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Fordyce High Teacher's Passion for Giving Back Earns Her National Award

FORDYCE – Jessica Young has just about done it all in the medical field. She has tended to patients as a nurse, and she serves a part-time ambulance driver throughout Dallas County. Taking the advice of a church member, she chose to go into education by preparing the next generation of health professionals. After all, the flexible schedule would allow her to be home

more often with her family.

“All throughout industry and nursing, you’re always involved in patient teaching, so it would be a natural transition to go to that aspect into a classroom realm,” Young said.

The first two weeks of school proved to be overwhelming for her. Teachers have to be



design their lesson plans to meet state-required frameworks, create end-of-course exams, and grade using a rubric. That’s not what she expected.

“I didn’t know what those things were. I looked up at God and said, ‘What were we thinking?’ I had a big girl cry,” she said.

Then one day it hit her. Standing before her class, she grew out of breath while teaching. Divine intervention clicked in.

“All my life, I’ve heard: ‘Use your talents. Use your talents.’ *I don’t have any!* I would think. That day, I knew that [teaching] was it. Since that day, I’ve been on fire,” Young said.

In late November, Young’s peers validated her career choice as the right profession for her. She now reigns as the 2016 Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE) New Teacher of the Year.



“Utter shock! I could not believe they called *my* name,” she said, still in disbelief.

When you talk to Young’s students, they feel it was a no brainer to honor Young with the recognition.

“When I found out she won, I was floored. The world finally knows how great of a person we all know her to be,” said Savannah Shankles, a senior at Fordyce High.

Shankles said that Young is, without a doubt, one of her favorite teachers. According to Shankles, it is because Young challenges the class to think, and she knows how to teach along various learning styles.

“If you are a visual learner, she always makes sure there is something you can do hands on. If you’re a note taker, she gives you worksheets. She helps you learn it by giving you strategies,” Shankles said.

Young’s course load consists of the following: Human Anatomy and Physiology, Introduction of Medical Professions, Medical Procedures, and Medical Specialization.

“Seven of the ten top jobs in 2015 are in health care. Without a doubt, I am aware that my contents are relevant. My students are excited about coming to these classes because it’s new and it’s fresh,” said Young.

Mason Nutt, a junior, is taking Young’s Introduction to Medical Professions class. She credits Young for confirming her desire to go into the medical field.

“Being in her class, I learned you don’t have to be a doctor to be in the medical field. There’s always the business end of it – the reports, the charts, and even therapy. She’s shown me it is about helping people. She’s helped me gain confidence in myself,” Nutt said.

Young’s journey to becoming ACTE New Teacher of the Year comes after winning the top spots on the state and regional levels. She had to submit letters of recommendation, write essays explaining her teaching methodology, and participate in rounds of interviews.

Young admits she felt good about state and regional interviews, but the national one concerned her. It was a ten minute phone interview with four questions. On the day in which she was interviewed, Young was sick. And she missed the interview time because of the different time zone.

“They graciously gave me a spot on the end. I wasn’t able to bring that excitement and enthusiasm in my voice because I was so exhausted,” she said.



Obviously, it was just enough to be named ACTE Teacher of the Year. At the ceremony at New Orleans, Young explained her calling.

“I told them, ‘It is fitting on the Mississippi River to quote Mark Twain: ‘The two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you find out why.’ And that’s why I’m here. I figured out why,’” she said.

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