

Somebody believes

Professor Reich's confidence in my ability helped me succeed in ways I had not imagined

BY MICHELLE AMAYA ('14)

During my academic career, I have kept in contact with many professors. JMU is academically challenging, and my professors have helped me in my struggles. I'd say the academic rigor of JMU has been the reason I've been able to develop relationships with so many professors. Yet even after classes have finished, I still go and talk to them.

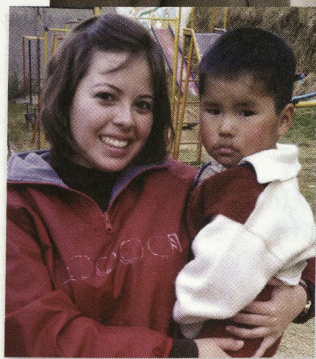
Dr. Steven Reich in the history department played a big role in my development as a student. In his honors history class, Critical Issues in Recent Global History, Dr. Reich discussed with students a wide range of topics including the Iraq War and illegal immigration. The class really expanded the way that I think, challenging me to think in ways I had not previously considered.

Sometime after the course finished, Dr. Reich emailed all the class members about the Hillcrest Scholarships, which are awarded to outstanding sophomore honors students. He told us that he felt we were a class of good students, and he had enjoyed teaching us. He asked that we read the attached material on the scholarship carefully. I felt like he was speaking right to me when he "strongly recommended" that we consider applying for the scholarship.

Wow! I hadn't heard of the Hillcrest Scholarship, but it seemed clear to me that if Dr. Reich saw potential when I was a student in his class, then maybe I had a chance.

Students had to choose a faculty member to work with in the application process; a process that would require a significant amount of work for the professor. I thought it only appropriate that I approach Dr. Reich and request his support.

And so I wrote: "Dr. Reich, I want to thank you for letting us know about the scholarship. I'm strongly considering applying,



Michelle Amaya ('14), above right, says her history professor, Steve Reich, played a big role in her development as a student. (Left): Amaya mentored children in Bolivia.

and I wanted to know if you would be my mentor through the process."

I don't think he had an option; but, in the end, I believe he liked helping me!

I found an organization to work with and fleshed out my proposal with a purpose, mission, timeline, methods, budget and all the details of my proposed project. Dr. Reich's support was particularly valuable as I prepared my personal statement and resume.

Proposals had to be submitted in December of the student's sophomore year. I remember staying in our residence hall while everybody was leaving for break so I could turn in my proposal the Saturday morning before I left.

I completed the application thinking, "Well, somebody believes I qualify for the scholarship. We'll see what happens."

As it turned out, I won the Hillcrest Scholarship Service/Leadership Award. When I was considering whether to apply for the scholarship Dr. Reich had told me, "It might really be of good use to you." He was so right.

Through the Hillcrest Scholarship, I traveled to Bolivia on a global health internship to mentor orphaned children and shadow pediatric physicians. The trip confirmed my call to serve in the medical field and allowed me to see the reward of the hard work I invested in my academic career.

As I helped the children, I saw firsthand the value of someone who can motivate you to achieve your potential by helping you discover your hidden talents. While tutoring, I found myself saying to the children, "Wow, did you do that by yourself? That's beautiful. You are so smart." Watching their confidence grow as I encouraged them reminded me of the many professors at JMU, such as Dr. Reich, who have believed in me, affirmed me and encouraged me to pursue my dreams. M

→ **LEARN MORE** about Amaya's experience abroad on Page 43.

About the Professor History professor Steven A. Reich joined the JMU faculty in 1999. He teaches GHIST 225 United States History and GHIST 150 Critical Issues in the Recent Global Past as well as courses in labor, African American, and southern history and historical research methods.

About the Author Honors student Michelle Amaya ('14) is a JMU Hillcrest Scholar, JMU Centennial Scholar and a Gates Millennial Scholar. JMU History professor Steven Reich describes Amaya as a "dedicated student who never shies from a challenge."