

Example 1

Roughly a year ago, I was sitting in math class with my friend, Rachel, talking about what careers we wanted to pursue. We had both recently been accepted into the University of Michigan, and we knew our opportunities were endless. The medical field has always been my primary interest, while Rachel is interested in engineering. As the year went on and Rachel told me more about engineering and its different branches, my interest grew. I did not, however, want to steer away from medicine. Rachel then told me about biomedical engineering, which her aunt introduced her to. Although her aunt graduated with an engineering degree, she proceeded onto medical school and became a doctor. This path of education immediately interested me, and it is something I have always wanted to know more about. Since learning about Rachel's aunt, I have strongly considered majoring in engineering and then continuing onto medical school. This interview was the perfect opportunity for me to meet Rachel's aunt, who is a doctor at the University Hospital. Despite her busy work schedule, Dr. Jennifer Schwartz made time for an interview with me. I may have met with her for only forty-five minutes, but in that short time she graciously provided me with an abundance of information about her life, encouraged me to continue on with my current education plans, and inspired me to consider new options for my future.

My first question for Dr. Schwartz was what kind of schooling did she go through to get to where she is today, and how long did it take? Dr. Schwartz was very friendly and easy to talk with, and while she was answering my questions, we found that we had a lot in common. Our first similarity is the fact that we both chose the University of Michigan for our undergraduate educations. When Dr. Schwartz started college here in Ann Arbor, she thought she wanted to do medicine. She did not know, however, what to major in. Her parents encouraged her to look into engineering, for if she decided down the road that she no longer wanted to become a doctor,

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engineering would provide her with a reliable back-up career plan. This advice is similar to the advice my parents and grandfather shared with me after graduating from high school. Dr. Schwartz loved math and science in high school, so she decided to major in electrical engineering and computer science (EECS). I, too, loved math and science in high school, which is why I am considering transferring to the College of Engineering.

Her undergraduate degree took her four years, and when she graduated, she was still interested in medicine. Dr. Schwartz had completed the prerequisites for medical school, but because she did not major in biology or a similar science subject, she felt as though she lacked the necessary biological foundation for medical school. She was also still interested in continuing her engineering education, so she began to search for a graduate degree that would transition her into medicine while still honing in on her engineering skills. After exploring her options, Dr. Schwartz chose biomedical engineering. To obtain this two-year master's degree, she moved to Urbana-Champaign, Illinois with her boyfriend, who is now her husband. Here they both attended the University of Illinois. Within these two years, Dr. Schwartz took classes that applied to both of her interests: engineering and medicine.

Following her master's degree, Dr. Schwartz attended medical school at Northwestern University in Chicago. Although she was eight years into her education at this point, she still did not know what kind of doctor she wanted to be. She was exposed to many different disciplines during medical school, and for several reasons, dermatology fascinated her the most. Like myself, Dr. Schwartz has always been a very visually oriented person, and she found that dermatology relies heavily on visuals for things such as mole mapping and pattern recognition. Dermatology is also very technologically based with tools such as imaging and telemedicine. As her undergraduate degree suggests, Dr. Schwartz loves working with computers and other

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technology. Dermatology fulfilled both her medicine interests and her engineering interests, so Dr. Schwartz spent the next four years becoming a dermatologist. She remained at Northwestern for another year to complete an internship before moving back to Ann Arbor to start her three-year residency. In total, Dr. Schwartz went to school for fourteen years before she got her first job as a dermatologist at the University Hospital. As a freshman in college, fourteen years sounds overwhelming, but Dr. Schwartz made dermatology sound very intriguing, and it is definitely something I will consider for my future.

Although I stated that I have always been interested in medicine, I have had my doubts about becoming a doctor. My mother is a doctor, and seeing how hard and how often she works is inspiring, but I also see the toll it takes on her. It can be a very rewarding job but also a very stressful one, and my mother often wishes she had more time to spend with her four children and husband. Because my biggest priority will be having enough time to spend with family, my next question for Dr. Schwartz was a very important one: how do you balance your career with your family and personal life, and what does a typical workweek look like for you? Speaking with Dr. Schwartz reminded me that doctors do not have to always work as often as my mother, and different fields offer varying amounts of flexibility.

In the dermatology field, Dr. Schwartz has the flexibility to tailor her schedule to fit her and her family's needs. When she first began her career, she worked a typical five-day workweek; however, eight years ago, Dr. Schwartz and her husband adopted two daughters. Following the adoption process, Dr. Schwartz decided to cut down her weekly hours. Since then, she has spent two days a week at home with her children and three days of the week working at the hospital. Dr. Schwartz specializes in melanoma, so she spends one of her three workdays consulting with newly diagnosed patients and the other two days doing procedures such as skin

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surgery. This schedule allows Dr. Schwartz to spend time with her daughters, Kate and Carrie, while maintaining her position as a dermatologist. On her days off, she can be involved in things such as field trips, class readings, and other daily activities that a full time schedule would not leave time for.

While we were discussing her role as a mother and her role as a dermatologist, Dr. Schwartz explained that women put too much pressure on themselves to be involved. Many women struggle to find a balance between work and being a mother, just as we have spent weeks discussing in UC 107. Often times, women feel pressure from their employers to focus their energy on work. I was surprised to learn that the dermatology department at the University Hospital is very supportive of Dr. Schwartz's decision to work three days a week. She explained that not all doctors work in such an understanding department, and it can be very challenging to meet the requirements of both roles: doctor and mom. Dr. Schwartz has always put family first, however, and it was encouraging to meet a successful doctor who has is satisfied with the amount of time she gets to spend with her family. It reassures me that I, too, can become a doctor and find time for my family.

As our conversation about women continued, I asked Dr. Schwartz about the male to female ratio in her work environment. I was shocked to find out that the dermatology department has slightly more female doctors than male doctors. Dr. Schwartz pointed out, however, that dermatology is one of the few departments where this is the case. There is hope, though. During her last fourteen years in the department, she has noticed a continuous increase in the number of female doctors. More women are going to medical school and more women are receiving specialty training. Dr. Schwartz, herself, received two years of specialty training in melanoma at the U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center. She also received specialty training in cutaneous

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surgery treatment of benign and malignant lesions.

It amazed me to listen to all that Dr. Schwartz has accomplished on top of being a highly involved mother. Not only is she a successful doctor, she is also an active researcher. Since 2000, Dr. Schwartz has been a participating investigator of two studies focusing on melanoma, non-melanoma skin cancer, and precancer. Since 2001, she has been involved with a study dealing with continuation of a melanoma clinical database. I can imagine that there are times when Dr. Schwartz feels pressure to spend more time at work or more time in the lab, but she does an excellent job of finding the balance between work and home life. Dr. Schwartz seemed very content as we were wrapping up the interview, so I asked her if there is anything she would do differently if she were to do everything over again. Her response was promising: “What I am doing now, I would not change it for anything. It is perfect.” It was a pleasure to meet Dr. Schwartz, and I hope that one day I will be able to say the same thing.