

Gross Anatomy:

For Robert Cusanelli, Gross Anatomy class was more than just another class to fulfill his degree requirements. It was more than a class to prepare him for medical school.

And although Cusanelli admits that Gross Anatomy was the best class he's ever taken, its meaning was much greater than just something academic. It was also an exercise that bolstered his faith.

"Just the ability to get in and see the body, how we're put together in the most intricate ways, it's just amazing," Cusanelli said. "It ultimately shows God's design. When you're looking at the body you wonder how people can come to the conclusion that it was done by chance. There's so much intricate detail. You can read about it in a textbook, but it's another thing to actually see it."


Union University has offered a gross

anatomy class for almost 15 years. Taught by biology professor James Huggins, the class is focused on the dissection of a human body.

"We cover every system as we dissect it," Huggins said. "This course is really a preparation for several pre-professional programs. Primarily it's for those going into med school, dental school and physical therapy school."

In medical school, Gross Anatomy is often considered to be a difficult course during the first semester, mainly because of the volume of information that students have to process. Because Union offers the course at the undergraduate level, it gives students planning to attend medical school a head start.

"Because they've already taken a body apart, they already know a bunch of this



Gross Anatomy students examine with awe the wonders of God's creation in the workings of the human body.

A CHANCE TO 'THINK GOD'S THOUGHTS BEHIND HIM'

information," Huggins said. "It's proved very, very valuable for them."

Offered only over the summer, Gross Anatomy class begins with the students removing the cadaver's skin on the first day. In order to make the students feel more comfortable, Huggins keeps the face covered and allows the students to look as they are able to.

Most of the students are tentative the first day, until the skin is removed.

"Once the skin comes off, what they begin to do is see less humanity, so they're able to get involved in learning the muscles, the nerves, the arteries and veins and eventually the organ systems," Huggins said. "When it's all over, the students love the course. They find it very beneficial."

The cadavers come from the University of Tennessee. Most of them are older people, usually in their 70s or 80s, and many are people who worked in health care profes-

sions who donated their bodies to science.

"We impress upon them that this is a human, and we treat it with greatest and utmost respect," Huggins said. "We pray over the cadaver every day in class. Most of the time we actually thank God for the person and their willingness to allow us such a great opportunity. The students come out with a very deep appreciation for anatomy and physiology, as well as for someone who would allow them such an opportunity."

Huggins said a class such as Gross Anatomy offers a variety of openings to integrate discussions of faith. He'll talk about opposable thumbs, and tell stories from the Bible about people's thumbs being cut off as a form of punishment. Since opposable thumbs are part of a person's humanity, this punishment is meant to take away some of that.

"It's easy to impress students with the

complexity of liver function, the complexity of kidney function," Huggins said. "As we talk about that, I generally will refer to, 'Why did God create the kidney this way? What is the necessity for having this particular arrangement in the human body?'"

For students like Cusanelli, who graduated in December and will enter medical school in the fall, the integration of faith into Gross Anatomy class made the experience even more unique.

"Because you're looking at the pinnacle of God's creation, you can't help but have your faith strengthened," he said. "As Dr. Huggins puts it, what we're doing is thinking God's thoughts behind him as we see how the body's put together and how it all works. We're sort of seeing what God had in mind. Obviously we can't know exactly what God was thinking, but we can still follow along." 