

The Pursuit of Passion

Making Marcia's Dreams a Reality

Why leave a 15+-year career in engineering to start all over on an entirely new path?

To pursue a passion.

"I've always been interested in pursuing a medical career, but I just never thought it was possible," says Marcia Thacher, UNCA student. "Engineering is great, but it's just one of those things where it wasn't fulfilling my passion or purpose."

It's a feeling many can relate to – being good at something but feeling like your true calling lies elsewhere. Marcia spent the past ten years trying to make her way back to school,

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but life events, and maybe a little self-doubt, kept getting in the way. Luckily, mentors, family, and her husband continued to push her to follow her dream.

A few years ago, Marcia set the self-doubt to the side and took the plunge back into school. This summer, she took part in the UNCA internship at MAHEC.

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FINDING HER TRUE CALLING:

Marcia speaks with Dr. Hicks after patient visits at MAHEC Family Health Center at Biltmore during her UNCA summer internship. Marcia left her career in engineering to start all over again in medicine. And she's so glad she did.

'The Pursuit of Passion' continued...

With your support, this internship, which is part of student medical education at MAHEC, encourages and assists those interested in healthcare careers.

Starting school all over again can be terrifying, but Marcia sees things differently this time around.

“This time, I just feel privileged and excited,” she says. “I love going to class, and I’m excited about what I’m learning.”

She’s excited enough that she spends her free time reading more about what she’s learning – **a true sign of passion.**

The UNCA Internship Program at MAHEC gives undergraduates experience in a medical practice where they conduct clinical shadowing and project research, and it helped Marcia in more ways than one.

Now, instead of mechanical equipment, she examines human anatomy; soft, warm skin replaces cold, hard metal; heartbeats are heard rather than the throb of heavy machinery; and she’s finding purpose in witnessing the difference a doctor can make in a patient’s life.

The experience opened Marcia’s eyes to what her future could look like. One of the lessons she learned while shadowing residents is to meet the patient where they’re at – not just physically, but emotionally and mentally as well. Treatment and helping the patient move forward with their health has to take that into account.

But what really stood out for her was the number of times she heard patients give feedback about the excellent care they received. That was important to Marcia as she looks to where she wants to train in the future. Knowing she wants to stay in WNC to practice, she hopes to continue in the programming available through MAHEC. **Hearing directly from patients how wonderful they found the residents to be gives Marcia everything she needs to know to continue on her path.**

“The internship has confirmed and solidified my decision to go into medicine,” she says. “That’s what I was really looking for: Was this for sure something that’s going to continue to excite me and what I want to do? It’s a hands-down, 100% YES!”

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This undergraduate internship experience for Pre-Health UNCA students is a collaboration between the University of North Carolina Asheville (UNCA) and MAHEC’s Center for Health Professions Education. Selected students complete 20 hours per week of clinical shadowing and project research.