

## Winning Streak

### JCHP teacher scores high marks with students

Looking back on your school days, you might remember a teacher who influenced you. Maybe she gave you a few words of advice. Maybe it was spending some extra time with you to make sure you understood the class. Or maybe it was simply giving you the support and encouragement you needed to succeed.

At Jefferson College of Health Professions (JCHP) of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, a good number of graduates owe their professional success, in part, to one of the college's teachers: Cynthia Shillingsburg, BA, RVT, RVS.

On a consistent basis, the students enrolled in Shillingsburg's cardiovascular seminar have graduated with "published" on their resumes, opening the door to higher salaries and greater job benefits.

And now for the fourth consecutive year, her students have been invited by the Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonography (SDMS) to present their original research abstracts at the annual scientific presentation competition to be held in October in Dallas. JCHP students will compete against several peers from across the country with hopes of filling one of only four winning slots.

Shillingsburg's seminar is a weekly course requiring students to write a research paper on cardiovascular technology. Through blackboard.com, she can also moderate the course online and communicate with off-site students in real time.

"I give them steps along the way so we can build [their assignment] together. I ask them to try to select a topic [for their research paper] that they are interested in," says Shillingsburg, who is an instructor and clinical coordinator in the department of diagnostic imaging at Jefferson. "Passion has a lot to do with it." When completed, the paper is presented as an oral report and submitted to a journal for a chance at publication.

Shillingsburg says she gives her students a "formula for success" checklist. On that list are simple tips like how to write a good abstract or paper, knowing your audience, realizing your scope of practice and networking with professionals. "These things allow them to know that it is doable and to really utilize references that are pertinent," she says.

For the presentations, the college allows the students to take laptops with them so they can make use of a power point presentation to assist with any images they may need. "This helps in the competition," Shillingsburg adds.

"I hope [my students] get one presentation or one abstract from

my seminar in their portfolio; something they can start with and learn that it is an evolution," she says. "They can revisit it often, maybe at their workplaces, present it at a conference or submit it to a journal. If they get rejected, they can massage it around and submit it again, even to another journal. They learn the process, as well as [creating] something to take with them."

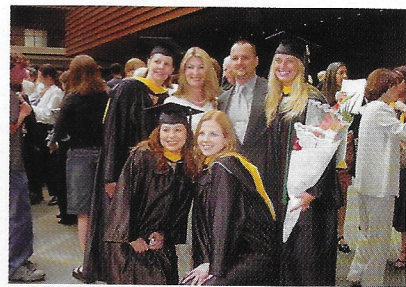
"I had great mentors, says Shillingsburg. "I had people that had been published and they always included me. When I came [to Jefferson], this was something I wanted to carry on and encourage other people to do."

She says JCHP's mentoring program has worked very well. "We kind of kicked butt," she jokes. "It just seems like we have it down. [JCHP] is such an immersion environment in terms of medicine. There are so many resources and mentors."

As an example, she notes two of her students who worked on an abstract with NASA regarding microgravity and the cardiovascular system. While on the project, the students were tutored by NASA researchers, as well as a physicist in Shillingsburg's department. "If they wanted to know something beyond their scope," she says, "the students were able to get to the next level in a timely fashion."

Shillingsburg says publishing is a way to share pertinent information and keep in touch with colleagues in an ever-changing field. She hopes that in the future, more employers and peers will mandate publishing in their jobs.

"For people to maintain the hierarchy of the hospital or collegiate setting, publishing is one thing you can use to readily climb the ladder," she says. "People don't realize that. Institutions that have hired people who have been published, and that has catapulted them to the next level."



Shillingsburg (top row, second from left) with her students at their graduation this past May

Photo courtesy of Cynthia Shillingsburg, BA, RVT, RVS

— T.S.