Western Faculty Profile: Dr. Michael J. Strong

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Dr. Michael Strong is the Dean of the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, Western University. He serves as the Arthur J. Hudson Chair in ALS Research and is an accomplished neurologist and a decorated researcher. Dr. Strong completed his undergraduate studies at Queens University, graduated Queen's School of Medicine, and pursued neurology training at Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

Following his residency Dr. Strong wanted to focus on being a neurologist. However, mentors such as Dr. Arthur Hudson convinced him to pursue research.

Dr. Strong went to the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, which at that time, had a unique environment. The NIH specialized in conducting high-risk research that other institutes did not have the resources to explore.

For Dr. Strong, these early years of his career spent at NIH instilled in him a passion for research that he still has today.

As a veteran researcher, a physician, and Dean, Dr. Strong is frequently asked about the choices and the decisions he made that dictated his career path. He believes that people never fully choose a career path, rather the path finds them.

"The best we can do is gain experiences that we enjoy and find fulfilling," he said.

Dr. Strong never anticipated his career path would lead him to be Dean of a medical school; nor did he angle his career to obtain such a position. Rather, throughout his academic career, he focused on gaining experiences he found engaging.

Dr. Strong understands that many undergraduate students are deeply concerned about their future career paths. He suggests a wise course is to use one's undergraduate years to sample different areas and explore one's interests. For students who believe research might be their calling, he recommends taking a 4th year thesis course. This experience exposes undergraduate students to research and provides them with a glimpse as to what their careers may include.

Dr. Strong believes that undergraduate students looking to succeed in their careers, especially those interested in research and medicine have to be more than just competent students: They have to demonstrate that they are exceptionally well-rounded people, who do not envision their future medical or research careers to be their sole occupation.

These students need to explore their wide-ranging interests, and volunteer for causes they are passionate about. Students also need to be resilient. Things often go wrong when working in the medical or research field, and the ability to stay motivated despite facing challenges is a crucial quality.

Dr. Strong believes one of the most important factors in an undergraduate students' life is that they enjoy their educational journey. While his undergraduate years were filled with hard work, Dr. Strong made sure he always spent time with his friends and pursuing his hobbies, such as playing tennis. These factors, combined with the strength and love of his wife and family, have been as indispensable to his current success, as much as his hard work.

An area Dr. Strong is a strong advocate for, is mentorship in career-building. He has experienced first-hand the positive influence a mentor can have, and firmly believes that mentors play an important role in helping researchers, young and old, grow and achieve. He encourages undergraduate students to reach out to leaders in their field of interest and learn from their experience and advice.

These are just some of the insights that Dr. Strong has accumulated throughout his career. It is a career he intends to continue for as long as he can.

The advice that Dr. Strong gives today is an acknowledgment to what some may think an over-used adage: "do what you love". Yet it highlights how following one's passion can lead one to success. Undergraduate students can look to Dr. Strong's example and take his words as advice as they progress in their academic careers.