When I think back to my childhood, I see houses made of straw. The houses were connected by dirt roads so dotted with deep puddles and gaping holes that cars did not dare to go faster than villagers traveling by foot. That was the pace of life in the small region of Northern Thailand where I grew up.

My family owned a small farm, and our livelihood depended on how many fruits and vegetables we could harvest each day. Although as a child I enjoyed my many muddy adventures, I was always keenly aware of my family's modest means and our poor quality of life. Perhaps most significantly, the lack of access to health care pervaded the health of my family and our community on a daily basis.

Medical facilities were far from the village, and the costs of care were far beyond our means. This particularly impacted my grandparents, who often had to forego receiving appropriate medical care—enduring pain and sickness, and continuing work in spite of their poor health. Having witnessed such intense hardship on my family and village resulting from limited access to medical care, it has become my great hope—and a principal motivation of my academic endeavors—to contribute to expanding medical services to underserved populations.

I enrolled in the fall of 2009 at Brandeis University as a pre-medical student. In addition to taking science courses that provide me with a solid conceptual and theoretical background, I have also obtained an emergency medical technician (EMT) certification and am currently working with the Brandeis Emergency Medical Corps (BEMCo). The solid practical experience gained from working as an EMT, combined with pursuing a dual major in Biology and Health Science, Society and Policy, has already allowed me to develop new insights into the everyday complexities of providing competent medical services.
Pursuing social justice has also been an important part of my social and academic life. Starting in high school and continuing into college, I have worked with the STAND club to fundraise, build public awareness, and encourage political actions to stop the genocide in Darfur, Sudan. In the course of running the club, fundraising, and participating in student rallies I learned to translate the cliché “make a difference” into tangible action: We collected enough money to reunite two Sudanese children with their parents in the United States. It wasn’t a theoretical undertaking; we really made a difference in those lives. STAND has helped me experience how gratifying it is to provide services to people in need and to make positive impacts on their lives.

Despite the great influence these various experiences have had on me, working with Dr. Dan Murphy at Bairo Pite Clinic this summer would prove the most significant progress toward my goal of devoting my career to working with underserved populations. Since 1999, Dr. Murphy has delivered free medical care to villagers in Dali, East Timor, where half the population lacks safe drinking water, most people do not have access to health care, and nearly everyone lives in a state of extreme poverty. Arriving when the country faced a violently oppressive Indonesian military occupation, Dr. Murphy launched Bairo Pite Clinic (BPC), a community clinic that provides medical services including consultations, infant care, and disease diagnosis. In spite of its small size, staffing constraints, and limited resources, BPC is the most visited health clinic in the country, providing care to an average of 539 patients daily in 2009. Dr. Murphy hopes East Timor will one day have health and education systems comparable to those in developed countries.
I am excited at the prospect of working at the clinic and contributing to its daring vision and daily successes. I hope to apply my skills as an EMT to administer pre-hospital care and expedite the medical process. I will learn how to recognize tropical diseases and how to appropriately treat them; how to administer diagnostic tests and help lab technicians with laboratory work; and how to take care of sick patients and run a free clinic effectively. As much as I am excited to immerse myself in the real practice of medicine, I am even more thrilled to personally contribute to BPC in general.

The tasks, of course, will be contingent on the needs of the community and the circumstances that arise. I may, for instance, help BPC photograph for publicity, set up technology equipment, or even drive a car to pick up supplies. Ultimately, I intend to approach this program flexibly and with an open mind. Having grown up in a similar environment, I can personally relate to the East Timorese way of life. I am at once eager to do anything that is useful to the community, and motivated to broaden my knowledge and learn about the medical practice and health care system in a third world country. By combining my interest in medicine and my strong support for vulnerable populations, I believe that working with Bairo Pite Clinic will offer me an invaluable opportunity to grow both personally and professionally.

As much as I am confident that BPC will give me a meaningful experience over this summer, I am equally certain that it will present great challenges as well. I will live for two months in a country I've had no prior experience with, and will have to become familiar with the native language, Tetum, as quickly as possible. In adapting to the culture and working to understand the ways of the clinic, I anticipate consulting with fellow interns regarding my personal challenges. For further guidance and support, I will seek help from Dr. Murphy and
other staff members who will be available at the clinic. A past BPC intern indicated that
encountering language barriers and resource shortages are part and parcel of the BPC
experience. Such challenges give the internship a distinctive quality that I look forward to and
are, in fact, precisely the reason I have chosen to go to BPC.

To prepare myself for the internship, I will take a course with Professor Theodore
Johnson on Development, Aid, and Coexistence. Focusing on past and present international aid
organizations, this class will acquaint me with some of the knowledge and skills necessary to
undertake development and aid work in conflict situations. The class will not only prepare me
for the BPC summer internship, but also prove an invaluable building block toward realizing my
ambition of developing an aid organization in a third world country. It will also help me think
more critically about the challenges inherent in undertaking such initiatives and how to
increase their ultimate effectiveness.

The Sorensen Fellowship represents a vital next step in my journey toward realizing my
deep-seated but very distant goal – bringing medical services to underserved communities. It
will give me the gift of opportunity, a chance to acquire some of the academic, personal, and
real-world tools and resources I will need to attain that goal. It will subject my passion to a real-
world test and at the same time allow me to make a real-time impact on others in medical
need. This program will teach me many valuable lessons I will apply to make a larger-scale
positive change in the future. Ultimately, I hope my exposure to the medical clinic founded by
Dr. Murphy will enable me to one day adapt his model to improve the quality of medical care
for impoverished communities in other still underserved parts of the world.