

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Different experiences lead to medical school

To pay his way through Missouri State University, Lincoln Sheets worked the graveyard shift at a Springfield, Mo., nursing home. After graduation, he became a software engineer. He never missed emptying bedpans, but something about that college job, directly helping others, kept nagging at him.

Sheets volunteered regularly as a hospice caregiver and interned with a physician in Burundi during a church mission trip. After 15 years of computer programming, he decided to switch careers and spent the next five years preparing to apply to medical school. “It took my wife five years to decide whether I was going to medical school,” says Sheets, who has three stepchildren and four grandchildren. “There was no way I was going to do it unless it was 100 percent what she wanted.”

During that half-decade, Sheets continued at his full-time software job in Springfield, spent weekends as an EMT and took required pre-med courses in the evenings. He first realized a doctorate was within reach when he received his white coat, symbolic of the medical profession, at the [MU School of Medicine](#) ceremony that kicks off students’ four-year journey. Soon after, he talked to the mother and daughter of a woman who had been lying unconscious in an ICU bed for two weeks. “I couldn’t answer technical questions, but these patients don’t have technical questions. They want to know: Is she going to live or die? I’m the one answering that question, the most important question. It was at my White Coat Ceremony






Fourth-year medical student Lincoln Sheets, right, listens to Kenneth Fann of Columbia a MedZou, a student-operated medical clinic that provides care to uninsured Columbians. Photo by Nicholas Benner

that I first realized this was going to be part of my responsibility and privilege as a medical student.”

Now in his fourth year, Sheets had the honor of addressing 104 first-year students at the White Coat Ceremony July 30, 2010, in Jesse Hall Auditorium. Sheets, who will remain at MU to complete his residency in family medicine, told them medical school can reprogram minds: “You’ll take an exam, and a part of your brain will be impressed that you even understood the questions.” But, he cautioned, don’t lose sight of the humanity of medicine. That is, after all, what motivated him to choose patients over PCs.

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