PRE PITT MED

Alexis Chidi doesn't know if she wants to get her MD immediately or after earning a master’s degree in public health. She's captivated by basic neuroscience, yet economics, French, and political science intrigue her as well.

As a University of Pittsburgh rising junior, the Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif., native has some time to make her decision. Chidi knows that if she finishes her undergrad years with a 3.7 GPA or higher and participates in appropriate medicine-related extracurricular activities, she's guaranteed admission to the School of Medicine. The “freshman guarantees” program attracts top high schoolers to Pitt by promising them a place in the University’s graduate and professional schools. The program accepts about five pre-med students a year.

Chidi has a relaxed manner which belies her drive. After her freshman year at Pitt—she matriculated at 16—Chidi did a summer undergrad research fellowship at the California Institute of Technology, during which she studied language generation as it relates to defects of the corpus callosum, the structure that connects the brain's hemispheres. She developed and led the project and, as she says jokingly, “Got a team of grad students to push around.”

This summer, she may investigate stem cell research through a National Science Foundation program. Or, maybe, land a public health internship in Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger’s office. Perhaps she’ll work on a service-learning project in Tanzania. Or she might just take some more courses in organic chemistry.

Chidi says she’ll figure it all out between classes, sorority soccer team games, and her duties related to serving in the student government, as vice president of her sorority, and on the Pitt Program Council.

—Joe Miksch
—Photo by Derek Wahila