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Mareisa Weil

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STUDENTS

HIS OWN PATH

HENRY ACKERMAN FOLLOWS HIS HEAD
AND HIS HEART

By Mareisa Weil

Henry Ackerman '17 wants to be a doctor, like his father and grandfather before him. The path that he is taking towards that goal is all his own.

Hailing from Seattle, he knew Colby had a strong government department and a strong biology department and planned to pursue both. "I didn't end up doing either one of those things," he said, smiling.

Ackerman did start his Colby career as a government major, before switching to biology. What he ended up falling in love with though, unexpectedly, was sociology. While home for the summer, he took an introductory sociology class to satisfy a prerequisite. "That just really opened my eyes," he said, "and when I came back to Colby I instantly signed up for more."

Signing up for more is a theme with Ackerman. "I've taken a ton of psychology classes, sociology classes, pre-med covers all the natural sciences," he said. "I've taken history classes, government classes. I wanted to be a film studies minor, but I couldn't fit it in." He did manage to fit in becoming a Maine-licensed EMT, thanks to one of Colby's innovative Jan Plan courses. "I think the image I'll always remember is Henry coming to class with his Colby EMS uniform on, a walkie-talkie with him—in case of campus medical emergencies," said Ackerman's advisor, Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology Neil Gross, "and then launching into brilliant comments about the latest book we're reading on class inequality."

"He's broad and deep," Gross said. "He's as interested in medicine as he is in social policy, and he doesn't neglect either of them. ... He's found [his] areas of interest and dived into

all of them with remarkable vigor and gusto. It's an inspiring way to be a student. And I admire that about Henry."

The admiration is mutual. "I took this class with him, Policing the American City, and it was one of the best classes I've taken at Colby," Ackerman said. "We had great conversations, and we never had enough time to finish because people were so into it. Even the quietest kids get pretty heated, because he—in a very positive way—drives people to do that."

But still, medicine beckons. Ackerman hasn't decided what kind of doctor he wants to be, but he's had the opportunity to shadow doctors in a wide range of specialties, from intensive care to anesthesiology, which is what his dad (Peter Ackerman '87; his mother, Elizabeth Applegate, is also Class of '87) does. Right now he thinks he might want to combine his M.D. with a master's in public health and work on the policy side of things. Whatever he decides, Gross believes that Ackerman's sociology background will "make him a better doctor, a more compassionate doctor—a doctor who can think through the circumstances faced by his patients in a more meaningful way," he said. "Who knows what his future will be. But one of the things he exemplifies is the way that Colby students can aim for highly technical professional careers but also have this broad liberal arts background behind them."

Ackerman, meanwhile, says there is another thing Colby students can do. When asked for words of wisdom for incoming classes, he had a quick answer: Get involved from day one. "If you can do that, you'll really, really enjoy your time here. You're only here for four years and it goes by so fast."