

## The NURERC Scholarship

### Turning Physical Impairment into Achievement and Empowerment Kyle Swensen, BS, 2013 NURERC Scholar and R. J. Garrick, PhD

When I applied to the Master's in Prosthetics-Orthotics (MPO) program at the Northwestern University Prosthetics-Orthotics Center (NUPOC), I also explored opportunities to improve amputees' lives through P&O research. I spoke with Steven Gard, PhD, about becoming a research assistant and learned that my lower limb amputation made me eligible for the NURERC Scholar program. The summer after I graduated from high school I experienced a crush injury and transtibial amputation of my left leg. That amputation closed a lot of doors to my future, so I was amazed to find that this painful and debilitating trauma actually opened a door to my future as a NURERC Scholar.



I was honored to be selected the 2013 NURERC Scholar. My mentor was Stefania Fatone, PhD, who guided me in my research participation. During three months, I experienced a steep learning curve and was especially gratified to contribute to the literature review for a published article (A. W. Heinemann, L. Connelly, L. Ehrlich-Jones and S. Fatone, "Outcome Instruments for Prosthetics: Clinical Applications" in *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America*, 2014(25) 179-198). I also participated as an Model Demonstrator in research conducted by Matthew Major, PhD, Stefania Fatone, PhD, and Elliot Roth, MD, about "Validity and Reliability of the Berg Balance Scale for Community-Dwelling Persons with Lower-Limb Amputation" that was published in the *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 2013, 94(11)2194-2202. (Also, see "Berg Balance Scale Validated for Lower-Limb Amputees", September 30, 2013, [www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/news/2013/09balance\\_NUPOC.html](http://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/news/2013/09balance_NUPOC.html).)

My experience as a NURERC Scholar was an excellent opportunity for me to experience hands-on research in P&O and also to shape my understanding of clinical

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education in the MPO program. From the outset of my MPO course work, I could better understand how research and the principles of evidence-based practice will influence my P&O clinical practice. As a current MPO student, I find that I can examine clinical procedures from a fuller perspective, always considering whether what we know is, or can be, proven by actual evidence. The NURERC Scholarship has enabled me to evaluate clinical practice in terms of evidence that supports treatment options, rather than simply memorizing pairs of pathologies and treatments. As a clinician, I want to make research part of my career and the NURERC Scholarship program has provided that essential direction and foundation.

I am grateful to have been awarded a NURERC Scholarship, which provided me with needed financial support and valuable research opportunities. Those opportunities have enabled and empowered me and other students like me who live with limb loss or another physical impairment. As a future Certified Prosthetist-Orthotist, I know I will be able to help thousands of people with limb loss so they can enjoy independent, productive lives. Going forward, I hope that more students who have a physical impairment can benefit from the empowerment and enrichment that this valuable scholarship program has provided me. Like me, each future scholarship recipient also will contribute exponentially to the lives of people who live with physical disabilities.