WHY I'D ENCOURAGE EVERY DENTAL STUDENT TO INTERCALATE

By Emily Black

Between the second and third year of Dental School at the University of Bristol, I decided to take a year out of my studies to undertake an intercalated degree. I chose Global Health – a BSc; it was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

For me, it was an opportunity to consider the broader scope and outreach of healthcare, not only in my own country but across the globe too. I got to learn about a whole range of topics; from strategies for successful health policy making and the impact of conflict and forced migration, to more intricate topics such as contrasting anthropological approaches to mental health care. I learnt invaluable lessons such as how to write a well-rounded argument, and I had never appreciated before the value of learning how to reference properly. It also opened my eyes for potential opportunities to get involved in Dental Public Health strategies in the future. It has made me not only understand but appreciate the importance of guidelines within the dental profession.

Here are my top five reasons to undertake an intercalated degree.

1. You get a whole degree in just one year

There are two main ways you can gain a BSc or BA in just one additional year – you either join the third year of a course (e.g. Pharmacology or Cellular and Molecular Medicine) or you partake in a stand-alone year with other intercalating students (e.g. Genomic Medicine or Functional and Clinical Anatomy). I did the latter, and it meant I got to mix with medical and veterinary students from across the UK and overseas. Our broad range of backgrounds and knowledge enabled both in-depth discussions and the

development of new friendships. If you want to take this even further, intercalating after third year gives you the chance to gain a master's degree (e.g. Medical Research). The sense of achievement at the end of the year when dressed in a gown at a graduation ceremony is like no other.

2. You gain skills as an independent learner

Not only do you get the opportunity to delve into a subject you find interesting, one of the main things I took away from my degree was the freedom to pick just one subject to explore further and expand on. Never before had I been to a lecture that I wasn't going to be examined on. Gone were the days of furious note taking at dental school, and instead were hours of taking a topic and *reading around it*. It has given me true insight about the value of listening. I also feel it has improved my academic performance since returning to dental school, because I am able to think more critically, and I am much better at reading around clinical dentistry topics too.

3. You get to understand what being a student in a non-clinical programme is like

I suddenly gained a whole new respect for what it was like to be a student without structure to my day. For me, it gave me the chance to become organised because I wanted to be, not because I had to be. It also gave me the opportunity to get involved with extra curricular activities (I'm a hockey player myself) and get to explore the city I was living in even further with friends that then graduated after three years. Dental school is both tough and full on, and I came back to the

Dental Hospital eager to finish the degree I'd come to university to study.

4. You can go to another university and make a new group of friends

The most common reason I hear from my peers about not wanting to intercalate is without fail *'I couldn't leave my year group'*. This is a completely normal reaction, but for me, it's greatly reassuring that every year group thinks this. While you may feel a little out of your comfort zone to start with, you get the chance to meet other students on your programme, and then go on to make friends with a whole new year group when you re-join the dental school programme. If you wish, you can also choose to go and study at a different university. This gives you the chance to explore a different city; or even a new country. In my degree, you also had the opportunity to complete dissertation research abroad; ever enhancing your chance to do something quite distinctive.

5. It can make you stand out when you start applying for jobs

Intercalating can help you improve career prospects in a competitive graduate market! You get the opportunity to enhance skills in evaluating evidence, critical scientific thinking and academic writing; all that you can take into your future career. It can be a chance to invest in yourself, particularly in a career that is very dependent on manual dexterity. The chance to diversify is an opportunity that in my opinion, should not be taken lightly.

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