

**The University of Scranton
Panuska College of Professional Studies**

Celebration of Remembrance Ceremony

Nov. 17, 2017

Student Reflection

Natalia Ochalski, Doctor of Physical Therapy Program

I remember walking to our first day of anatomy lab. I walked with my head high and my shoulders back wearing my blue scrubs, gloves and shoe protectors as I hid my anxieties of what awaited beyond the door to the lab. The door to the cadaver lab opened, and I was greeted with a cold breeze and an unfamiliar feeling. Forty eager students amongst a room of eight metal tables, cadavers on top, covered in blue sheets and plastic. My heart skipped a beat, as this sight was foreign. Before us lay eight, beautiful human beings who dedicated their bodies to people they never knew. These humans elected to sacrifice their burial, and instead chose to have strangers bury their hands inside of them to examine them for the purpose of science and education. My cadaver did not only give his body to my fellow students and I, but he gave his body to our future patients. In that moment, I realized that it was not just about science, but the most selfless gift that these humans bestowed on us; the gift of life, the gift of learning. On that June morning, I stood before a human who would teach me so much. After uncovering the body and pulling that blue sheet, I saw a man in the most vulnerable form. It was then when my fellow lab group members and I decided to give him a name. He was not just an object to us, and naming him was the first step to accepting the journey we were about to experience for the next 8 weeks. After giving him a name, Bert took on a life of his own, which made getting to know him much easier. Each day we learned something new about this man, and he began to feel like a part of our lab group, instead of a stranger lying motionless before us.

Much of our summer was spent trying to find miniscule vessels and structures in Bert's body. Once we found the structures we were relieved until we realized we had to remember the names of all these structures, and find them in all other 7 bodies. The saying that no two people are the same is certainly true, especially when one body is missing a structure and you have spent the past 45 minutes squinting through foggy goggles trying to find it.

However, Bert helped us through it all. Through his silence, he mapped out where each structure was to our eager eyes, and I will forever be grateful for his patience.

It all became real for me as we got inside the body. I ran my fingers across muscle fibers that helped Bert walk all paths of life. I held his fingers so delicately that used to hold the ones he loved. I saw his lungs, the organs that kept him alive day in and day out. I held Bert's heart, a human heart; a heart that once raced with excitement, with fear, with love and with passion. These cadavers dedicated their life to have a lasting impact on this world even when their hearts were no longer beating. In that moment, I witnessed eight human beings carry out the greatest act of heroism.

These bodies will forever be our teachers; the ones who were with us through our first step to becoming the amazing physical therapists we aspire to be. We will never forget the beneficent actions, the patience and the lessons that each of these individuals taught us.

Months after cadaver lab, I still get a sense of gratitude when students say the names we gave them. I will never know my cadaver's real name, but I know the impact he had on me will forever hold a special place in my heart. Thank you for having the courage to teach, as the best lessons are taught through actions. I'm apprehensive to describe how grateful I am, as your impact goes beyond words.