



Beyond the Classroom

It's not enough to shuffle curricular requirements and create more programs. The structure of education itself must be re-envisioned, permitting students opportunities to learn beyond classroom walls and with an entrepreneurial determination ★ by Ana Lucia Hurtado,

Psychology and Communications Senior

BECAUSE OF OVERWHELMING TURMOIL CAUSED BY THE SHINING PATH MAOIST guerrillas, my parents left Peru when I was only 4. Although a painful sacrifice, they wanted their three daughters to succeed and prosper in this “land of opportunity.” I studied hard in school, believing this would ultimately secure a life of fulfillment.

At the end of high school, I grew nervous about finding my career and began exploring engineering and medicine via structured outreach programs at Stanford, MIT, Baylor College of Medicine, and my magnet school's medical rotations classes. However, I remained unconvinced and, while at Duke University, retreated into a state of despair — worrying I would never find my vocation. I continued with my pre-med track as was expected: my oldest sister was already a physician, and the other was in medical school.

I probably would have become a physician had I not confronted the greatest challenge of my young life: becoming a mother. Facing unintended pregnancy, I knew I could no longer approach my future passively. The search to find my “calling” resumed in earnest, and I began exploring the possibility of a career in law. Frustrated, I found myself stretching in opposing directions as I dedicated most of my time to doing well in my classes, while attempting to make time for career exploration. Why was education limited to textbooks and lectures, and why was experiential learning and career contemplation viewed as less intellectual and therefore separated from academic knowledge?

Naively, I thought that's just the way things are. It wasn't until I transferred to UT that I began to believe otherwise, stumbling upon an unusual curricular offering: the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Internship. I share my experience, hoping that changes will be made in undergraduate education, resulting in more entrepreneurial opportunities like this one.

The IE Pre-Graduate School Internship course was unlike other classes I had encountered. In the largely self-orchestrated internship, students were encouraged to explore graduate studies and career possibilities through collaboration with a UT faculty supervisor and a graduate student mentor in their area of interest. Most refreshingly, rather than being delivered in the typical didactic fashion, where knowledge is known in advance and spoon-fed to students, the IE Internship functioned as a class where students could own and tailor education to fit their personal, academic, and professional interests.

In my case, the IE Internship allowed me an insider's look at law. The site of my internship was the Children's Rights Clinic (CRC) at the UT law school, and it proved to be the most valuable experience of my college tenure. For the first time, I asked questions for which I genuinely sought answers, directed the

course of study, and collaborated with my supervisors to create the most enriching experience possible. Each week, I carefully planned a schedule with my two supervising attorneys at the CRC, which would optimize my exposure to a balanced overview of family law. This included attending court hearings, accompanying supervisors to several client contact visits, going to Permanency Planning Team meetings, being a part of mediations, listening to attorney-client telephone conferences, filing court documents, and sitting in on a law school class.

This entrepreneurial exercise dispelled many myths I held about the legal profession — many of which had kept me from committing myself to a career in law. For instance, like so many, I believed that most lawyers ended up compromising integrity and ethical principles to succeed in their career. I had also come to believe, from the constant advice of friends, that to choose a career in law was incompatible with my desire to be a good mother and wife. Additionally, I had imagined that most law settings, if not all, were driven by the insatiable appetite for money. Fortunately, I was proven wrong on all matters while at the CRC.

Both supervising attorneys with whom I interned were not only highly respected in the legal community but were highly virtuous individuals. They showed me that being an ethical lawyer was not an oxymoron, just a choice. Furthermore, they were living proof that being a good lawyer and a good mother were not mutually exclusive. Seeing them balance their legal careers and responsibilities to their families successfully showed me that, although a challenging and often tiresome “juggling act,” it was possible. Finally, the CRC introduced me to a law setting where superfluous billing was not practiced and where legal services were not reserved for only the most privileged and affluent clients. After my oldest sister dedicated several years of her medical career to serve the homeless in

Boston, I knew I, too, wanted one day to continue this spirit through my own line of work. Thus, the realization that this kind of nonprofit and pro-bono setting was available after law school greatly appealed to me.

Through UT's Intellectual Entrepreneurship Internship, I was given the rare chance to own my education, using a class to engage in self-exploration, and one which ultimately led to the discovery of my vocation. Psychology explains that there is a period of exploration and uncertainty, termed “moratorium,” necessary to arrive at an “achieved” state in which individuals devise set plans with clear goals. The IE Internship functioned as my “moratorium,” encouraging me to study myself, my knowledge, and the career I envisioned.

Sadly, instead of constructing the undergraduate experience as a “moratorium” leading toward “achieved” gradu-

ates, the university curriculum often encumbers true exploration. I urge UT's leaders not only to think but to live outside the box, recognizing the sometimes stifling nature of undergraduate education. It's not enough to shuffle curricular requirements and create more programs. The structure of education itself must be re-envisioned, permitting students opportunities to learn beyond classroom walls and with an entrepreneurial determination. Because of the IE Internship, I will soon face the world, diploma in hand, with a sense of direction and purpose and, I dare say, an “achieved” state. Don't others deserve the same?

—
Ana Lucia Hurtado is a UT psychology and communication senior. Information about the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Internship is available at: www.utexas.edu/coc/cms/faculty/cherwitz/