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UF senior earns top student honor April 17, 2004 6:00AM

Long list of achievements lauded

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By **JANINE YOUNG SIKES**

Sun staff writer

A perfect 4.0 grade-point average, student government leadership and outreach into the community secured University of Florida senior Anup Patel's place as "college student of the year" as determined by Florida Leader magazine.

State Education Commissioner Jim Horne, Colleges and Universities Chancellor Debra Austin and Community Colleges Chancellor David Armstrong were on hand in Tallahassee to present the award Friday. Patel emerged as the overall winner from 78 applicants.

A triple-major who founded a nonprofit organization designed to provide education and health supplies to help children in some of India's most deplorable areas, Patel, 22, was named earlier this year as one of the top 20 students in the nation as determined by USA Today.

Patel, who will receive nearly \$65,000 in scholarships, could not be reached for comment. The scholarship program is sponsored by Florida Leader, SunTrust Education Loans and Office Depot.

For 17 years, Florida Leader, a leading student-oriented magazine, has selected a college student of the year based on his or her academic standing, self-sufficiency and service to the community and campus.

Patel of Altamonte Springs is scheduled to graduate in May with undergraduate degrees in biochemistry and molecular genetics, economics and political science.

He has dreams to be a physician and has been accepted to Yale University's medical school and UF's medical school.

UF administrators marvel at his accomplishments during his four years at the university.

Even before he attended his first class, Patel approached UF Genetics Institute Director Ken Berns, who is renowned for his research in gene therapy. Patel asked if he could work in Berns' laboratory - something typically reserved only for upperclassmen.

"I couldn't believe that as a freshman he would have that much ingenuity," Associate Provost Sheila Dickison said.

Berns agreed on the proviso that Patel maintained a perfect course record. Patel did. He worked with Berns on


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and off during his time at UF to create a DNA string to carry beneficial genes into cells in the eye to treat blindness.

"It turned out to be technically very challenging, but he actually made this new DNA construct," Berns said.

In addition to research, Patel became familiar with health policy issues during an internship with U.S. Sen. Bob Graham in Washington after Patel's sophomore year.

Graham even incorporated some of Patel's research into a speech he gave on the Senate floor related to a prescription drug plan.

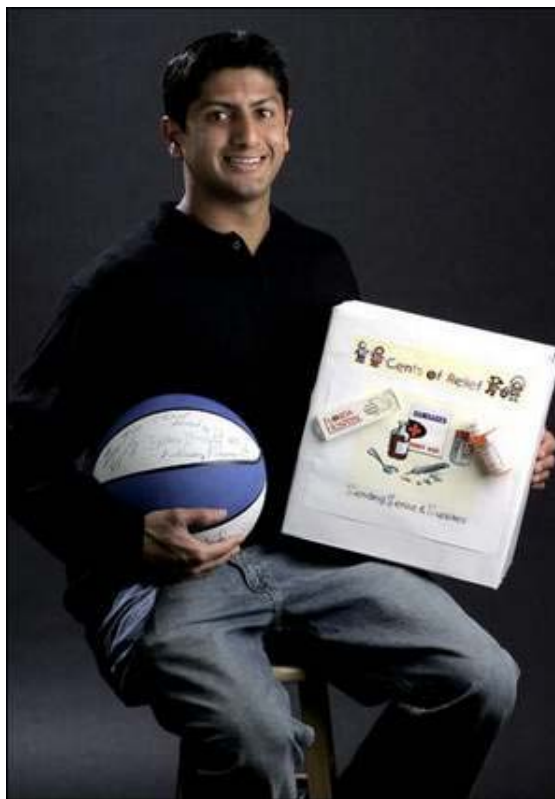
"Anup brought his research skills to the table, capable and willing to work long hours and do the type of detailed analysis that was needed at that point," said Howard Forman, associate professor of diagnostic radiology at Yale, who was then a legislative fellow in Graham's office.

Off campus, Patel volunteered at the Gainesville Ronald McDonald House and helped bring Locks of Love, a hair drive to make wigs for cancer patients, to campus.

No one doubts Patel is destined for great things.

"He's going to do great," Berns said. "But we're not done yet. He's still writing his honors thesis. He's gotten all these honors but he's still got to finish his thesis."

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ZOOM 

CHRISTINA STUART/Sun file photo

Anup Patel poses at The Sun recently. Patel was named "college student of the year" by Florida Leader magazine.

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