

OCCUPYING WALL STREET

In early December 2011, about 200 students in the health professions — many in their lab coats or scrubs — rallied in downtown New York City and marched in support of the Occupy Wall Street movement, access to healthcare for all, and the elimination of the social disparities that affect health. Participants “shared some fascinating and powerful stories,” says Colin McCluney, who helped organize the event. “It was really fun and empowering.”

McCluney, who is taking a year off from his course work at the UW School of Medicine to serve as the 2011–2012 Education and Advocacy Fellow of the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), is a natural fit for this kind of activism, having long followed the road less travelled.

Born in Scotland, McCluney has lived in the U.S. since 1987 and in Seattle for the last 10 years. He was taking premed classes at Reed College in Portland, Ore., until a music theory course changed his direction. “I came back around to medicine eventually,” he says. “It’s one of those things that you should be sure about before you commit the time and expense.” A non-traditional student by virtue of his relative age and experience, McCluney also has been more active in advocacy than many of his peers.

An internship at AMSA’s national office the summer before he started medical school confirmed McCluney’s interest in the student-governed organization, which represents physicians-in-training. “Since then I’ve been involved in various aspects of the organization, including the ‘Healthcare for All’ campaign — students working toward everyone having access to medically necessary health care,” he says.

McCluney’s dedication to access also informed his choice of medical school. “The emphasis on primary care at UW and the clinical opportunities provided by the WWAMI program were really appealing to me,” says McCluney.

After the “grand tour” — i.e., his third-year WWAMI rotations — McCluney started his AMSA fellowship in July 2011, based at the organization’s national headquarters outside Washington, D.C. “A big part of [the draw] was the opportunity to combine the education and the advocacy pieces,” he explains.

In his role as fellow, he helps to coordinate national conferences and symposia for AMSA members, develops his mentoring skills through an intern program, directs AMSA’s legislative



The Rev. Jesse Jackson spoke with UW School of Medicine student Colin McCluney and AMSA National President Danielle Salovich at a December 2011 rally — held in New York City — of students in the health professions.

Photos: Sonia Lazreg

efforts — such as contributing to a brief for the Supreme Court — and supports members' efforts through training programs and other projects.

“The fellowship is expanding my personal belief that physicians should be involved in advocacy,” McCluney says. “That can be writing a letter, or talking to people in your community; it doesn’t have to mean writing a policy paper.”

Which brings us back to the December rally and the support of the Occupy Wall Street movement. Noting that AMSA has long pushed for access to healthcare, McCluney says, “There are all different kinds of advocacy, and one of them is direct action expression.”

Read more about AMSA at amsa.org.



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