Christopher P. Schaeffer, MD '98, clinical assistant professor of medicine, was presented the Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Award at this year’s White Coat Ceremony. The award, sponsored by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation, is presented annually to a faculty member who best demonstrates the foundation’s ideals of outstanding compassion in the delivery of care, respect for patients, their families, and health-care colleagues, as well as demonstrated clinical excellence.

One student who nominated him, stated: “I have personally witnessed Dr. Schaeffer’s empathy toward every patient’s story. He treated every one of his patients with respect, kindness and tolerance. He truly listened to them and went out of his way to address their needs beyond the bottle of medicine, regardless of how busy he was. Another student recalled the following situation: “One of Dr. Schaeffer’s patients was noncompliant and had created frustration among a previous medical team. Up until Dr. Schaeffer became his physician, no one bothered to notice that the patient didn’t comprehend the majority of medical jargon with which he was being bombarded. In talking with him for a few minutes about nothing medically related, Dr. Schaeffer created an opportunity for the patient to break down in tears and ask, ‘Why does this keep happening to me?’ That in turn gave Dr. Schaeffer and his team the opportunity to help the patient comprehend his various pathologies and what the patient needed to do to help control them.”

In conclusion, another student observed: “Overall, Dr. Schaeffer inspired all of us—his patients and students, residents and other staff who worked beside him. Students merely have to watch him to learn all one needs to know about professional behavior, empathy, cultural sensitivity and communication. He is the ideal person to be honored with the Faculty Humanism in Medicine Award.”

Why did you choose UB?
I wanted to learn basic sciences in an organ-based curriculum and to attend medical classes in a city with only one medical school so that I could learn without undue competition for access to doctors and facilities. I also wanted the option of a student-run free clinic like the Lighthouse Clinic on Buffalo’s east side. I wanted to explore an unfamiliar city, and Buffalo has an interesting history and beautiful architecture.

How did your scholarship make a difference?
The deciding factor of where to attend medical school was financial. I was determined not to leave medical school with loans that would limit my ability to work in humble communities. When UB offered me the Greco scholarship I realized that it was an institution that would support me to achieve my goals.

When did you decide to become a physician?
I decided to become a doctor while working for the late Dr. Ronald Davidson who showed me that a physician is responsible for the health and well being of all people, insured or not; and that the intellectual, moral, and emotional challenges of medical practice make up a fulfilling career. I realized that a physician is in a privileged position as a cornerstone of the community, intimately involved in the lives of people.