

A Perfect Balance

2004 student of the year does it all

By Kaleena Thompson and Anup Patel

Anup Patel, 22, takes the term “balancing act” to a whole different level. The 2004 University of Florida graduate balanced a 4.0 GPA in three majors, made significant progress in medical research, volunteered abroad, and still found time to raise money for AIDS relief. As a 2003 Goldwater Scholar and member of the USA Today’s All-USA College Academic Team, he used the scholarship monies he earned from the awards to create Cents of Relief, a non-profit organization that raises money for AIDS victims in India. His achievements earned him the title of 2004 Florida College Student of the Year. But don’t just take our word for it—here are his own.

Finding His Footing

Many of my leadership skills, such as communicating effectively with others and focusing diverse interests toward a common goal, originated from activities I participated in throughout high school.

To be involved in many things simultaneously requires a combination of time management and efficient work habits. That’s the way I got things done at the **University of Florida**. Nothing really fell by the wayside for me. The only thing I did prioritize was keeping my grades up. Without a strong GPA, you make yourself less competitive for prestigious scholarships. Now, this may seem selfish at first glance, but I knew all the money I would win from these scholarships would be donated to charities. That’s why I prioritized my grades. In addition, some scholarships open up venues that allow you to spread the word about your passions and causes to others.

At UF, I found a potential obstacle to be the overwhelmingly large student-to-faculty ratio. This ratio tends to hinder discussions with faculty and makes it difficult to find the right people in the field of your interest. An approach I used in resolving this problem was to do what everyone else wasn’t. That meant if a teacher said to come during set office hours, I would arrange for another time. This facilitated a greater understanding of the material as well as an opportunity

for the professor to get to know me. Basically, you must take an active rather than a passive role in your education if you want to be on top.

Staying Steady

Although I came to UF planning to become a doctor, I found that my interests grew to encompass more aspects of the



medical field. My interest in health policy began when I worked in Senator Bob Graham’s office under the guidance of **Yale University’s** Dr. Howard Forman. The following semester at school, I started becoming more aware of the AIDS epidemic devastating many countries, particularly India. Therefore, it seemed

Ever the advocate, 2004 Student of the Year Anup Patel’s acceptance speech challenged Gov. Bush to improve conditions for AIDS victims.



ideal for me to find a program that would allow me to explore health policy geared towards eradicating AIDS. I came across a program with a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kamathipura, India that seemed a perfect fit for me. This NGO focused on helping AIDS victims that lived in the red-light areas of India.

Cents of Relief (www.centsofrelief.org) started after I won the Goldwater Scholarship. The money I received from that allowed me to establish a non-profit organization dedicated to providing educational, medical, and nutritional support to AIDS victims in India. Cents of Relief is a project I took on with several friends. I was fortunate to have my friend Rina Patel help me develop the entire web site, and register Cents of Relief as a 501c3 tax-exempt organization. Victoria Hernandez formed Cents of Relief chapters at other universities to garner more support for victims. Two other friends, Max Starks and Carlos Perez, brought national attention to the group with the media attention that came from their positions playing on the UF football team. Now that both Max and Carlos recently were selected to play in the NFL, they can continue to spread the word about Cents of Relief to an even wider audience.

Cents of Relief reminded me to persevere in spite of adversity. At times, when I tried raising money for the organization, it seemed virtually impossible to convince anyone to spare a few cents. Yet, I continued to ask those reluctant to donate and convinced them that Cents of Relief would use their funds for people in dire need of help. The more I worked at the mission of Cents of Relief, the more I believed in the cause. If you truly believe in your cause, then it will be easier to persevere.

A Centered Stance

The Florida College Student of the Year Award allows me the opportunities to be a mentor to other students and to serve as an ambassador for the state in terms of education.

This fall, I plan to pursue a medical degree at Yale University, then enroll in an MBA program. Ultimately, I hope to return to India’s red-light district and treat patients there. At the same time, I wish to see Cents of Relief grow and turn into the world’s largest anti-trafficking organization, providing an option for girls other than prostitution. With God’s graces, I hope when I’m done with life, I can be remembered as the person who prevented the trafficking of young girls into a profession that is the root of their health problems. 🙏

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See all of the 2004 honorees at floridaleader.com/soty