

# Message from the Dean

This year's Alumni Reunion Weekend was, once again, delightful. For me it always offers the opportunity to enrich my sense of the legacy Upstate gives the world—our graduates—and of the history and unique culture of this college. It is wonderful to listen to stories of the “good old days,” and to hear the sense of gratitude so many of our graduates have for the opportunities that Upstate afforded them.

The current economic downturn has of course affected all of us—medical schools, students, and families. I am particularly concerned about how the recession, coupled with increases in tuition, may limit opportunities at Upstate for the less affluent.

Until this year, our medical school tuition was near the mean for public medical schools, and had been essentially flat for a decade. Nonetheless, our students graduated over that period with an accumulated debt higher than that of graduates of other public medical schools. This is because we do not have nearly enough scholarship money to help students. Despite remarkable generosity on the part of alumni, only nine percent of the aid we provide is in the form of scholarship awards. This is the lowest percentage of all medical schools in New York State. Ninety-one percent of our aid is in the form of loans that students are obligated to repay. It is not unusual for Upstate to lose an excellent applicant to a private school with much higher tuition, because those schools often have such large endowments that they can offer scholarship grants that bring the net cost to the student down below ours.

The New York state economy has made this situation worse. To offset the large cuts in our state allocation, SUNY has raised tuition across its four medical colleges by 14 percent for New York residents (to \$22,800 per year) and by a whopping 21 percent for out-of-state students (to \$40,640). These numbers are eye-popping for graduates of earlier times. But given the state's ongoing difficulties, there is a real prospect of further increases being mandated by Albany.

The consequences are significant. The graduates of our remarkable class of 2009 left here with an average debt burden of \$131,358. Payments on such a debt can amount to \$2,000 per month, or more. Our students tell us that this is a very real factor for many of them in their career choices. In the class of 2009, only five chose residencies in family medicine, as compared with 26 choosing orthopedics, diagnostic radiology, and dermatology. Of course there were surely multiple factors determining these preferences, but too often debt load is one of them.



Steven J. Scheinman, MD



Dr. Scheinman talking with medical students at a recent Upstate picnic.

I am seriously concerned that these realities limit access to a medical education, even at a state school like Upstate, for students of modest economic means. Families have had to readjust their priorities in these difficult times. One of my primary goals as dean is to assure that the opportunity for a medical education at Upstate is available to all, regardless of means. I know that the alumni share this goal. I can think of no better way to support your College, and the opportunity that we represent, than to consider endowing or supporting need-based scholarships.