

My name is Salvatore, and I am a fourth-year medical student at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. When I was asked if I would like to write briefly about what brought me to Downstate, and what my experience here has been like, I jumped at the chance. That's because I believe so strongly in the strength of this program, and in how well it has prepared me as I move on to the next phase in my training.

I went to undergraduate school at Binghamton University, also part of the SUNY system. There I received an excellent education and ample opportunity, which prepared me well for the challenge of applying to American medical schools, all within a reasonable price. Naturally, that experience drove me to see what opportunities the SUNY medical schools had to offer. I considered all the SUNY medical schools, and some private ones as well. At that time, however, I did not know where I really wanted to go. That changed as soon as I walked through the doors of Downstate. During my tour and through speaking with students and residents, I began to see a pattern emerge in the culture of Downstate, one of independence and exposure. I also learned my year would mark the launch of a brand-new curriculum, which focused on the integrated learning of physiology and pathology, with a self-directed approach to learning. I was also assured that I would see everything at Downstate, thanks to its unique patient population, and that my learning would be hands-on. All of this, along with the price, made Downstate very appealing, but what really drew me in during my interview day was an incredible gut feeling, which told me that this is where I belonged. From that moment on, my heart was set on Downstate, and now looking back, I can say it was one of the best decisions of my life.

So now the important part. Now that my time at Downstate is drawing to a close, what was my experience like? Well, I can say all that I was promised came true, and then some. The first year and a half consists of the Integrated Pathways Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to promote independent learning, allowing each student to tailor their experience to their own unique learning style. Love lectures? They are there, covering everything you need to know. Prefer solo learning? Every resource is made available to you through the school and your class, so that all the information you need is at your fingertips. If group learning is your style, a variety of different interactive experiences help you synthesize the massive amount of med school data. The curriculum also utilizes a Pass/Fail system which encourages cooperation, not competition, among students, and all evaluation takes place at the end of the individual units (similar to blocks), which means you can learn at your own pace which does wonders for stress levels. They also utilize questions directly from the National Board of Medical Examiners for some of the end-of-unit exams, which truly helps prepare you for the dreaded STEP 1 exam that all med students take at the end of their basic science years. In that first iteration of the integrative Pathways curriculum, I was so prepared for the STEP 1 exam that I achieved flying marks, and the class as a whole did better than the national average. Since then, the curriculum has been refined and modified, with the faculty and administration being tremendously receptive to student input. Another new and extremely useful aspect of the new curriculum is a focus on clinical skills and patient care, which prepared us greatly for the unique challenges of our clinical years.

While my time during the basic science years was massively useful, it was the clinical years at Downstate that were the most memorable. Downstate's location, in the heart of one of the most underserved communities in NY, lends itself to some incredible experiences. Patients of poor socioeconomic status, or who are new immigrants, often present with rare diseases, unique presentations, and other social or financial challenges. This situation also provides for an environment where students are not only passive observers, but are relied upon to participate in patient care in a real way. You will find yourself seeing your own patients, developing your own opinions, performing procedures, and participating in ways that many other institutions cannot or will not offer. The patients here have a sense of trust and gratitude, and will appreciate you as

you “lay hands” and work with them so closely. Couple this amazing experience with dedicated faculty and a wide variety of available electives and extracurriculars, and together a truly incredible environment for learning, personal development, and career preparation is created.

As I write this, I am making my rank list. Thanks to Downstate’s excellent education, the research opportunities and extracurricular involvement available here, and the guidance and experience I have received, my rank list includes the very top hospitals in the nation. As I interviewed at those prestigious institutions, I was so grateful that Downstate had so well prepared me for my career in medicine that I could rival the applications of Ivy League grads, all for a fraction of the price (and while staying close to home, I’m from Staten Island). In summary, all I can say is that if during your tour you get the sense that Downstate is somewhere you could be happy, follow that instinct. Rest assured that Downstate has every opportunity you could need to launch your medical career and become a leader in your chosen field, so long as you have the motivation to work hard, get involved, and take advantage of all the school offers. I wish you all luck in your search, and in your future careers. No matter where you go, give it your all!

Warm regards and well-wishes,  
Salvatore, SUNY Downstate Class of 2017