

Summer of Hopes and Dreams

The story of Grace Bernhard and her family is, in many ways, the story of America. It's about uprooting a family from one country and moving to another so the children could pursue a better life. It's about parents encouraging their children to dream big, work hard, serve others and get a good education. The story begins in Honduras.

"When I was a little girl, my grandfather was a big influence in my life," Grace recalls today. "He was a teacher and the principal of the local high school. He would come to our home and teach me new things. No matter what I was learning in school, he wanted me to do more, to get ahead of things."

During those early years in Honduras, Grace developed a fascination with dentistry. "My father used to call me 'little dentist.' From the time I



Grace Bernhard is one of 11 students chosen for the 2011 Summer Enrichment Program in dentistry.

started to lose my baby teeth, I sensed that dentistry was a special kind of caring. I thought that dentistry was what I was meant to do."

Since coming to America 14 years ago, Grace has pursued her dream. In 2010, she graduated from the University of New Orleans (UNO) with a degree in biological sciences. She then returned for advanced courses in immunology and biochemistry. She has sought out several opportunities to observe dentistry in action through shadowing. Those experiences confirmed her desire to become a dentist.

This summer she was one of the 10 students accepted into the Summer Enrichment Program, under the direction of Dr. John Ritchie, who is also director of admissions. The program is an intense six-week course for



Summer Enrichment Program Class of 2011 with program director Dr. John Ritchie, third from the left

continued

Carolyn Nguyen places a silver filling on a dental mannequin.

underrepresented minority students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The 10 students were chosen from 27 applicants based on grade-point average, recommendation letters from science professors and personal essays. This year's students came from LSU in Baton Rouge, Louisiana Tech, McNeese State University, University of Louisiana at Monroe, UNO, Tulane University, Xavier University and Loyola University.

The program consists of 140 hours of lectures and labs that provide students with hands-on experience during workshops in dental anatomy and the principles of operative dentistry. The program has enjoyed strong support among the faculty. This year 25 volunteer faculty members taught the labs and classes. The students also receive preparation for the Dental Admissions Test.



Dorian Long, Tracy Lewis and Michael Goins are all members of the Alpha Epsilon Professional Honor Society at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston.

According to Dr. Ritchie, 39 students have gone through the summer program in the prior three years. Of this total, 18 have been accepted into dental school.

"The program went above and beyond my expectations," said Grace. "I learned a lot from the hands-on experiences such as waxing, taking impressions, and performing operative dentistry procedures including drilling and placing silver and tooth-colored fillings in dental mannequins.

"I am really glad that we had the opportunity to be mentored by Dr. Ritchie," Grace continued. "He says that dentistry is about helping others. He not only says it but he shows it in his actions. The fact that he's been helping us and making a difference by bringing diversity into the dental school says a lot about his character. He is making a difference in people's lives. He has certainly made a huge impact on mine."

Grace's dream is to give back as her parents did. "My father is a pastor and my parents came to the United States as missionaries to the Hispanic community. My hope is to have a dental practice and also, perhaps once a week, to have a free clinic at a church, to be there for people who need dental care but who are low-income. The summer program has encouraged me even more to pursue a career in dentistry so that someday, I, too, can be that dentist who helps others."

Dr. Ritchie says that it's been personally gratifying "to play even a small part in helping many of the summer program students realize their dreams of joining the dental profession. It has been particularly rewarding to see so many of them succeed in spite of the tremendous obstacles they had to overcome."

Funding for the program comes from private and public sources, including LSUSD, Campus Federal Credit Union, Louisiana Dental Centers, Dr. John T. Nguyen, members of the Louisiana Pelican Dental Association, Dr. Peter J. Dorsey, Dr. Joan T. Fisher-Ranel, Dr. Sharon Sims and Dr. Kevin Harris.

For information about giving to the 2012 program, contact Dr. John Ritchie at jritch@lsuhsc.edu or Joanne Courville at jcourv@lsuhsc.edu.