Kathy Calhoun '09 is a great example of the kind of student Schreiner sends on to medical school.

While pursuing a pre-med track biology major, she shadowed a number of local doctors, including Dr. Thomas Noonan, who is the volunteer doctor in Schreiner’s Health and Wellness Center; orthopedic surgeon Dr. Robert Mitchell; and two radiologists, Dr. Joe Pruneda and Dr. Tyson Hale.

“All my shadowing was really helpful, but Dr. Mitchell helped me the most,” said Calhoun, who plans to practice reconstructive plastic surgery. “I was able to shadow him in the clinic and in surgery.”

Calhoun, whose family are Kerrville residents, now lives in College Station, where she is in her second year of medical school at the Texas A&M Health Science Center. She was also accepted at four other schools, including the University of Texas-San Antonio and Texas Tech University.

“When I interviewed at A&M, the questions were different than at the other schools,” she said. “They didn’t just ask about my volunteer work or why I wanted to be a doctor, which is basically on my résumé. I felt extremely challenged. I decided to go to A&M because I loved that I was going to be challenged every day.”

Possibly one of the most interesting things that has happened to Calhoun since leaving Schreiner is being invited to observe the first full-face transplant in the U.S., which...
took place at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston in 2010. She was visiting Dr. Elof Eriksson, chief of the division of plastic surgery, and his wife and shadowing doctors there.

“As soon as I got to the clinic that day, Dr. Eriksson pulled me aside and asked me to guess beyond my wildest dreams what I was about to see. I guessed some sort of transplant; the first total face transplant ever performed.” The plastic surgery team would be flying to the donor that night, taking the face, flying back to Boston and immediately going to work on the patient. I went to a private meeting with six plastic surgeons. There was a slideshow of their plan, the donor and the recipient. They said this had to stay extremely quiet. I felt so privileged to be there and Dr. Eriksson insisted I was there for every moment.”

Calhoun said that 60 to 70 percent of her medical class plan to go into primary care, OB/GYN or pediatrics. Medical students in the U.S. must go through a residency program before being licensed to practice, she said, and five percent of medical school graduates will not be able to go on to residency because of the shortage of programs.

Calhoun said she had her eye on a six-year residency at Southwestern Hospital in Dallas because it’s “miles ahead in technology.”

But before that—even before finishing medical school—she will take a year to get her M.B.A. at A&M. After that, she’ll finish her third year of medical school and plans to graduate in 2015 with both an M.D. and an M.B.A.

“Our teachers have told us that in residency we better prepare ourselves for 100-hour work weeks for $30,000 a year,” Calhoun said. “In light of that, I keep in mind that I want to be a doctor because I want to help people.”

She plans on practicing both cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgery.

“Reconstructive is where my heart is,” she said, “children with cleft palates, burn victims, women with mastectomies, other traumas. Cosmetic surgery pays the bills so you can do reconstructive surgery. I wanted to explore the art side of medicine but in a field where there are immediate results and it’s not life and death. I also don’t want to be pushed into a corner where someone is telling me I have to see a patient every seven minutes.

“I want to be the best possible mother and wife as well as a doctor,” she added. She recently married Christopher Hix whom she has known since high school.

She gives Schreiner a lot of the credit for getting her where she is today.

“My education at Schreiner was extremely individualized,” Calhoun said. “Professors helped me narrow in on and improve my weaknesses, while at the same time improving my strengths. Schreiner instilled in me a confidence I definitely did not have before. They made me believe that I could become an incredible doctor and forced me to overcome challenges. The confidence this gave me has dramatically helped me with my communication skills with patients, my work ethic and most importantly, my desire to help people in the most positive way.”

Photo: Schreiner grad Kathy Calhoun, second from the right, poses with some of the surgical team for the first face transplant performed in the U.S.