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IPAC Student Bio
Amelia Denby

Hello, my name is Amelia Denby. I am in my first year of medicine at University of Alberta. I am from a rural area near the town of Stony Plain, Alberta. I decided to go to medical school for a few reasons. First, I have always enjoyed learning about anatomy and physiology. In addition, I want to pursue a career that contributes to society in a meaningful and vital way. Finally, I chose to be a physician because there is great demand for physicians and I know I will never be out of a job.

I knew before entering high school that I wanted to be a doctor so I made sure to take all the science courses including biology, physics and chemistry. Next, I did four years in the general science program at University of Alberta with a major in biology and minor in arts psychology. I went to a session at the University before registering so that I knew what courses were required to apply for medicine later. I also took some native studies courses as arts options, including a course on native health issues. I chose to live in an apartment in Stony Plain and commute to Edmonton for most of my undergrad so I worked part time at Dairy Queen year round and also worked labour jobs in the summer to help cover expenses. I also had a student loan and some scholarships and bursaries. I gained some experience in the medical field by volunteering once a week in the Misericordia Hospital in Edmonton in the emergency ward. I volunteered for various other things in undergrad including a science day for grade six girls and fundraising for Children's Miracle Network. In the summer after my third year, I studied during breaks at work and wrote the MCAT in August. This is also about the time when I began to

prepare my applications to medicine at the University of Alberta and University of Calgary.

There were a few challenges getting into medical school. First, it was difficult to keep my grades up when I was not always interested in my required courses, such as chemistry. Next, I had to ask some unconventional sources for reference letters for my application. References from professors are recommended but I didn't feel that many of my professors knew me at all from such large classes in undergraduate. I asked a native studies professor who taught me in a much smaller class and two of my work supervisors who I felt knew me well enough to write a strong letter. Another challenge was that I really didn't know much about medical school or the profession itself. Many of my classmates have parents in the medical field but none of my parents even have a university degree. I tried to learn as much as I could by attending information sessions put on by the University, reading the newspaper and internet for current issues and mostly by talking to other students.

A big surprise about medical school is that the students are very friendly and we get to know each other well. I was relieved to find that the other students had a lot of the same anxieties as I did. I was worried that the other students would be only interested in academics but now I know that they are people just like me. I am also grateful to have an Aboriginal Health Careers program at the U of A that links me to other Aboriginal students and offers many opportunities to learn more about our culture. The other Aboriginal students in my class have become some of my best friends. I am also surprised by the many ways there are to become involved from volunteering, joining clubs, class council and intramurals. Another pleasant surprise about medical school is

that I find the academic work easier than undergraduate. I do not have to spend all my time studying and when I do have to study I don't mind it as much because it is interesting to me and I can picture actually applying my knowledge in my future career.

My advice to Aboriginal people considering medicine is to believe that you can do it! It is easy to doubt your abilities and feel like you don't have a chance when so many people apply to medical school and so few are accepted. Although it is important to have an alternate career plan, it is important to have faith that you can do it, especially with help from programs specifically for Aboriginal students. When I prepared my personal attributes section for my applications and prepared for my interviews, I really had to search within to remind myself that I do have the qualities and capabilities to be a physician. It helped me to actually keep a file of all the work, volunteering and other experiences that I have. Many of my experiences were not directly related to the medical field, but these experiences did say something about my strength of character which is also very important for the application. Although there were others who seemed to have better marks or way more medical experience, I am proud of my education and proud of my other achievements and volunteering. Before I could sell myself to the admissions committee, I had to convince myself that I was a great applicant.