

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The birth of Great Expectations began with the lofty goal of helping the first year dental students at Baylor College of Dentistry succeed in dental school and form lasting relationships with those in the dental profession. The way Great Expectations has been structured is centered around the concept of creating a web of relationships throughout the dental community, between the first year dental students, the upperclassmen dental students, faculty members at the dental school, and practicing dentists in the community and the Dallas County Dental Society. If the first years need school advice, they can go to the upperclassmen and faculty member. If they want to be exposed to real-world dentistry, they have the practicing dentists to speak to and go observe. The beauty of Great Expectations is that the relationships formed each year will not dissolve with each first year class passing through Baylor; but rather, they will be maintained over the years to come after having been established during the critical stage of a budding dentist, which is that first year in dental school. This mindset of unselfishness, teamwork, and support for those in dentistry and those joining the dental community is contagious and will, no doubt, lead to more involvement in organized dentistry and dental organizations, both local and nationally, by the budding dental student.

The need for an organization like Great Expectations is shown by the thirst for those in the dental community and within the dental school to become a part of it. Both the organizations and members of the Dallas County Dental Society and the International College of Dentists have been very involved and supportive. So far, twelve practicing dentists, twelve Baylor faculty members, and twenty-four upperclassmen at Baylor have volunteered to be mentors to the first years. In fact, when applications to become student mentors went out to third and fourth year dental students, the response was so overwhelming that twice the number of mentors were accepted to the organization. People want to be a part of this; the dental community wants to give back.

Great Expectation's first event was the "Dallas County Dental Society's First Year Dinner & Great Expectations Mentor Program Kickoff." Almost all of the first year class attended, as well as all the chosen mentors. At the end of the evening, everyone gathered in their assigned groups of eight to ten first year dental students, two upper classmen mentors, a faculty member, and a practicing dentist from the community. Everyone got to know one another, and goals were set for the first year students. Since then, each small group has met regularly, usually at the mentor-dentist's office, to eat and talk about the progress of the first years and how their experience could be richer and more successful. Now, the end of Great Expectation's inaugural year is coming to a close. A huge ranch party is planned on April 26, 2008 at Dr. Herwig's ranch, where BBQ will be served and games will be played. In addition to all of the mentors and first year dental students, spouses and children were also invited to attend. Up until now, the mentor-dentists, as well as DCDS and ICD, have been the primary funders of Great Expectation's events. However, due to the sheer numbers involved in the activities, funding has become a very real problem. Raising money is now a priority. It is now time that the unselfish passion that began Great Expectations be extended to unselfish giving. We cannot limit the potential of Great Expectations to add to the synergy of the dental community and help the first year dental students succeed by falling short of the required funds necessary to support the annual events.