

## Brandon Foster, Dream Scholar 2015

To become a surgeon, one must have a steady hand, a calm demeanor and a devout attention to detail -- many of the same traits needed to be a world class musician. Just ask Brandon Foster, he aspires to be both.

A recent graduate of Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Brandon is sorting through a myriad of medical schools from which to apply, all while practicing, fine-tuning and occasionally performing as a classically-trained violist.

"I think becoming a surgeon is extremely difficult, but if you can make it through [medical] school you're guaranteed to make a good living for the rest of your life," Brandon said. "Music is not guaranteed at all, but it's what I love."

Brandon, 22, is currently a researcher at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, where his work focuses on the treatment of brain tumors. After work, he studies for the looming Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) that he plans to take in January.

When he can, Brandon plays his viola as a way to unwind, and sometimes he'll play a few "gigs" with groups or quartets in the Washington, D.C., area. But his thoughts are never far from the MCAT.

"I've gotten hired to play with local semi-professional groups," Brandon said. "I played with the Alexandria Symphony and I also played with an opera company, which is fun but stressful considering the rest of the stuff that I'm doing. But it's nice to be doing it."

"I'm trying to still have time to practice the viola at least every other day --- ideally every day --- but it's getting to be pretty difficult. Medicine is the main focus, but I still want to have music in my life."

Brandon is one of 80 recipients of a first-year college scholarship through the Dream 4 It Foundation, a Baltimore-based organization that since 2008 has awarded more than \$161,000 in scholarships to deserving students.

"Beyond the initial financial scholarship for their freshman year, the Foundation maintains connections within scholars through intentional mentoring efforts focused on scholars realizing their dreams," said Dr. Anthony Brown, founder and president of the Dream 4 It Foundation.

Although the majority of the Foundation's scholarships have been from Maryland, scholars have also come from New York, South Carolina and Georgia.

Brandon, a native of Carroll County, Md. who currently lives in the Bethesda area, has played the viola for the last 13 years and played with the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestra for two years before enrolling at Carnegie Mellon, where he majored in music and biology.

Although he listens mostly to classical music, he equally enjoys jazz and R & B. Now that his undergrad college days are over, he has a different perspective on his music and playing the viola.

"When you're a major [in college] you're constantly being evaluated and you have to learn music in a certain amount of time and constantly playing through a teacher," he said. "But now that I'm not a student anymore, I guess now it's sort of like a release."

While in college, Brandon spent his summers travelling to music festivals in places such as Newfoundland, Canada, and Miami Beach, and met several renown classical musicians, including Daniel Foster, the principal violist with the National Symphony Orchestra.

Spending time with top-tier musicians was not only thrilling, but educational.

“That’s usually the caliber of teachers that you study with at these things,” he said. “In college, my viola professor was an internationally famous musician.”

His current work with brain tumor research at NIH is equally as exciting and challenging. But on a much different level.

“One of the main difficulties in treating brain tumors is this thing called the blood brain barrier that prevents harmful substances from reaching the brain,” Brandon said. “But when you’re trying to treat brain tumors, it can prevent the drugs that you’re trying to use from reaching the brain tumor.”

“So, we’re testing how different treatments can open up the blood brain barrier. It’s really interesting.”

His research at NIH will hopefully help with his medical applications and give him a glimpse of what his medical career might look like 10 years down the road. He hopes to pursue either general surgery or neuro-surgery after medical school.

So, what’s more difficult: seeking a medical career or a career in music?

“I think really making it in the music world is one of the hardest achievements because getting through school is one thing, but to get a secure job in the music world, the only thing you can do is either be a professor or get a job in a top paying orchestra and those jobs are extremely competitive,” Brandon said.

“Becoming a surgeon is not easy, either. But I’m doing what I love. I really like the research that I’m doing. I’m in an environment where I can still be pretty involved in music. This is honestly the best next step I could have taken after college.”