



CLINICAL EXTERNSHIP: A Guide for the Surgical Technology Student

Written by: Heather Burggraf, CST, ASTSA Vice President



Although most surgical technology students anxiously await the clinical portion of our training, we also experience a lot of fear and nerves in the weeks leading up to our first days in the O.R. I will never forget preparing for my clinicals. Last fall, my class of 36 students crammed in our lab classroom, studying for our practicum, the hands-on practical test that would determine if we would continue on to clinicals. Finally, the day arrived. The majority of my class performed very well, and within days we were given our hospital assignments.

The next week, five of my classmates and I joined our instructor at

the hospital. We spent the first day getting oriented and observing our first case. Mine was a thyroidectomy. I kept my eyes locked on my preceptor, watching his every move and silently praying that I would be able to do well the next day, when I would be scrubbing in with him. The next day, as my heart pounded beneath my scrub top, he watched me gown and glove. I managed to get sterile without fumbling, and he then talked me through the setup for our case, a total knee arthroplasty. It was intimidating. There were two backtables piled high with instrument pans and supplies. I arranged the supplies and instruments that I was familiar with, and he showed me several new instruments. During the case, I ran the mayo. Luckily, I had a very patient surgeon, who talked me through each step. My preceptor handled the implant trays on the other backtable, but I got to work at the field for most of the case. I will never forget how surprised I was at how much of this felt familiar; we had learned more in lab than I realized. After that day, my nerves subsided a bit and from then on I went into each case with the confidence that I knew enough to be there, and I took every opportunity I could to learn more.

During my nine months in clinical

rotations, I learned many ways to get the most out of my experience. Instructors, preceptors and other experienced STs gave some of the following advice to me. Some of it I figured out the hard way. By going into clinicals knowing what to expect, you can go in ready to learn with less anxiety and fear.

Eat a good breakfast and come prepared. Having a solid meal in your stomach (coffee and a donut does not count) will help prevent fainting, and makes some of the smells you will encounter much more tolerable. Bring a pen and small notepad so you can write down anything you will need to write in your clinical reports. I always made notes after the case about what suture and special instruments were used. If the backtable covers are disposable, you can also make notes on them with your sterile marker during the case.

Ask questions, but know when to keep quiet. Many surgeons and preceptors are happy to answer questions. If the case is a stressful one, or if you happen to have a surgeon who just does not seem receptive, hold your questions until the end. Asking questions shows your surgeon that you are engaged and paying attention, but if they dislike talking

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during a case or if you constantly bombard them, they may have an unfavorable report for your instructor.

Remember you are there to learn. Sometimes the mood in the O.R. can be downright jovial, with lots of banter and laughing. Try not to get too caught up in this, as it can easily cross the line into behavior that is inappropriate for a student. You are a guest in the O.R., and learning is your number one priority. I am not saying be unfriendly, but keep the joking to a respectable minimum.

Every clinical day is a job interview. Even if you do not plan to work at your clinical facility, you can use your contacts there as references when job search time comes. Trust me, everyone has eyes on you, from the surgeon to the circulator to the other STs. Even your conversations in the locker room and break room are making an impression on that facility. Behave professionally every minute of your time there.

Review your cases the night before or after. You may get your case assignments the night before. If you read up on them, you will be much more prepared, which will definitely impress your preceptor and other members of your O.R. team. The night after, review the cases, write down procedure steps and what suture, instruments and supplies were used. You can use these for reference later, and it really helps you “hard-wire” the procedure into your brain.

Avoid arguing with your O.R. team. Maybe something is done differently at your clinical site than you learned in school. Maybe your preceptor is being impatient or not letting you do much. Maybe your surgeon is in a surly mood and snapping at you. Just go with the flow, stay calm, and wait to share your concerns with your clinical instructor. It is their job to help you through these situations, and arguing during a case can earn you a reputation as less than a team player. If the situation is extreme, such as real verbal or physical abuse, ask permission to scrub out and contact your instructor immediately. I have never experienced or heard of anything escalating to that point during my clinical

assignments, but it does happen from time to time.

Be careful with the sharps. One of your preceptors’ and circulating nurses’ biggest fears is that a student will have a sharps accident in their O.R. Put their minds at ease by exercising extreme caution with needles, suture and knife blades. Follow their sharps handling protocol to the letter. In addition, the way you handle instrument counts and medication on your field will tell them a lot about your competency as a surgical technologist.

Clinical externship is our time to learn by doing, to get comfortable in our new role and practice the skills we will need once we graduate. Make the best use of your time at the hospital, because it will be over before you know it! Remember that every day is a chance to learn a new procedure or a few new instruments. Once in a while, think back to when you were just learning this stuff and be proud about how far you have come. And mostly, enjoy your clinical experience

because it will be one of the most memorable times of your life. If you would like more information, the AST Web site has a wonderful online discussion board. It is a great place to get advice, share successes and frustrations, and meet other surgical technology students from across the country! Go to www.ast.org, choose the “professionals” tab and click Online Discussion Board. Log on and introduce yourself, or just read through the posts. It is a wonderful reference for students and working surgical technologists!

I wish every student reading this article the best of luck during their clinicals, and I look forward to meeting many of you at Student Track Day during the AST 2010 National Conference! ▲

HEATHER BURGGRAF graduated from the Surgical Technology program at Guilford Technical Community College in July. She passed her certification exam in August and, as of this writing, is looking forward to starting her first job as a CST at Randolph Hospital in Asheboro, NC.

AST's Sixth Annual ASTSA Forum will be held on Friday, May 28, at the 2010 Annual National Conference in Grapevine, Texas. The Forum is a great way to meet fellow surgical technology students from across the country, as well as take part in shaping the future of the organization! Below is the schedule for the 2010 Student Forum. We hope to see you in Texas!

MORNING SESSIONS

* 8:00 – 9:00	Candidates Forum	AST Candidates
* 9:15 – 9:30	Welcome!!!	Sherri Alexander
* 9:40 – 10:40	Employers & Career Fair	• Surgical First Assistant • Medical Mission • Travel Tech • Medical/Surgical Sales Rep • Educator
* 10:45 – 11:15	Business Meeting	
* 11:25 – 11:50	Candidates Speeches	
* 12:00 – 12:50	Lunch	

AFTERNOON SESSIONS

* 1:00 – 1:50	Cindy Mask, CST Tarrant County Community College	“Do We Get Extra Credit For This?”
* 2:00 – 2:30	Meet With Your State Assembly Representatives	
* 2:30 – 3:00	Voting	
* 3:00 – 3:15	Tell Us About Your New Friend	
* 3:15 – 3:30	Announce Contest Winners	
* 3:30 – 4:30	Certification Exam Q & A	Karyn Songer, CST, FAST Ron Kruzel, CST, MA
* 4:30 – 4:45	Election Results	
* 4:45 – 5:00	Raffle	

Students Celebrate National

Surgical Technology programs across the country celebrated National Surgical Technologist Week with various activities, including lunches, parties, open houses, and mock surgeries. It was a great opportunity for surgical technologists to network and share their experiences.



Fayetteville Technical Community College; Fayetteville, North Carolina

The Fayetteville Technical Community College's Surgical Technology Department hosted a number of events throughout the month of September to promote the surgical technology profession! The events included promotion of the ST program on the school's marquee and in the display showcase; cards mailed to local hospitals; and pins mailed to the advisory members. The week concluded with the department providing the surgical technology students with a breakfast.

Pictured (l-r): Jennifer Jenks, Kylie Parker, Terry Herring, Amy Stewart, Yolanda Plunkett, Sharon Erk, Whitney Wahlstrom, Jenna Muhsen, Robert Byford, Tami Riutort, Candice Melvin, Dionne Hopkins, Ashley Kemmer, Shannon Chavez, Alexis Hightower, Terrell Coleman, Sybil Thomas and Judy Williams.



Northwest Technical Institute; Springdale, Arkansas

*Back row (l-r): Katie Fritz, Michael Sanders, Kevin Smith, Allison Reaves, Ashley Galyon, Thomas Crane, Zach Sone
Middle row: Ashlie Worthey, Crystal Partain, Kollene Lane, Julieta Montoya, Scheina Harriman, Robin Eason
Front row: Ashton Starnes, Rachel Miller, Erin Hall*



Parkland College; Champaign, Illinois

Parkland College celebrated National Surgical Technologist Week with a potluck lunch, college-wide open house in the mock operating room, surgery bears and a display case. The local media also ran a story on the event.



West Kentucky Community and Technology College; Paducah, Kentucky

The students participated in special events each day for National Surgical Technologist Week.

Pictured (l-r): Ashley Crouch, Taga Jones, Samantha Littlepage, Gabriela Hurtado, Glenn Carmon, Leigh Ann Wood, Shara Rudy, Kelly Neely, Jenny Clark, Marion Schneider and Erin Thompson.

Students performed autopsy on decorative pig's feet, learning to convert inches to centimeters, ounces to milliliter and how to place a simple interrupted suture to close the skin.



Conemaugh Valley Memorial Hospital; Johnstown, Pennsylvania

Surgical technology students celebrated National Surgical Technologist Week with a pizza party, and had some fun on their break.

Southeast Technical Institute; Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The STI Surgical Technology Student Organization raised \$270.25, which was donated to the Southeast Technical Institute Foundation's Lan-Cast Scholarship Fund to support a ST student as they complete their clinical experience. The students raised funds with a lunch and bake sale during National Surgical Technologist Week.

Students made posters that had information about a career as a surgical technologist that were placed in the different campus buildings as a way to educate their fellow students and visitors on campus and demonstrated the skill of gowning and gloving during the lunch and bake sale.



Kingsborough Community College; Brooklyn, New York

The students at Kingsborough brought the O.R. to the campus's Breezeway, simulating a surgery just outside the campus cafeteria!



Fortis College; Richmond, Virginia

Fortis College's Surgical Technology Student Association hosted the college's first annual blood drive on Tuesday, September 22. They designed and sold t-shirts to help promote the blood drive, along with NSTW. The shirts slogan was, "Surgical Technologists Count ... And So Does Every Drop!" ST student Tiffany Briggs is shown donating blood. In all, the drive collected 60 pints of blood.



Midlands Technical College; Columbia, South Carolina

National Surgical Technologist Week

National Surgical Technologist Week in style. Several colleges hosted fund raisers for scholarship programs, took the opportunity to educate their fellow students and their communities with their knowledge of surgical technology students across the United States to take pride in their future profession.



Delaware County Community College; Media, Pennsylvania

First row: Patty Fellick, Amy Uknis, Jessica Power
 Second row: Beth Peterson, Valerie Lopes, Malee Yang, Alexandre Redden
 Third row: Rosie De Barberie, Lisa Kalinowsky, Angel Burger, Kelly Walsh
 Fourth row: Ann Endrey, David Jones, Aisha Witherspoon, Jena Basilio, Deirdre Kelly Boylan
 Not pictured: Ariel Bevington, Hester Tipton, Robert McDevitt



Maysville Community and Technical College; Maysville, Kentucky

Students and instructors educated the public with their display.



Everest College; Salt Lake City, Utah

Jeremiah Maxwell, Carmen Sattler and Ty Gogglesell hover around the grill. On the last day of NSTW, the faculty barbequed hamburgers and hot dogs for the students. There was also a raffle for all students that participated and gave away five gifts.



San Joaquin Valley College; Fresno, California

The San Joaquin Valley College surgical technology students were on their term break during National Surgical Technologist Week, so they held their celebration early by hosting an open house for friends and families of current students, prospective students, and the general public. The event was advertised in the newspaper, as well as on television and radio.



American Career College, Los Angeles Campus; Los Angeles, California



Tarrant County Community College; Durst, Texas

Tarrant County Community College celebrated the 40th anniversary of its surgical technology program. They planned for an entire year and invited alumni from the last 40 years. The program director, Don Braziel, CST, was in the second class! The program continues its work for the GLOVE project.



Tulsa Tech; Tulsa, Oklahoma

Tulsa Tech celebrated with a luncheon at the end of the week. They also gave gift baskets to their clinical partners for their surgical technologists.



Galveston College; Galveston, Texas

Galveston College surgical technology students celebrated National Surgical Technologist Week by collecting stuffed teddy bears for the Galveston Police Department Outreach Program.

Pictured from left to right: (back row) Ashley Littles, Director; Suzanna Martinez-Miller, CST, Takeshia Miller (sitting) Cherond Freeman, Angela Tamez, Tracey Battistoni, Sharitta Johnson, Marina James. (not pictured) Pamela Robinson, Yalanda White-Florence

The students also presented the OR staff at UTMB with cake and cookies.



Glendale Career College; Glendale, California

Academic Excellence Award recipients:

Justin Tarango, Cindy Porcell, Edwin Fahlsing, MD, CST, and Napoleon Baguisi

Nine Killer Mistakes that Destroy College Scholarship Applications

DALE CLIFTON

The Scholarship Doctor

COURTESY OF ARTICLESBASE

Are there mistakes that can disqualify a college scholarship application? You bet. Generally speaking, most local scholarship committees may find a few minor mistakes acceptable, but the higher the level of competition, the less tolerance there is for a faux pas. When you go for the gold at the national level of competition, no mistake is permissible. Even at the local level, if the competition is heavy, one error can result in the loss of money.

EVEN SMALL SPELLING MISTAKES can cause an application to be thrown out. A judge reviewed a submission from a girl who was second in her class. She had a 3.95 GPA. The problem? She misspelled salutatorian. Believe it! How does that happen? Surely, it should have been noticed. Was it a keyboarding error? Maybe.

ANOTHER APPLICATION from a boy on the baseball team noted that he won the league batting title with a .259 average. Know anything about baseball? Most likely, the number 2 should have been a 3, 4, 5, or even 6.

YET, ANOTHER LISTED the applicant's age as "88." Do you suppose she

was the oldest high school student in the country...in the world? But wait, she listed her birth date as 18 years earlier. Those are the kinds of silly little miscues that can disqualify good candidates. Use the computer spell check and have someone read for context and spelling problems. Most people cannot do a good job of proof-reading themselves. Why take a chance?

ANOTHER BLUNDER is leaving spaces blank. The committee may think that you are trying to hide something. If the question or statement is not applicable to you, write DNA on the line, which is the standard abbreviation or acronym for Does Not Apply.

USE A COMPUTER AND KEYBOARD whenever possible. Investigate the many inexpensive and free form-filling computer programs. No long hand here. Never write in pencil. And, NEVER, NEVER. EVER, EVER use whiteout.

FOLLOW DIRECTIONS EXACTLY. It is not unusual to see lists where paragraphs are required and vice versa. Sometimes a signature is needed with the name printed. A simple YES or

NO may be necessary, instead, an opinion is given.

HERE'S A TRICKY ONE that trips many applicants with honor roll credentials. After 10 years in school, they still have problems using to, too, two, and they're, their, there.

Oops! I saw a sure regional and possible national winner disqualified, because her application missed the deadline date...by one day. Always beat the deadline. Mail early.

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? An application arrived without the requisite signature form.

CHECK, CHECK, CHECK.

THIS BEARS REPEATING: most mistakes can be eliminated when others proof the application. Then read it aloud while someone else listens.

WHAT CAN YOU DO if the mistake cannot be corrected? Be sure to make a copy before you start. If it says "copies are not permitted," go back for one or two more originals.

PLANNING PRODUCES positive outcomes when the scholarship effort is truly a family affair. ▲

Great Recommendation Letters Win Big Scholarship Bucks

DALE CLIFTON

The Scholarship Doctor

COURTESY OF ARTICLESBASE

Your scholarship application is due in 10 days. It must have three recommendation letters attached, and, so far, you have not gotten any back from your instructors. A note to each of them last week hasn't gotten any results. Talk about strained nerves. All the work to get

the application ready, and now letters are halting the process.

This is a scenario that repeats itself hundreds and thousands of times each year. You can avoid this problem by taking important appropriate actions. Start by asking for your recommendation letters at least six

weeks in advance. This allows busy teachers to take their time in writing great responses. After two weeks, remind them with a note in their mailboxes. Seven days after that, make a visit to their classroom. Remind them in person that your application could be late and disqualified and that you

will come by in a few days to pick it up. Thank him or her again and then stop by once more.

One way to avoid total mayhem is to ask for more letters than is really needed (awards may vary in the number of letters needed). If the requirement is two for an award, ask four people.

If you are applying for more than a couple of scholarship awards (and you really should be), ask the instructor or whoever, if they would be willing to put their comments on a CD. Remind them that you will be sending out dozens of applications. It will save them time. You can print out as many copies as you need and bring the letters by for their signatures. They can inspect the documents before you send them in. A hand-written signature is always best.

Who should you ask? Does it

make a difference? Yes, it does matter. Know this: English and foreign language teachers generally write the best letters. They personalize them and may write from a half to a whole page. They also produce results that have no spelling or grammatical errors. Again, and this is a general statement, coaches and physical education teachers write the shortest remarks and may have mistakes in spelling and grammar. But, go with your best options regardless of teaching position.

Use your official school letterhead, when possible.

Remember to ask your instructor if he or she can write a positive response. If not, move on. A probable scholarship winner fulfilled all requirements with a big plus, and was in line to receive an \$8,000 award.

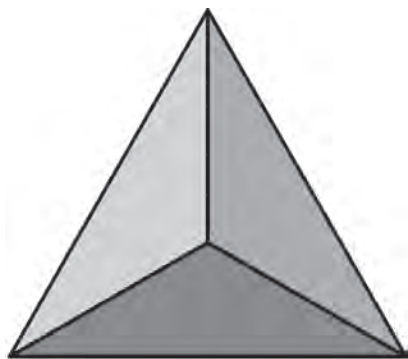
Everything was super except for one

recommendation letter. She assumed her coach would write a glowing response. He didn't. Don't let that happen to you. She didn't win.

Follow the same time-line for all requests, and remember this: everything in life is a decision, make the right ones today for your future. ▲

DALE CLIFTON, the Scholarship Doctor, has degrees from Purdue and Indiana Universities with experience in education. He served as a national scholarship judge for three years. Dale has presented scholarship success seminars to parent groups, students, and employees of major companies. Dale has developed College Scholarship Planning, a complete strategy for winning college scholarships. He has been featured on ABC, CBS, TBN and Fox-TV affiliates, on talk radio and in print. Dale can be contacted through his Web site, www.scholarshipdoctor.com.

2009-10 Scholarship Applications Posted



FOUNDATION
FOR SURGICAL
TECHNOLOGY

In a tough economy, what could possibly be better than free money? The Foundation for Surgical Technology's Student Scholarship program rewards educational excellence by responding to the financial needs demonstrated by surgical technology students.

Scholarships are awarded based on the information provided in individual applications. Applicants must provide an official course fee schedule from the educational institution for the courses they are taking, in addition to official transcripts and a mentor reference form.

The scholarship application consists of four parts: a student section, to be completed by the applicant; the official transcript, to be obtained by the applicant from his or her school; an instructor section, to be completed by the applicant's instructor; and a preceptor section, which must be completed by the applicant's clinical preceptor.

Keep in mind that instructors and preceptors are busy, so the earlier you can speak to them about writing you a recommendation, the better. As illustrated above, an application can be derailed by a weak letter of recommendation, or an incomplete application. Be sure to give yourself enough time to get your entire application together before the due date!

All applications must be postmarked by March 1, 2010.

Scholarship funds are provided entirely through contributions to the Foundation for Surgical Technology by individuals, AST constituent divisions, corporations and others who desire to support the scholarship program of the Foundation. All winners will be required to provide a photograph, background information and professional goals.

Please send any questions regarding scholarships to publications@ast.org.

In addition to scholarships offered by the Foundation for Surgical Technology, Delmar Cengage Learning offers students in CAAHEP-accredited surgical technology programs the opportunity to apply for financial assistance. The Foundation for Surgical Technology administers the program and selects the scholarship recipient.

For more information on this, or any scholarship that AST offers, please visit www.ast.org, click on the "Students" tab on the left hand side of the page and select the "Scholarships" option from the drop-down menu.

Congratulations to AST National Honor Society Inductees

AUGUST

Elizabeth Ekanger.....Mercy College of Health Sciences; Des Moines, Iowa
Nola C Jones.....Heritage College; Oklahoma City, Okla.
Christina LaCombeMt Diablo Adult Education; Concord, Calif.
Amber R MartindaleMt Diablo Adult Education; Concord, Calif.
Cynthia NovakMt Diablo Adult Education; Concord, Calif.
Athena Servis.....York Technical College; Rock Hill, SC
Brittany Stapp-CaudellSan Joaquin Valley College; Fresno, Calif.
Melissa Thomson.....Mt Diablo Adult Education; Concord, Calif.
Don Voltaire Vidal.....Mt Diablo Adult Education; Concord, Calif.

SEPTEMBER

Amy BroussardLouisiana Technical College; Lafayette, La.
Nicholas Frank FlorioNorth Florida Institute; Orange Park, Fla.
Annalise C Minks.....San Joaquin Valley College; Fresno, Calif.
Teresa Lynne MooreYork Technical College; Rock Hill, SC
Jacqueline Diane StrozewskiNorth Florida Institute; Orange Park, Fla.

OCTOBER

Dena Hamilton Lemus.....Glendale Career College; Glendale, Calif.
Herman Han.....NYU; New York, NY
Narine OganesyanyGlendale Career College; Glendale, Calif.
Sheryll Shemwell.....Concorde Career Institute; Jacksonville, Fla.



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