Prodigy who started college at 9 set to graduate from University of Chicago med school at 21
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CHICAGO — A 21-year-old Chicago man who began college at age 9 and medical school three years later is about to become the youngest student ever awarded an M.D. by the University of Chicago.

Sho Yano, who was reading at age 2, writing at 3 and composing music at 5, will graduate this week from the Pritzker School of Medicine, where he also received a Ph.D. in molecular genetics and cell biology.

Yano earned his undergraduate degree from Loyola University at age 12, finishing in three years and graduating summa cum laude, the Chicago Tribune reported Sunday (http://trib.in/LaabMZ). The average age of students entering medical school in the U.S. is 23, and there were schools that refused Yano admittance because of his age. School officials worried that the rigors of medical school would hinder Yano’s ability to have a normal adolescence.

“I never understood that,” Yano said. “Why would being allowed to challenge yourself be considered more damaging that being totally bored?”

The University of Chicago admitted Yano in 2003.

“I remember interviewing him ... this nice, polite, 11-year-old boy, dressed in a little suit,” said Dr. Joel Scwab, a professor of pediatrics who was on the admissions committee. “He was never going to be among typical 11-year-olds, where his mother would drive him to Little League. He was going to be a doctor.”

The school made some accommodations because of Yano’s age. Unlike most students, who begin their Ph.D. training after their second year of medical school, Yano began his after his first year. That way, he was about 18 when he began his second year of studies toward his M.D., which includes interacting with and examining patients.

Yano, who is an accomplished pianist and has a black belt in tae kwon do, told the paper he hopes his graduation will silence those who questioned his developmental aptitude when he entered medical school.

He is currently preparing for his residency in pediatric neurology, which he became interested in pediatric neurology while doing a rotation at LaRabida Children’s Hospital in Chicago.

“I really liked not just taking care of kids, but the way the whole team worked together,” he said.

Genius, seemingly, runs in the Yano family.

His sister, Sayuri, is his only sibling, also a prodigy and his closest confidante. After receiving a bachelor’s degree in biology from Roosevelt University in 2010, the 15-year-old is now at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, pursuing a second bachelor’s degree in violin performance.
Yano has been a college student for 12 years, but it’s only recently that he looks as if he belongs, blending in with students in a Hyde Park coffee shop.

The wisecracks that come with being a college pre-teen have passed, and Yano is looking forward. The University of Chicago holds its graduation Saturday.

He said, “I am living my dream.”