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Sage College of Albany
Sage Graduate School

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Sage Offers Flexible Option for Graduates Interested in Medical School

Albany and Troy, NY - Christina Yerdon's college advisor told her to forget about medical school. Her grade point average was too low. She accepted what she saw as her destiny and went on to earn two master's degrees and work as an acute care Nurse Practitioner in a Central New York hospital.

But the desire to become a full-fledged physician never waned so several years later she's going back to medical school by way of The Sage Colleges' new Post Baccalaureate Premedical Program. Frequently, additional science courses and labs are required before individuals are prepared to apply to medical school, which is why 12 New York State schools offer a "post-bac, premed" program, The Sage Colleges being the newest among them and the only one in the Capital Region that results in a Certificate in Post Baccalaureate Premedical Studies from the New York State Education Department. The certificate confirms students who complete the program have met premed requirements.

A projected shortage of physicians – and desire to expand course offerings – gave rise to Sage's new program. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), several factors have contributed to the shortage, including:

- An aging physician workforce – one in every three active doctors is over age 55.
- A doubling in the number of people over 65 between 2000 and 2030.
- Longer life expectancies.
- A projected glut of physicians that never panned out.
- And even, according to the AAMC, a new generation of physicians who may choose to work fewer hours.

Yerdon's work as a Nurse Practitioner in Central New York, where she provided patients with medical services in the hospital setting, inspired her to try for medical school. "This will allow me to provide more services for my patients and their families," the 31-year-old said, sitting at a conference table in Mueller Science Hall on the Troy campus where she studies every day from 2 to 5 p.m. before a four-hour-long chemistry class. She'll complete the program while she continues to work 12-hour-long weekend shifts at Samaritan Hospital.

In addition to preparing students for admission to medical school and physical therapy programs, which now require doctoral degrees, "our program also prepares students for physician assistant schools," said Mary Rea said, chair of Sage's Biology Department. The "post-bac, pre med" program can be completed in one year which includes summer courses. Both programs include preparation for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) and assistance with the medical school application process.

-30-

About The Sage Colleges

The Sage Colleges is an independent comprehensive university with two four-year undergraduate colleges: Russell Sage College for women in Troy, N.Y and the coeducational Sage College of Albany. Through SCA's Sage After Work program, working adults with prior college credit can complete the bachelor's degree in a flexible schedule and format. The coeducational Sage Graduate School offers master's and doctoral degrees on both campuses.

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A second chance at getting M.D. in your title

Sage Colleges program helps make medical school possible for those with degrees who lack prerequisites

CATHLEEN F. CROWLEY Staff Writer

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ALBANY - After a rocky freshman year in college, Christina Yerdon's adviser told her she'd never get into medical school.

Yerdon abandoned her dream of becoming a doctor and went into nursing. She earned an advanced degree and became a nurse practitioner. But after 12 years of working side by side with doctors, she wondered if she might challenge her adviser's prediction. Yerdon, 31, of Waterford, is now the first student in The Sage Colleges' Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program, a certificate program for career-changers and college graduates who want to go to med school but don't have the prerequisite biology, chemistry and physics classes.

The Sage program, which was approved by the state Department of Education last spring, is the 12th New York college to offer a "post-bac, premed" program and is the first in the Capital Region.

"The call for these programs has really increased," said Dr. Henry Sondheimer, senior director of student affairs at the American Association of Medical Colleges in Washington, D.C. The postbaccalaureate programs have been around for decades, but they have proliferated in the past several years, he said. There are now more than 100 programs nationwide.

"I think that represents the fact that there are a moderate number of people looking at medicine who started out as English majors or engineering majors," said Sondheimer, who until recently was dean of the School of Medicine at the University of Colorado.

"Someday I'm going to wake up and I'll be 40," said Yerdon. "On that day, I didn't want to wake up and wonder what would have happened if I hadn't tried."

The director of the Sage program, professor Mary Rea, said most of the prospective candidates for the postbaccalaureate certificate are women who have delayed their dream of becoming a doctor due to family, finances and other reasons.

They remind Rea of herself: a middle-school science teacher who postponed her career to have children. Rea received her doctorate from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute when she was 50. Now, she's chairwoman of Sage's biology department.

Rea is personally watching over Yerdon and Nancy Houghton, 37, of Wallingford, Vt., an EMT who wants to pursue a doctorate in physical therapy. Two more students are enrolling in the fall.

Rea designs individual programs that fill gaps in the students' knowledge, and she takes them out to dinner when they need a lift.

"I know the feelings that these students are going through," Rea said.

The Sage program costs about \$14,000 and takes one or two years, depending on the coursework needed. Getting into medical school is not a guarantee, but Rea hopes to form partnerships with medical schools, like Albany Med, so students who successfully complete the program get special consideration.

Yerdon is attending Sage full time and works 12-hour shifts on Saturdays and Sundays at Samaritan Hospital as a nurse practitioner. She hopes the program will give her the courses, the confidence and the test scores she needs to get into med school.

"I owe it to myself to at least try," she said.

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