

James Francis Magurno III

Senior Project Review

Senior Project Committee Members

24 May 2012

### My Life's Direction

A wise man once said, "You can have anything in life, if you will sacrifice everything else for it." (Barrie) For the past nine years of my life this phrase could not have been more accurate. I have been completely consumed by my goal to earn a spot on the United States Alpine Olympic Ski Team. Every other aspect of my life: family, friends, other sports, and especially school have suffered in some way due to my almost obsessive commitment to skiing.

As a result, when I learned that I had to do a senior project, I saw this graduation requirement as just another hurdle in my path to get on the hill and training. However, and much to my surprise, my career oriented senior project was actually very thought provoking and educational. Now that the project is over and I am able to analyze each step, I realize that I have actually learned a fair amount about myself from what project I decided to do, the research I performed, and of course the project itself.

The beginning of my junior year was a tense time. I was taking difficult classes at Sayre and working hard, but really focusing on making the most of Mt. Mansfield Winter Academy and the skiing opportunities it would soon be providing me. Consequently, when Mr. Johnson called a meeting with of my class to discuss our Senior Projects I was less than enthusiastic. I wanted to train and focus on the upcoming ski season, not take time out of my day to have a

learning experience unrelated to the classes I was taking. Thankfully, I did not have a say in the matter, and was forced to sit through his lecture. By the end of the class period I was already brain storming different project ideas with Alex Porter.

Originally, I considered doing a community service project because I like to help people, and already had experience organizing that sort of project from my Eagle Scout Leadership Project. However, it was this scouting experience which made me pick career research. I had learned from my Leadership Project that organizing community service projects took much longer and required more effort than simply inserting myself into a preexisting program like the career research senior project seemed to have. So, my choice was simple, by performing the career oriented project I was able to minimize the time I could not work out, increase my exposure to jobs I might be interested in if skiing did not work out, and count my college visits as part of my Senior Project.

Unfortunately, after I decided what project I was going to do I allowed my motivation to disappear. Instead of getting on the project, and getting it done, I went off to Mount Mansfield and pursued my skiing dreams. At this time I inadvertently did part of my community service requirement when I stacked, stored, and delivered cans of food for the poor. When I got back in the spring, and had to play catch-up in several of my classes I put off my Senior Project, reasoning that I could easily do it during the summer. Still, I did some work, turning in my formal proposal before the end of my junior year.

Suddenly, it was fall and I had spent the summer training for skiing, attending Cornell Summer College, and kayaking with my family; totally disregarding my senior project. So, when the school year began I jumped right on the first part of my project; job shadows. After three

consults with Mrs. Horton I had everything set up. I would job shadow David Martin at ProCare Physical Therapy and Thomas Rupp at Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics.

First up was ProCare, and despite the fact I felt fairly comfortable with this shadow, as I already knew many of the staff from my skiing workouts, I researched average income, typical procedures, and common problems on the job. As it turns out, it was a good thing I did this because Dr. Martin had a slow day during the shadow and we ended up talking about the very things I just mentioned. According to both Martin and my research the average income for a physical therapist is around \$75,000 a year, but this number can vary by \$30,000 in either direction depending on your certification, employer, and location. (Salary)

This information is helpful because I will be able to plan more accurately and live within my means if I decide to go into this line of work. Furthermore, we talked at length about typical procedures and common problems a therapist faces. Dynamic stretching of the lumbosacral region is indeed one of the most common procedures performed by therapists in sport dominated communities. (Goodman) However, the most common problem is not stubborn patients (Bibi), but patients who simply do not want to get any better. Martin's view into the psychology involved with physical therapy was indeed fascinating and increased my interest in careers where you interact with patients.

My second job shadow, with Thomas Rupp a certified prosthetist, was less inspiring. My interest in this area many came from Cornell Summer College, and hearing by word of mouth that MIT had successfully created a mechanical neuromuscular interface which allowed them to make prosthetics with feeling. The industrial reality which Hanger Inc. portrayed was a far cry from this ground breaking technology. In this job shadow I spent the day going from hospital to

workshop and back, making adjustments to very rudimentary prosthetics. By the end of the day I was certain that I did not want to partake in industrial biomedical engineering; research was what had me excited about this field.

After the second job shadow I was off, back to Vermont and my dream. However, unlike my Junior Year I worked on my Senior Project while skiing. I began seriously considering my college options. Should I go to a skiing school and focus on my athletic career? Should I go to an academic college focus on my studies, and then search for a job in research or industry? These two questions plagued me throughout the winter, and as I talked to different teachers, coaches, parents, and fellow students my opinion vacillated back and forth. Finally in mid-March my two head coaches Lorant, Igor, and I had a conversation that allowed me to pick my college with a large degree of certainty.

We reviewed my skiing career. A high level of achievement for the first six years of my career with top twenty in the Junior Olympics to finish that successful spree. Then, my seventh and eighth years saw only mediocre results because I let my head get in the way of my body. However, my ninth and most recent ski season had seen elevated performances. My coaches thought this meant was that I had finally figured out my mental game. I had always had the physical skills, but it was not until the last half of this past year that I could perform at a high level under pressure. Consequently my overall national ranking was 355 at the end of the 2012 season; 351 places too high for an Olympic team spot. Lorant put it plainly, "You can spend the next six years of your life accumulating debt and fighting for your Olympics dreams, or you can go college, get a degree, build up a ski team while your there, and then figure out another way to achieve excellence because now that you have the mental attitude for winning you can apply it to every area of your life."

That being said, I decided to go to the best academic college I was accepted to. My options were fairly limited; the only two schools that really fit this bill were the University of Vermont and Pennsylvania State University. These events set the stage perfectly for the last part of my senior project – college visits.

I visited UVM on a rather cold and cloudy day, but despite the brisk weather every student I saw was excited to be there and very happy with their classes. I started off touring the Agriculture and Life Science College because I was accidentally accepted into this program, but as my true interest lies with engineering I asked to switch tours and was surprised and impressed when the tour guide took time out of her break to help me find the group I was looking for. At the end of the day I left with the impression that everyone was happy to be at UVM, school pride was high, there were many recreational activities near the campus, but unfortunately the classes the school offered were fairly mundane.

My visit to PSU was the opposite in almost every way possible. It was bright, sunny, and slightly breezy day. While the tour guides were nice they did not go out of their way to make you feel welcome or included. Additionally the many stories I heard about the shouts of “We are! Penn State!” seemed a myth. With one exception most students on campus were fairly reserved and serious. This could have been due to the fact that it was finals week, but never the less, I left with the impression that PSU was a better school, but the people and atmosphere at UVM was more positive. After considering these differences I decided that the goal of college was to learn as much as possible not to focus on having fun, and since Penn State was ranked over 30 places better nationally than UVM in both job placement upon graduation and acceptance into graduate programs (Healy), I chose Penn State.

Looking back on what I initially thought would be an inconsequential endeavor, my Senior Project has helped me in both the short and long term. In the short term it has helped me pick the college that is right for me, Pennsylvania State University, based upon the goals and expectations that I was forced to confront when performing this project. In the long term, the job shadowing has helped me discover what I truly enjoy doing -- helping people and learning about the human body -- as well as which jobs allow me to do this most effectively. All in all I believe that my career focused Senior Project has helped me realize several things about my true interests and expectations in life, as well as provide realistic expectations for both college and the work force. No matter how you look at it, this project has enabled me to transition from high school to college with high expectations for myself and the quiet confidence necessary for me to be successful.

Works Cited

- Barrie, James M. "James M. Barrie Quotes." *BranyQuote*. BookRags Media Network, 2012.  
Web. 15 May 2012. [http://www.branyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/james\\_m\\_barrie.html](http://www.branyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/james_m_barrie.html)
- Bibi PhD, Khalid W. "ACSM's Certification Review." 530 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA:  
Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2006. Print
- Healy, Jeanne Marie. "*School Guide*." New Rochelle, NY: Myles Ridder, 2010. Print
- "Physical Therapists- U.S. National Averages." *Salary.com*. Kenexa, 2011. Web. 11 October  
2011. <http://www1.salary.com/Physical-Therapist-Salary.html>
- Understanding Human Body Anatomy. Dir. Professor Anthony Goodman, M.D., F.A.C.S. The  
Greater Courses, 2010. DVD.