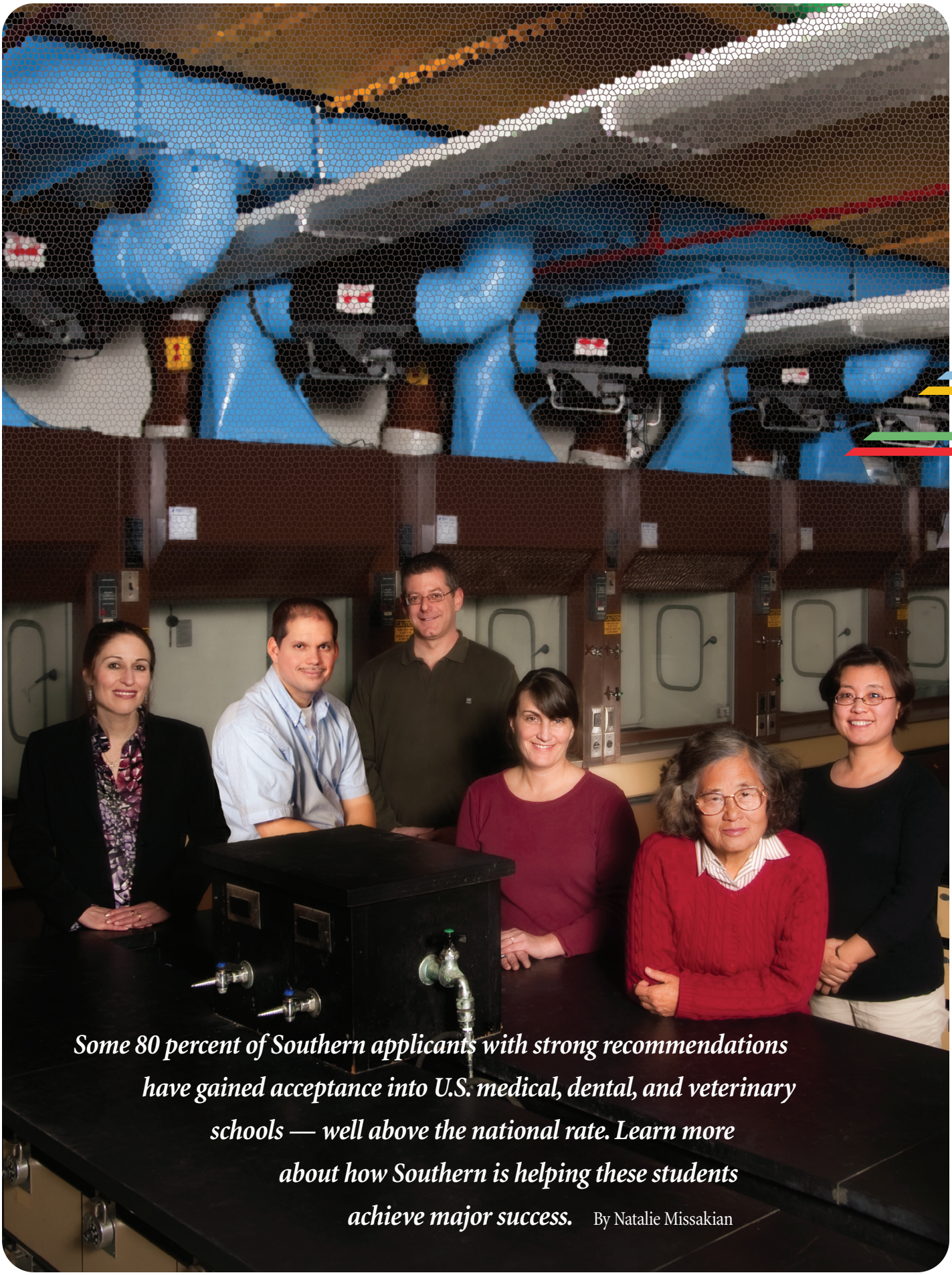


Some 80 percent of Southern applicants with strong recommendations have gained acceptance into U.S. medical, dental, and veterinary schools — well above the national rate. Learn more about how Southern is helping these students achieve major success. By Natalie Missakian

Next Stop ○ Med School



• Melissa Beckmann, '04, loves everything about her job as a doctor at a Texas military hospital — even the weekly 30-hour shifts seem a small price to pay for living a childhood dream. Next year, she hopes to travel to Korea as an Air Force flight doctor.

Neil Young, '09, an aspiring ER doc who beat out thousands for a spot at Dartmouth Medical School, spends his days studying human anatomy and physiology alongside Ivy League-educated peers.

Closer to home, Titi Aina, '04, starts her mornings promptly at 5 a.m., preparing for rounds as a surgical intern at the University of Connecticut Health Center. Her long-term goal is to become an anesthesiologist.

These successful young alumni share numerous traits. They're smart, well-rounded, dedicated to their field — and all are graduates of Southern's small but thriving pre-med program.

> "It's a close-knit faculty so it's really good that you get to know all of the professors on a name basis."
>
> Byron Peck-Collier, '10

Each year, a handful of talented, science-minded undergraduates sign on to work closely with Southern's Pre-Medical, Pre-Dental, and Pre-Veterinary Committee, a team of six faculty members charged with advising and supporting students who want to pursue health careers.

Those who don't achieve the necessary standards are often counseled into further training or other career options. But those with the right mix of academic achievement, ambition, and analytical skill have found tremendous success. Graduates have earned seats in such diverse medical schools as Dartmouth, Penn State, Boston University, Temple University, New York Medical College, and the University of California, San Francisco.

These are no small accomplishments in a field where, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), only four out of every 10 med school hopefuls make the grade. The competition is fiercer at top schools like Dartmouth, which enrolled only 84 of 5,294 applicants this year, according to the school's Web site.

"It's very, very competitive. But we have done a good job if students follow our

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[OPPOSITE PAGE] Helping students succeed is the charge of Southern's Pre-Medical, Pre-Dental, and Pre-Veterinary Committee, which includes [FROM LEFT] Professor of Physics Christine Broadbridge, Assistant Professor of Chemistry Adiel Coca, Assistant Professor of Biology Jonathan Weinbaum, Professor of Physics Karen Cummings, Professor of Biology Jane Feng, and Assoc. Professor of Chemistry Jiong D. Pang.
[THIS PAGE] Byron Peck-Collier, a member of the Class of 2010, hopes to become an orthopedic surgeon.

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advice, take challenging courses, and do not take the easy way out," says Jiong Dong Pang, associate professor of chemistry and chairwoman of the committee.

Technically, pre-med is not a major. In fact, pre-med students may choose any major, but must also take a cluster of science courses, including at least eight credits each in biology and physics and 16 credits in chemistry. In addition, the committee urges students to take advanced science courses — anatomy, physiology, microbiology, genetics, and biochemistry, to name a few — as well as calculus. Aina says she couldn't have come this far without the committee's guidance.

In addition to Pang, the committee includes Biology Department faculty members Jane Feng and Jonathan Weinbaum; Assistant Professor of Chemistry Adiel Coca; and Professors of Physics Christine Broadbridge and Karen Cummings.

The committee helps would-be doctors with everything from course selection to studying for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). Interested students are encouraged to register with the committee as soon as possible, preferably freshman year. In spring of their junior year, potential medical school applicants must submit to an intensive evaluation and interview. Most U.S. medical schools typically require a letter of recommendation from the committee.

According to Pang, 80 percent of Southern applicants with strong committee recommendations have gained acceptance into U.S. medical, dental, and veterinary schools. This includes both undergraduates and post-baccalaureate students who come to Southern to take science courses needed for medical school entry.

"You can come to Southern and you can be a doctor," Pang adds. "It's a long journey and a hard-working one, but we can prepare you."

Nationwide, there were 558,053 applications to U.S. medical schools in 2008 from a total of 42,231 applicants, according to AAMC statistics. Of those, 18,036 students were enrolled. On average, each applicant applied to 13 schools.

Successful students fit a similar profile, says Pang. Typically they have at least a 3.7 overall grade point average and a 3.8 grade point average in the sciences. They're analytical thinkers with strong backgrounds in the sciences and liberal arts. Usually, they've volunteered in a hospital or doctor's office and are leaders in campus clubs and community organizations.

Aina, for example, served as a resident advisor in her dorm and helped charter a chapter of the Golden Key International Honor Society. She also volunteered in the emergency room at the Hospital of Saint Raphael in New Haven, Conn., and worked as a laboratory assistant at Cadbury-Schwepps in Trumbull, Conn., before attending medical school at the University of Connecticut.

Beckmann, an Air Force captain doing an internal medicine residency in San Antonio, Texas, was a gymnast and volunteered at Ronald McDonald House and Yale-New Haven Hospital. After college, she interned for a year at leading consumer-goods manufacturer Unilever, before attending Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Neb.

Young spent more than five years in the Navy and completed a six-month stint in Iraq as a medic in the Marine Corps. before enrolling at Southern. While on campus, he founded the Pre-Health Society, a professional organization for students interested in medical careers.

Young admits to being intimidated when he first learned his roommates at Dartmouth had done their undergraduate work at Yale and New York University. But his doubts evaporated when the semester began. He quickly realized he'd have no trouble keeping up.

"Southern did a very good job preparing me," says Young, explaining he chose Southern because it was affordable and close to home. "It's kind of nice to know that maybe you didn't come from an Ivy League school, but you still have the same quality education."

Graduates and current participants say the program's small size has its advantages. For one, it's easy to get one-on-one time with professors. Students interested in research are often able to work alongside professors in their field of study. The faculty "really cares about you instead of just trying to push you through," Young says.

"It's a close-knit faculty. It's really good that you get to know all of the professors on a name basis," adds Byron Peck-Collier, '10, who wants to be an orthopedic surgeon and is eyeing Northwestern University or the University of Chicago for medical school.

In the meantime, he says Southern offers great opportunities for hands-on experience, such as the Emergency Medical Technician course offered on campus. The university also has a partnership with the Research Associate Program at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport, Conn., where students can gain clinical experience in the emergency department.

"You need to make sure that you were adequately challenged as an undergraduate, otherwise you will fail out of medical school very quickly," says Aina. "At Southern, they make a point of encouraging you to take those more rigorous courses. It ensures that we get in and we stay in."

Her advice to other future doctors at Southern: "Seek out the faculty mentors from the very first day you walk onto campus. That was a key for me." ■