



A Love for Country

2014 GRAD IS COMMITTED TO ADDRESSING LACK OF DENTAL CARE IN GHANA

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After attending a career seminar hosted by the biology department during her first year at Loyola, Serwaa Mensah, '14, knew she wanted to be a dentist. It was an ironic career choice, perhaps, for a young woman who had been to the dentist just once as a child.

That's the norm in Ghana, where Mensah grew up, a country with roughly 150 dentists for a population of more than 25 million.

"I knew I wanted to be in a health care profession, but I had never considered becoming a dentist. After I attended that seminar, I thought, 'This is the kind of thing that I know Ghana needs.' Nobody talks about the dentist in Ghana because they're so very rare. It's considered a luxury to go to the dentist," Mensah explained.

Born in Washington, D.C., Mensah and her family moved to Accra, Ghana, when she was six months old. She grew up in a town that lacks running water and stable electricity—poor by American standards. But for Mensah, "being poor can be a state of mind." And there is always someone who is worse off than you are, she added.

When it came to her education, Mensah's father encouraged his children to take advantage of their American citizenship and apply to American universities.

She heeded his advice, applying to several schools—including Loyola, where her older sister received her degree in 2007.

Mensah left Ghana and her family for Baltimore in April 2010. The day after she arrived in the United States, her mother

passed away. She was thousands of miles from home in a new place, grief-stricken, and overwhelmed.

But she was focused.

Calling to mind her mother's perspective on life, her selflessness and generosity, and her drive, Mensah was inspired as she started her first semester of college. This drive stayed with her for four years as Mensah took advantage of every opportunity that crossed her path. She made meaningful relationships with professors. She conducted research through Loyola's Hauber Fellows program. She studied abroad in Thailand.

And in the fall of her senior year, she was accepted to the University of Maryland School of Dentistry in Baltimore, one of the most competitive dental programs in the country.

"My story could have easily been a sob story. I could have been crying that my mom passed, that I'm poor, and use those as excuses to not do well and not focus in school. But for me that was the deepest motivation, knowing that there was no backup plan. I told myself, 'You have to get into dental school.' That's how I pushed myself," she said.



As a first-year dental student, Mensah attends classes and takes part in required clinical work at the university's downtown campus. Dental school is exactly what she expected: hard work. She is taking 13 classes a semester.

Earlier this fall, Mensah received news that she had been selected from thousands of applicants to receive a full scholarship to dental school through the National Health Service Corps.

After she finishes her degree, she is obligated to practice in a medically underserved area in the United States for four years.

"Then I want to go back to Ghana."