a first year student, this was amazing! From so early on, it taught me so much about what is clinically important to look for, and how to interact with patients. During my third and fourth year, working in an environment as high volume as Kings County, I learned a lot about how to be resourceful on a busy medical team. I had many hands-on and technical procedure-based experiences, but also learned a lot about how to take accountability for your patients, and felt that there was a great balance between independence and autonomy in regards to my responsibilities. Help was always there when needed, but I was also trusted and expected to see patients on my own when appropriate for a student. When it came time to decide on a career field, I also felt that I had great support from the faculty in regards to mentorship, guidance, and research opportunities. Physicians who I met during my clinical rotations were all very approachable and happy to offer advice or just a conversation about my thoughts regarding the right specialty for me. I learned a tremendous amount during my four years at Downstate – I definitely feel that my education here has prepared me well for residency, and I am grateful for the opportunities that I had here!