Sitting across the desk from Shawn Friedland, one may not expect this senior from Melbourne, Fla., with his quiet demeanor and understated style to have such a wide circle of influence. Friedland has moved into his role as student body president with little fanfare, but when it comes to service on the campus and in the community, he wants to lead in both word and action.

“Along with sustaining the initiatives of our past leadership, I hope to give the Crookston Student Association (CSA) a bigger voice on campus and in the community,” Friedland says. “And, I would like to see our executive board take on a community service project like all the clubs and organizations do.” With a heart for service and a dream to become a medical doctor, he manages a rigorous academic career with his leadership activities into a blend that befits him.

After spending five weeks in Ghana, Africa, over the summer, Friedland realized his potential to make a difference in a very personal way. “Observing in a hospital in Ghana was a great learning experience for me,” Friedland describes, “but, I loved going into the schools and teaching hygiene and malaria prevention to elementary school children the most.” While the schools lacked much in the way of facilities and supplies, Friedland found the children lacked nothing in the way of enthusiasm. What surprised him most however was the depth to which he enjoyed teaching.

Originally interested in zoology, he attended college in Miami, Fla., for a year and a half after high school. “I wanted something different,” Friedland explains. “I started searching for schools offering degrees in animal science. I found the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, but I wasn’t sure I wanted another large campus. That’s when I found Crookston.” The rest is history.

Becoming a medical doctor has always interested him, and after considering it, he decided to change from animal science to a major in biology and follow the pre-med track. The first few months on campus left him feeling a bit disconnected. It wasn’t until he
decided to run for CSA senator that Friedland hit his stride. “I knew I needed to join an organization because I wanted to meet people and get more involved,” he explains. “Serving as a senator really changed things for me.”

It didn’t stop there. He joined the Multicultural and International Club, Student Programming and Activities for Campus Entertainment (SPACE), Students for the Education of Environmental and Life Sciences (SEELS), and for a year, served as a community advisor in Skyberg Hall. Currently, he devotes his time to CSA alone.

Friedland had long harbored an interest in studying abroad. Weighing opportunities and options led him to Cross Cultural Solutions, an organization specializing in short-term volunteer abroad programs. Working with his advisor, Associate Professor Pam Elf, he was able to use the experience for internship credit while volunteering in Africa.

He spent five weeks observing and helping in a hospital in Hohoe, Ghana, and along with it, teaching three classes per day in three to four different schools each week. “We stayed at a home base while we were in Ghana, and we had a program manager looking out for us,” Friedland explains. “There were twelve college students in my group, and I joined four other volunteers interested in helping in the community by teaching.”

One of the unique experiences during the trip was taking a few days to study herbal medicine, meet a witch doctor, and observe a bone setter. The trip to Africa changed how Friedland thinks about and approaches his future medical career. “I had several specialties I thought I was interested in before my trip, but now, I want to help people and primary care seems the best fit to me,” he says. “I want to go to places in the world where doctors are needed. My earning potential matters less to me than being able to make a difference in the lives of people who might not otherwise have access to medical care.”

For now though, Friedland is busy in his role as a student leader, applying to medical schools, and completing his last two semesters as an undergraduate. Along the way, he has discovered a circle of influence running from the corner of Africa to the corner of Minnesota and as far beyond as he can imagine—like the ever growing circles in a ripple effect.