

ESSM Students Prepare for Wide Range of Fields

by Jean M. McLean

You never know what future professional you might encounter in Samford's Exercise Science and Sports Medicine [ESSM] program. About half of these undergraduates plan to be physicians or physical therapists. Others will be pharmacists, physician assistants, dentists, athletic trainers, fitness specialists, physical education teachers, nutritionists or other specialists.

More than ever before, each of these students, regardless of anticipated vocation, is nurtured in a program that "provides them with unique opportunities, including service learning, high-level research, and outstanding faculty members who care about the personal and professional lives of the students," said Dr. Alan Jung, ESSM department chair and assistant professor.

It is obvious that these efforts are working, as evidenced by the department's extraordinary graduate school acceptance rates. Nearly 100 percent of all the department's applicants have been accepted to medical school, dental school, pharmacy school, physician assistant school, chiropractic school, physical therapy school and other graduate programs.

Graduates currently attend graduate or professional schools ranging from Samford and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, to Duke and the University of Southern California.

Jung credits ESSM's success to the quality of entering students, the quality of committed faculty who make students a priority and the programs crafted to give undergraduates some master's-level research training while still in a bachelor's setting. The department emphasizes service that continues the school's community service tradition, which appeals to a wide range of Samford students, particularly those who see medical missions as part of their future. Many students, says Jung, consider their major as a foundation for a future of serving others in the mission field.

Part of this development is in research. Dr. John Petrella, a muscle physiologist formerly with the University

of Alabama at Birmingham's medical school, joined the department in August. "He brings a wealth of research knowledge and lab experience that will benefit all our students, particularly those who plan on attending graduate school, medical school or physical therapy school," said Jung.

Petrella continues the school's established emphasis on varied student research worthy of academic journal publication. Four manuscripts from last year's senior research projects were submitted for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Students regularly present their research projects at the Alabama State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance annual meeting, and will begin presenting at the Southeast American College of Sports Medicine and Southeast Athletic Trainers' Association annual meetings.

Research and service opportunities were furthered when the Exercise Physiology Lab recently acquired equipment to perform high-level research and conduct physiological testing for the local community. The metabolic cart is the gold standard for measuring aerobic fitness. It can be used to predict the number of calories an individual burns at rest during the day (resting metabolic rate) and the number of fat calories burned during exercise.

The lab frequently receives requests from individuals in Birmingham who would like to have a variety of physiological tests performed, including calls for an instrument called the "Bod Pod,"



PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Exercise science and sports medicine major Tan Taylor works with Josh Kaiser, right, and Thomas Comini in a motor skills development class for children at Samford.

which measures percentage of body fat.

In addition to special-request and research use of these instruments, students soon will have more opportunities for outreach. The department plans to launch an official Community Testing Program in 2008.

The combination of community service, research, consultation with professionals and peers and academic publication does more than further these students' chances of being accepted in their desired graduate school. It also helps meet the ESSM's mission to help them become as well-rounded as possible.

"It's not just about going to medical school or other graduate programs," said Jung. "We challenge students to think about their purpose, their God-given gifts and their calling. We hope this encourages the students to understand how they can make a positive impact on others—individually, locally and globally." ■

Jean M. McLean is a freelance writer in Montevallo, Ala.