

ON

OF A LIFETIME THE PRICELESS GIFT OF ANATOMY CLASS

By Doug Carlson

Few visitors ever step beyond the locked doors of the College of Medicine's clinical anatomy laboratory. These two brightly lit rooms on the lower level are 2,700 square feet of sacred space.

Hand-picked from more than 3,000 applicants, 120 new medical students arrive each May filled with confidence – until they report to the anatomy lab. No amount of previous success can prepare them for the anxiety and emotional upheaval of their first medical school experience. The uncertain first step toward becoming a physician begins with a cut.

"I think anatomy really is sort of the rite of passage," said Lynn Romrell, Ph.D., professor and associate dean for curriculum development and evaluation. "Medical students are among the very few individuals who get to dissect as they study the fascinating details of the human body."

Romrell has taught clinical anatomy in Florida for 41 years to more than 4,000 medical students. For 25 years in Gainesville, he directed the state anatomical board that accepts donated bodies and distributes them to Florida's medical schools.

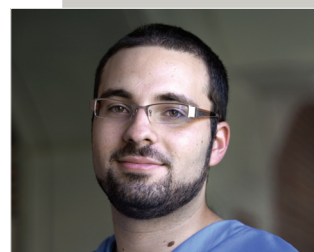
With his permission, FSU MED interviewed five first-year medical students as they went through the emotions and discoveries – both personal and scientific – of a semester in clinical anatomy. The students who agreed to share their story over a three-month period in the summer of 2009 are as diverse as the lessons learned, each bringing their own approach to coping with this uniquely transforming experience.

Though only students and faculty are allowed inside the lab while cadavers are present, the interviews provide a glimpse at how the course works and why it has such an emotional impact.

During orientation week, before the first day of class, the first-year students are gathered in a lecture hall. Less than an hour later, they are in the anatomy lab for the first time, seeing the 21 cadavers (most students refer to them as "patients") they will be dissecting over the next 10 weeks.

"You're changing into your scrubs and you're about to meet your patients," said Brett Thomas, who grew up in a rural area south of Tallahassee and is the first person in his family to go to medical school. "And I was thinking, 'Wow, this is orientation?'"

Katie Powell is now a second-year medical student at Florida State.



From top: Professor Lynn Romrell, Cindy-Sue Turco, Brett Thomas, Souhail Karram and Samsad Mansoor.

PHOTOS BY COLIN HACKLEY