

Preparing Leaders for an Evolving Profession



Where Oral Health Leaders are Made

A Message from Dean Krebsbach



When we think about leadership in dentistry, it's often the outcomes that are celebrated: building a successful practice, developing new products or techniques, becoming an in-demand speaker, for example. This issue looks beyond those markers to highlight the journeys that shape UCLA School of Dentistry leaders, from those well established to others just beginning their careers.

At UCLA, such development is intentional. We cultivate an environment that challenges individuals to think broadly about their role in improving health, rooted in clinical excellence and a commitment to seeing beyond the operator. Our graduates understand the connections between oral health, systemic health, and the communities they serve.

You'll see this reflected in alumni like Kami Hoss and Oariona Lowe, whose careers embody a holistic view of dentistry defined by innovation, advocacy, and service. It's also evident in our early-career faculty, who are making meaningful research discoveries while adapting education to meet the needs of today's digital native practitioners.

Sometimes, leadership begins with a single decision ... a willingness to step into the unknown. In this issue, you'll meet Amy Banks, who elected to pause her

D.D.S. training in Westwood to pursue a year of research at the National Institutes of Health.

I was fortunate to play a small role in encouraging Amy to consider the opportunity, drawing on my own experiences as a young dentist-scientist. Ultimately, the decision was hers and reflects the curiosity and long-term vision that define future leaders in our field.

This issue also comes at a pivotal moment. Our 2026 to 2031 strategic plan charts a path forward centered on four priorities: excellence in education and patient care, research and discovery, people and culture, and sustainable, mission-driven growth. Success in each area will require steadfast leadership across the School.

Together, these stories illustrate what makes a UCLA School of Dentistry education distinctive. Leadership here is not an endpoint, but a process – shaped through education, mentorship, and experience, and carried forward in service to others.

Sincerely,

Paul H. Krebsbach, D.D.S., Ph.D.
Dean and Professor

Table of Contents

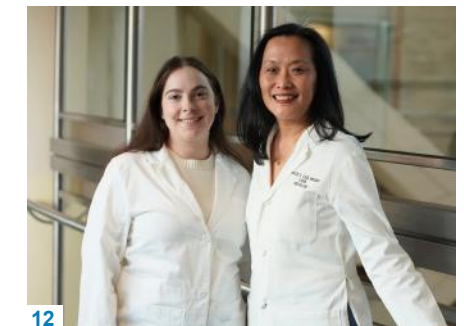
- 2 | Thank You, Dr. Park**
As he enters retirement, UCLA Dentistry's longest-serving dean cherishes the relationships more than his legacy of achievement.
- 3 | Purpose in Practice**
Alumni spanning the School's six decades are giving back to the profession and advancing oral medicine.
- 6 | Faculty at the Forefront**
Meet five early-career faculty members driving innovation and tech-forward patient care.
- 10 | Another Five Years to Lead the Next Era of Pediatric Dentistry**
Renewed federal grant expands UCLA's nationally recognized model
- 12 | Capitol-izing on an Opportunity**
Amy Banks '28, is spending this academic year conducting intensive research at the NIH, mentored by Janice Lee '94, M.S. '98.
- 15 | A Culture of Advocacy**
From Washington, D.C., to Sacramento, UCLA dental students are making their voices heard in the seat of government.
- 16 | Our Strategic Plan**
A five-year roadmap to advance – and enhance – how dentistry is taught and practiced.
- 18 | Milestones and Moments**
Alumni making waves over the past year



3



10



12



6

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Thank You, Dr. Park

As he enters retirement, UCLA Dentistry's longest-serving dean cherishes the relationships more than his many achievements.

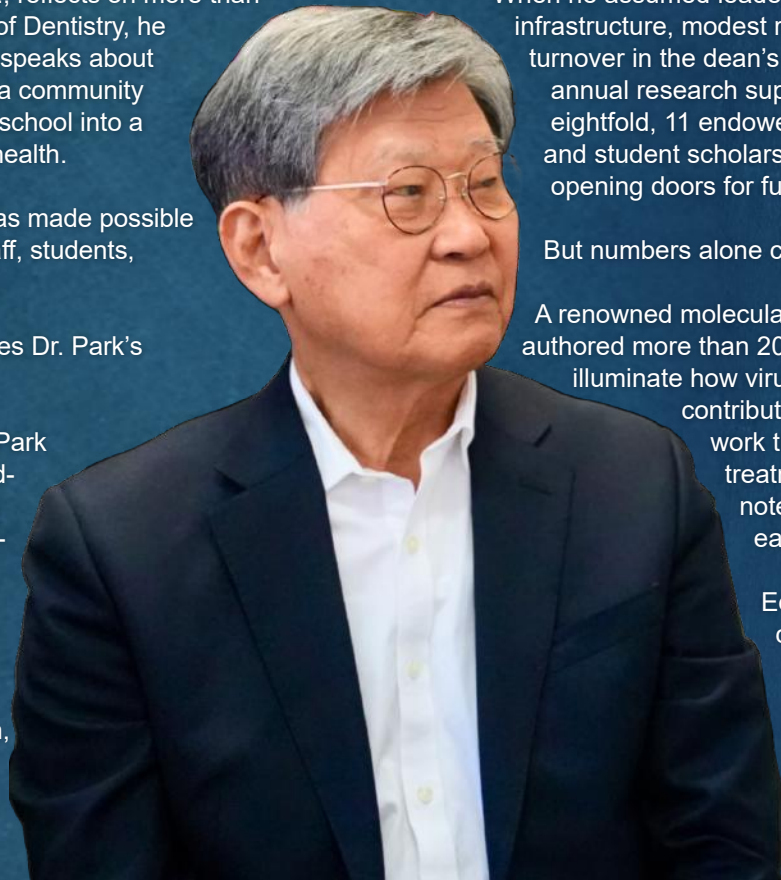
When No-Hee Park, D.M.D., Ph.D., reflects on more than four decades at the UCLA School of Dentistry, he doesn't begin with accolades – he speaks about people: students, colleagues, and a community that transformed a regional dental school into a globally recognized leader in oral health.

"Whatever I have accomplished was made possible by the dedication of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and donors," he said.

That spirit of shared purpose defines Dr. Park's extraordinary legacy.

Arriving in Westwood in 1984, Dr. Park would go on to become the second-longest-serving dean of any UCLA academic unit and the first Korean-American appointed dean at a major U.S. university.

Over his 18-year tenure from 1998 to 2016, he led a period of remarkable growth and reinvention, elevating the school's standing in education, research, patient care, and community engagement.



When he assumed leadership, the school faced limited infrastructure, modest research funding, and frequent turnover in the dean's office. By the end of his tenure, annual research support had increased more than eightfold, 11 endowed chairs had been established, and student scholarships had expanded dramatically, opening doors for future generations of Bruins.

But numbers alone cannot capture Dr. Park's impact.

A renowned molecular oncology researcher, he has authored more than 200 publications and helped illuminate how viruses and environmental factors contribute to oral head and neck cancer; work that has influenced research and treatment worldwide. His curiosity, he notes, has guided him since his earliest days in science.

Equally enduring is Dr. Park's commitment to mentorship. Over his career, he has trained more than 100 students, residents, and fellows, many of whom now lead academic and research institutions around the world.

"I am grateful to the many students and trainees who placed their trust in me ... Their passion and accomplishments remain my most cherished legacy."

"I am especially grateful to the many students and trainees who placed their trust in me," he said. "Their passion and accomplishments remain my most cherished legacy."

That dedication reshaped the educational experience at UCLA. Under his leadership, the curriculum evolved to emphasize interdisciplinary thinking, early clinical exposure, and patient-centered care. Such innovations continue to define the school today.

Dr. Park's journey to Westwood began in war-torn South Korea and continued through degrees from Seoul National University, the Medical College of Georgia, and Harvard University, where he then served on faculty.

That global perspective later informed his leadership, fostering collaborations across Asia and Europe and expanding the school's international reach.

Even in retirement – effective January 2026 – Dr. Park remains deeply connected to UCLA, continuing his research and mentorship.

"My heart is filled with gratitude," he said. "I am deeply thankful for my colleagues and friends at UCLA who have enriched my life for so many years."

Although I am stepping down from my academic roles, UCLA will forever be my home." **D**

Purpose in Practice

Alumni spanning six decades are giving back to the profession and advancing oral medicine.

Orthodontist. Entrepreneur. Author. Speaker. Board Member. Mentor.

Kami Hoss, D.D.S. '93, holds many titles. In health care and in business, he remains grounded by a sense of purpose bigger than himself.

Hoss' guiding belief is that dentistry doesn't have a talent problem but a systems problem, and this drive to effect change has shaped his career.

He began with The Super Dentists, a San Diego-based multi-specialty practice grounded in prevention and expanded access to care, later extending that mission with SuperMouth, a science-driven oral care company focused on simplifying prevention. A bestselling author and nationally recognized speaker, Dr. Hoss champions the oral-systemic health connection and reimagines dentistry's role in whole-person care.

At UCLA, Dr. Hoss' impact is both personal and enduring. In addition to being a major financial benefactor, he mentors D.D.S. students through the Board of Counselors' Leadership Institute (BOCLI), where his entrepreneurship session is consistently ranked among the most engaging.

His message to students reflects the principles guiding his many endeavors: "Don't think of yourself as a tooth doctor. Think of yourself as a physician of the whole person."



Dr. Kami Hoss

A four-decade career for Oariona Lowe, D.D.S., P.D. '84, M.P.H. '16, has taken her well beyond the clinic ... both physically and philosophically.

Whether treating young patients, mentoring oral health trainees, or engaging policymakers, Dr. Lowe has long viewed dentistry through a broader lens, one that includes access, equity, and the power of collective action.

That commitment is especially visible in her organized dentistry efforts. Through national forums like the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's annual advocacy conference in Washington, D.C., Dr. Lowe works alongside UCLA's first-year pediatric dentistry resident cohort and colleagues to advance policies that support children and families, translating clinical experience into meaningful change.

Dr. Lowe brings that same perspective to chairing the School of Dentistry's Board of Counselors and with BOCLI, where she encourages students to lead with clarity and collaboration. Her advice is direct: "Don't give up. Know what you want. Be focused. Teamwork is essential. Build together and achieve."

Across every setting, her message is consistent: lasting progress depends on the collective will of oral health practitioners and others outside the field, working together to move it forward.



Dr. Oariona Lowe and Alliyah Farahi '26

Nine more Bruins who are purposeful in practice →

These alumni at diverse career stages embody the University of California's *Fiat Lux* motto

Distinguished and Dedicated



**Mark Lisagor '73,
P.D. '77**

A driving force behind UCLA Friends of Pediatric Dentistry, Dr. Lisagor has chaired major fundraising efforts including the 2019 Westwood clinic remodel and an endowed chair position. For five decades, he's focused on mobilizing peers to give back and expand opportunities, whether at UCLA, with CDA, on service trips, or through civic engagement outside the field.



Hedi Kermani '95

A board-certified orthodontist, Dr. Kermani directs a thriving Orange County multi-specialty practice known for its school partnerships and community engagement. Through service on UCLA Dentistry's Board of Counselors and professional organizations she mentors future clinicians, while also advancing her chosen specialty via published research and leadership positions with the California Association of Orthodontists.



Ariana Kermani '25, O. '28

A triple Bruin and chief resident of her cohort, Dr. Kermani is already emerging as a leader in orthodontics. She treats complex cases in UCLA's Thomas R. Bales Orthodontic Clinic while serving as the only resident on the Pacific Coast Society of Orthodontists Women's Committee. Also a contributing author to the West LA Dental Society's *Westviews* journal, Dr. Kermani is continuing her mother's legacy of service to the profession.

Mid-Career Catalysts



**Manuel "Chip" Carin '89,
G.P.R. '91**

Dr. Carin has delivered care in some of the world's most challenging environments – from the Amazon jungle to Syrian refugee camps – through an international NGO. Across eight missions, he has relieved pain for more than 1,000 patients. Now joined by his son, Jon '18, these global experiences reinforce a longstanding personal north star: "There is no greater feeling than giving and receiving compassion."



**Katherine Ahn '93,
P.D. '95**

A pioneer in airway-focused, holistic dentistry, Dr. Ahn is the founder of Aviana Integrative Centers and creator of the Aviana Method, bridging oral health, lifestyle medicine, and aesthetics. From developing Oxygen Lip Tape to launching a Beverly Hills MedSpa and founding a nonprofit empowering high school students to be social entrepreneurs, she personifies the modern practitioner.



Joshua Vert '17

From clinics in underserved communities across the Western U.S. to Harvard University, Dr. Vert has built a career defined by service. As a National Health Service Corps scholar, he spent five years expanding access to care before completing his pediatric dentistry residency at Boston Children's Hospital, where he is now a faculty member.

Next-Gen Changemakers



Toni Carfino '84

Following in her father's footsteps and inspiring her daughter, Jordan '24, to pursue dentistry as well, Dr. Carfino has built a practice grounded in continuity of care and deep patient relationships. Beyond the operatory, she actively mentors aspiring Black dentists – often inviting them to shadow – and advocates through organized dentistry, championing representation with her guiding belief: "If you can see it, you can be it."



Chalise Morgan '07

As Dental Director at Shingle Springs Health & Wellness Center, Dr. Morgan expands access to care for a community where nearly 60% of patients live below the poverty line. Leading an Advanced Education on General Dentistry residency program as well as statewide advocacy, she aims to "shine a light" beyond dentistry: through mentorship, prevention, and compassionate care.



Kishen Godhia '21

Blending clinical expertise with tech savvy, Dr. Godhia has built a following of almost 800,000 on TikTok (@kishengodhia), where he translates complex dental topics into accessible, engaging content. This approach is redefining how dental knowledge reaches a younger, digital-native audience by combating misinformation and promoting preventive techniques.

Faculty at the Forefront: Five Innovators Driving Education and Patient Care

By Nancy Sokoler Steiner

Recruiting and developing ambitious early-career faculty members has long been a strategic priority for the UCLA School of Dentistry.

While distinguishing themselves in the field through grant-funded research, peer-reviewed publications, and participation in competitive career development programs, the School's highly motivated educators never lose sight of the institutional mission: To train the next generation of oral health leaders.

Here are five faculty members whose work – in the lab, the classroom, the field, and the modern clinic – offers a snapshot of where dentistry is headed.



Dr. Yan Wang



Dr. Paula Ortega Verdugo



Dr. Insoon Chang



Dr. Shahed Al Khalifah

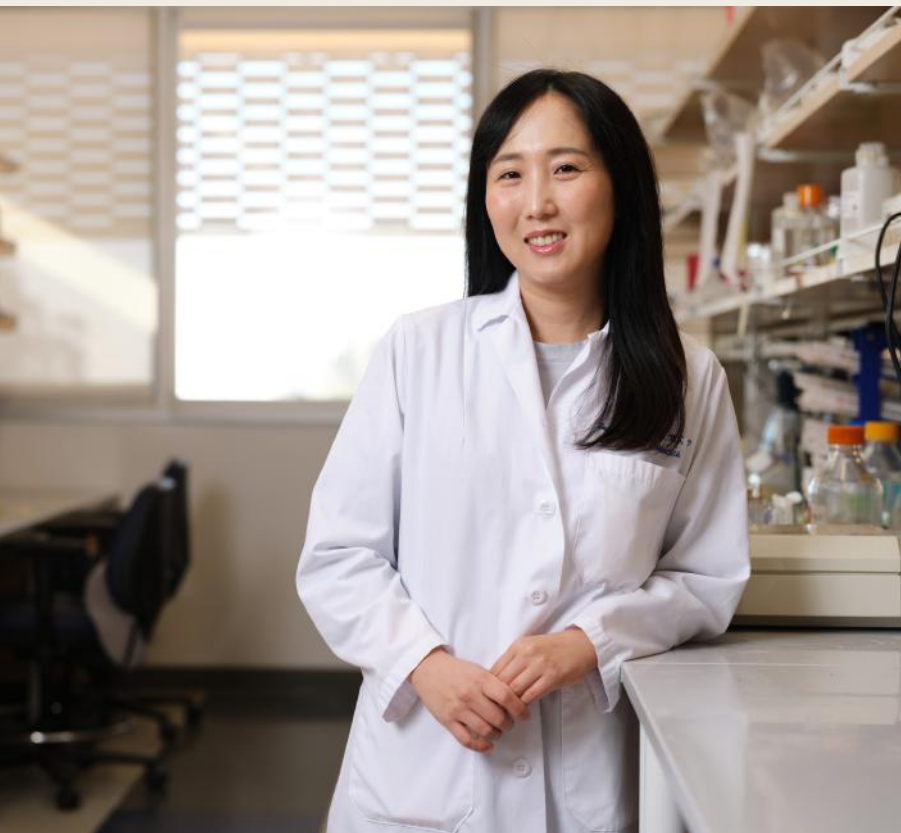


Dr. Denny Chao

For three straight years, UCLA faculty have been selected for the prestigious American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research's (AADOCR) Mind the Future program. Mind the Future aims to develop a strong cadre of investigators addressing critical scientific challenges. The association selects cohorts of ten participants from multiple disciplines to receive multi-year funding, get matched with an eminent mentor, and enhance their research and teaching abilities. All three faculty members have enjoyed forming close bonds with their cohorts, networking, and interacting with accomplished scientists they would not normally have access to.

Insoon Chang, M.S. '09, D.D.S. '13, Ph.D. '17, [🔗](#)

assistant professor in the Section of Endodontics, recently completed the 2024-25 cohort cycle. Her mentor was Dr. Hatice Hasturk, D.D.S., Ph.D., a director of the Center for Clinical and Translational Research at the American Dental Association's Forsyth Institute. Dr. Chang



conducts basic, clinical, and translational research. Her work examines why people with poorly controlled Type 2 diabetes have trouble healing bone around their teeth after infection or dental treatment. She aims to understand the causes of this problem and develop better treatments to help these patients heal more effectively.

Dr. Chang has also contributed to research in dental pulp regeneration and the biological effects of endodontic sealers; her collaborative work in this area with UCLA's Dr. Mo Kang and colleagues at South Korea's Yonsei University was published in the *Journal of Endodontics* (2025 and 2026) and recognized by the ADA.

"Traditionally, pulp regeneration has relied on dental stem cells isolated from pulp tissue to promote regeneration," she explained. "However, this approach presents significant logistical and technical challenges, as it requires specialized facilities to harvest tissue, isolate and expand stem cells, and subsequently reintroduce them. Our approach instead utilizes tissue grafting, offering a more practical and accessible alternative with promising results."

In another early-career highlight, her peer-reviewed paper investigating the biological effects of endodontic sealers was selected

Meet the Investigators

as the cover article for *Dentistry Journal* Volume 14, Issue 3 (2026, MDPI). Dr. Chang's research is conducted in tandem with a full range of educational responsibilities. She provides clinical instruction, teaches D2 endodontic techniques in the simulation lab, and chairs a summer "boot camp" course for students in the Professional Program for International Dentists. In her newly established laboratory, she mentors trainees, including visiting scholars from partner universities in Japan.

"UCLA gave me the opportunity to fulfill my dream, and Mind the Future allowed me to become more nationally recognized and start a new chapter," she said.

Paula Ortega-Verdugo, D.D.S., M.S., Ph.D., [🔗](#)

assistant professor in the Section of Public and Population Health, was selected for the 2025-26 Mind the Future cohort. Dr. Ortega-Verdugo focuses on bringing prevention and minimally invasive dentistry



to populations at high risk of caries, particularly low-income and uninsured populations.

"We know how the area in which you live affects your health through the lens of medicine, but we don't have research demonstrating the effects on dental health," explained the native of Santiago, Chile.

Dr. Ortega-Verdugo is working to identify local neighborhoods with a prevalence of these disparities in Los Angeles County; her long-term plan is to expand the geographic territory studied to the state and nationally. The goal is to recommend areas, and populations, most in need of interventions.

Dr. Ortega-Verdugo, who earned the AADOCR Procter & Gamble New Faculty Research Fellowship last year, teaches in the dental clinic and leads courses on professionalism and quality improvement in dentistry. In 2024, she helped restart UCLA's chapter of the American Association of Public Health Dentistry, supporting this student research group and teaching a related selective course.

"Two of my dental research students were selected for the 2026 UCLA Dental Research Fellowship Program," she noted.

"I've had wonderful mentors along my journey, including Drs. John Warren at the University of Iowa, Dr. Honghu Liu, our chair of UCLA Public and Population Health, and Dr. Francisco Ramos-Gomez, who chairs UCLA Pediatric Dentistry, so that's something I want to pay forward."



Yan Wang, M.S. '10, Ph.D. '19, [🔗](#)

is an adjunct assistant professor in the Section of Public and Population Health. She was the first faculty member to be selected for Mind the Future, participating in the 2023-24 cohort. Her research focuses on the development of the oral microbiome in mothers and younger children, particularly from the prenatal stage through age five.

Supported by NIH postdoctoral training grants, in 2020 Dr. Wang expanded her work into global oral health. Projects investigate the longitudinal oral microbiome of Kenyan children at age three to five, comparing those living with HIV, those exposed to HIV, and their healthy peers.

"I want to understand how the oral microbiome develops in the early stage of life and how it shapes health outcomes later, not only in oral health, but also in physical development, systemic health, and cognitive function," said Dr. Wang.

Two years removed from her AADOCR experience, Dr. Wang continues to meet bi-weekly with her Mind the Future mentor, University of Iowa College of Dentistry Professor Dr. David Drake. Their discussions range from career development to NIH grant management to work-life balance to grant writing in her Analytical and Translational Oral Microbiome (ATOM) lab.

Dr. Wang currently serves as President of AADOCR Southern California Section, organizing its inaugural symposium at UCLA last year which brought together researchers from the area's four dental schools and other regional peers.

In addition, Dr. Wang mentors three first-year UCLA D.D.S. students in the School's Dental Research Fellowship Program.

"Every achievement I have is built upon the guidance and support of my incredible mentors. I feel a deep responsibility to carry that forward, to support the next generation and strengthen our research community."

"Every achievement I have is built upon the guidance and support of my incredible mentors..."

I feel a deep responsibility to carry that forward."

Another Five Years to Lead the Next Era of Pediatric Dentistry

A fourth consecutive federal grant expands UCLA's nationally recognized model

By Christelle Snow

I don't see pediatric dentistry without public health, said Damaris Arriola Zarate, D.D.S. '22, P.D. '27, who is pursuing a Master of Public Health alongside her clinical training at UCLA. "They're completely connected."

At the UCLA School of Dentistry, that belief shapes how clinicians are trained, how communities are served, and how leadership is cultivated.

Dr. Arriola Zarate's program allows dentists to complete their pediatric dentistry certificate while earning an M.P.H. through UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health. The dual perspective changes how residents think about care from the beginning. "Every day I see how many factors influence a child's health beyond the clinic," she said. "The neighborhood they grow up in, their school, family support ... All of those things affect their oral health."

Before returning to UCLA for residency, Dr. Arriola Zarate worked as a general dentist in a community clinic serving largely low-income families. The experience reinforced how closely oral health is tied to everyday realities.

"When a parent is struggling with housing or employment, oral health may not be their top priority," she said. "Understanding that helps you meet families where they are."

That philosophy is at the heart of the training model developed by [Francisco Ramos-Gomez, D.D.S., M.S., M.P.H.](#), professor and chair of the Section of Pediatric Dentistry. His approach



Dr. Damaris Arriola Zarate is concurrently pursuing an M.P.H. and a pediatric dentistry certificate

"If we want to change children's oral health outcomes, we have to train dentists differently."

integrates clinical excellence with prevention, public health strategy, and deep community partnership.

"When you open a child's mouth, you can see that their teeth are a window to the environment and the world they are living in," Dr. Ramos-Gomez said. "You have to understand the child, the family, and the community to treat the disease. Otherwise, you're only treating a tooth."

Dr. Ramos-Gomez believes the future of the field depends on this integrated medical/dental approach.



"If we want to change children's oral health outcomes, we have to train dentists differently: a focus on interprofessional education practice, community partnership, and public health integration all working together."

UCLA's model has earned sustained national recognition, with a fourth consecutive award from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) strengthening the initiative. Each successive funding cycle earns a new acronym as its guiding light; for 2025 to 2030, it's known as BRIGHT-PD (Building Resilient, Innovative Growth, Health, and Training in Pediatric Dentistry).

The current grant cycle expands teledentistry services, integrates community health workers and *promotoras* (promoters) into care teams, advances dual clinical-public health training, strengthens care for children with autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions, and deepens partnerships with community clinics. That includes the School's own facility, the Wilson-Jennings-Bloomfield UCLA Venice Dental Center.

Through teledentistry, families who live far from clinics or face transportation and work barriers can consult with providers remotely. Community health workers help bridge cultural and language gaps while guiding parents through prevention strategies and care navigation.

For residents, the program's impact often becomes most visible through patient relationships.

Dr. Arriola Zarate recalled treating a young patient whose mother had immigrated from El Salvador, the country where she herself was born.

"She told me she never thought she would find someone from her country to treat her child," the future pediatric dentist said.

It makes families feel welcomed and understood," she said. "And when that relationship is there, they want to come back, and we can work together to improve a child's health."

Her M.P.H. curriculum builds on this foundation. As a pediatric dentist trained in epidemiology, health policy, and community-based program design, Dr. Arriola Zarate will be equipped to address the upstream factors shaping children's health. She'll also be prepared to advocate for prevention-focused systems beyond the clinic.

"We're not just training clinicians. We're training socially accountable pediatric dental leaders."

Continued on p. 20

Capitol-izing on an Opportunity

Amy Banks, D.D.S. '28, is spending this academic year conducting intensive research at the NIH, mentored by a School of Dentistry alumnus

By Nancy Sokoler Steiner



Towards the end of her first year at the UCLA School of Dentistry,

Amy Banks, D.D.S. '28, attended a presentation by Janice Lee, D.D.S. '94, M.D., M.S. '98, clinical director and chief of the Craniofacial Anomalies and Regeneration Section at the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR). Banks was already interested in the specialty, having worked for six years as an assistant to an oral and maxillofacial surgeon before starting dental school in 2023.

In addition to describing her research, Dr. Lee detailed her career path and the value of a National Institutes of Health (NIH) fellowship she completed after residency and medical school at Harvard. Dr. Lee's mention of another NIH initiative prompted Banks to take notice. The Medical Research Scholars Program (MRSP) immerses future medical, dental, and veterinary clinician-scientists in an intensive year on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Md., to conduct basic, clinical, or translational research, along with providing professional development and mentorship.

"I was attracted to the opportunity to solely focus on research, as I hope to pursue a career in academia," said Banks, a native of Chatsworth, Calif., who earned her B.S. in Biological Sciences at UC Santa Barbara.

She is one of four dental students among the 30-member 2025-26 cohort, selected from hundreds of applicants across U.S. medical, dental, and veterinary schools. When MRSP commenced last June, participants were invited to explore opportunities with primary investigators across the NIH ecosystem.

Banks gravitated to the mentorship of Dr. Lee, whose lab focuses on craniofacial and oral anomalies and disorders that impact human facial development. For Dr. Lee, the opportunity to pay it forward and welcome a fellow Dental Bruin into her lab is special.

"I had incredible mentors who encouraged me to be curious, be creative, look for answers, and ask questions. And I think that's what research is all about," Dr. Lee said. She mentioned Drs. Charles Bertolami and Earl Freymiller, former chairs of the Section of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, and George Bernard, '63, Ph.D. '67, her master's thesis mentor, as major influences.

In 2025, Dr. Lee strengthened the connection to her alma mater by signing on as an MPI to the Human Virome Characterization Center at UCLA, funded over five years by the largest NIH grant in School of Dentistry history and led by Its Associate Dean of Research, Dr. Yvonne Hernandez-Kapila.

As eager as she was to participate, Banks had reservations about pausing dental school for 12 months and moving across the country. However, everyone she spoke with encouraged her, assuring her the gap wouldn't disrupt her schooling. (continued)

Dean Paul H. Krebsbach, in particular, urged Banks to apply, leaning on his own experience as an NIH senior staff fellow from 1993 to 1996.

"Being immersed in the NIH environment gave me the space to mature scientifically, build confidence, and develop strong ideas and networks without the competing demands of teaching and administration," Dean Krebsbach said. "Those three years solidified my identity as a scientist and positioned me for the best possible academic career. It truly made all the difference in where I ended up professionally."

"I encouraged Amy to apply because even if she doesn't ultimately pursue a research career, the experience will be life-changing," he added. "She's surrounded by incredibly bright, like-minded young clinician-scientists. That foundational knowledge makes a dental practitioner aware of how everything in clinical practice is grounded in science."

Banks is working on several projects at the NIH, and spends around 40 hours per week immersed in the lab environment. One involves analyzing the craniofacial features of patients with Loeys-Dietz syndrome (LDS), a rare connective tissue disorder involving enlargement of the aortic root, among other symptoms.



After attending a UCLA talk by Dr. Janice Lee (right), and with encouragement from Dean Paul H. Krebsbach (left), Amy Banks deferred her D.D.S. studies for one year to pursue research at the NIH in Bethesda, Md.

"I definitely feel I'll return to UCLA as a better clinician..."

I look forward to a future immersed in opportunities that advance research."

We're looking at whether there is a correlation between the severity of the craniofacial manifestations and their cardiovascular phenotypes," she said. "If so, we may be able to prevent cardiovascular morbidities among younger patients who present with these craniofacial features but haven't yet shown cardiovascular symptoms."

She's also involved with a project assessing the feasibility of using ultrasound to image TMJ.

"The current gold standard, MRI, is more costly, complicated, and less accessible as it requires visiting an imaging center. Dr. Lee wanted to investigate an imaging modality available at a typical dentist's office," Banks says.

"Ultrasound gives us a dynamic image, allowing us to look at the function of the joint as it's moving," Dr. Lee added, in contrast with the other, static modalities used to look at the head and neck.

Dr. Lee chooses to mentor because her trainees inspire her to evolve and innovate. "It's a two-way exchange, because I learn so much from these folks and their creativity helps me

jumpstart ideas," said Dr. Lee, who noted that the majority of MRSP participants remain in research-related careers.

Banks enjoys the interdisciplinary collaboration at NIH. She has worked with researchers at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) regarding LDS patients, as well as with statisticians and engineers.

The MRSP program also provides participants with opportunities beyond research. They take part in journal clubs and attend monthly lectures given by clinical directors of different institutes.

NIH Director Dr. Jay Bhattacharya spoke to the group about his career path, balancing research and clinical practices, and transitioning to his current position.

Participants also have clinical teaching rounds where researchers often bring patients or include them via videoconference.

Banks says she and her colleagues are enjoying D.C. attractions, including visiting the Smithsonian museums and attending a Nationals baseball game as a group.



"I definitely feel that I'll return to UCLA as a better future clinician," Banks says. "I look forward to a future immersed in opportunities that advance research, and promote the importance of oral health, and how it truly reflects overall systemic health." **D**

A Culture of Advocacy

From Washington D.C. to Sacramento, UCLA School of Dentistry students are making their voices heard in the seat of government. Many Bruins engage in organized dentistry, with some pursuing regional and national leadership positions.

Among them is **Sharen Abi Nader '27**, who joined UCLA's American Student Dental Association (ASDA) chapter as a D1, participating in initiatives like Mock Lobby Day. Now, as chapter president, she organized a campus visit from ADA President Dr. Brett Kessler and will serve as 2026-27 chief of finance for the newly formed ASDA District 13.

Notably, Bruins hold 60% of leadership roles in this district encompassing Southern California's four dental schools.

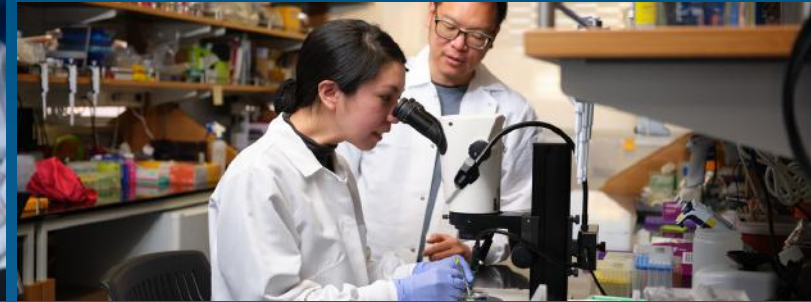
"The UCLA School of Dentistry fosters mentorship and leadership, encouraging students to pursue advocacy and organized dentistry," Abi Nader said. "Combined with a highly engaged ASDA chapter and institutional support, this creates an environment where many students pursue district and national roles," Abi Nader said.

Luis Acosta '26, a member of the two-year Professional Program for International Dentists (PPID), has also been a change agent. As UCLA's international student representative to the California Dental Association (CDA), he collected testimonials that aided CDA Foundation Executive Director Mary McCune in her advocacy efforts for a state bill fast-tracking international dentists for registered dental hygiene licensure.

Beyond advocacy in Sacramento, Acosta helped organize CDA's Senior Swag Day at UCLA, where graduating D.D.S. students learned how they are supported by free membership in the organization as they transition to private practice.

"My public health internship in México after graduating dental school there really opened my eyes as to how much we can help patients beyond our usual clinical approach," Acosta said. "With CDA, I saw an opportunity to advocate for our patients' rights and increase our scope of practice as dentists to increase the standard of care, creating a better future for the dental profession." **D**





2026 to 2031 Strategic Plan

*A five-year roadmap to advance – and enhance –
how dentistry is taught and practiced*

This spring, the UCLA School of Dentistry is embarking on a five-year strategic plan that sets a bold direction for the future, building on a six-decade legacy of excellence while responding to rapid change in the profession.

At its core, the plan is about impact: Preparing future leaders, advancing discovery, expanding access to care, and strengthening the community that makes it all possible.

It aligns with the campus's future-focused *One UCLA* strategic plan and is grounded in our mission to improve oral and general health locally, nationally, and globally.

Our strategic plan centers on four strategic imperatives:



**Excellence in Education
and Patient Care**

We will prepare graduates to thrive in integrated, technology-driven, patient-centered health systems – grounded in strong clinical reasoning, collaboration, and ethical leadership.



**Research and
Discovery**

We will accelerate scientific knowledge, strengthen infrastructure, and translate innovation into measurable benefits for patients and communities.



**People and
Culture**

Our mission depends on a thriving community. We will cultivate a culture of openness, inclusion, professional growth, and shared accountability.



**Sustainable, Mission-
Driven Growth**

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Milestones and Moments

Alumni making waves this past year



Joan Otomo-Corgel '76, M.P.H. '80, was awarded the 2025 American Academy of Periodontology Gold Medal at the annual meeting on Oct. 16. The academy's highest honor recognizes contributions to the field over a career of 25 years or more.

Noha Nour '14 was installed as president of the Orange County Dental Society on Sept. 27, 2025.



Samira Shafae '01 introduced a resolution to the ADA House of Delegates in Oct. 2025 to recognize children and adolescents with Type 1 diabetes as a distinct high-risk patient group, potentially paving the way for professional guidance. Report to be given to the House of Delegates in Oct. 2026.

Kevin Seto '14 currently serves as the West Los Angeles Dental Society vice president and will assume the presidency in 2027.

Shahe Dishakjian '21 completed a four-year Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery residency at MedStar Washington Hospital Center in D.C. and returned to Los Angeles, joining the Encino office of George Maranon '83 as an associate.

Shukan Kanuga '06 was installed as president of the San Fernando Valley Dental Society on Jan. 24, 2026.

Eric Cheung '08 serves on the California Academy of General Dentistry's Continuing Education Committee and is helping to start a chapter in the San Joaquin Valley.

Sara Ehsani '16 was named to "10 Under 10" lists in 2025 by both the American Dental Association and the American Association of Pediatric Dentistry.

Layla Fijani '20, O. '23, celebrated the opening of her private practice in Laguna Beach, Calif. – Crafted Orthodontics – on March 26, 2026.

The photography of **Jack Kurtz '76, M.P.H. '80**, was selected for display at the UCLA Simulation Center, which is dedicated to advancing healthcare education through the use of innovative medical simulation technologies and resources.

A reception and tour of his works (Icelandic Rivers Captured at 1,200 feet, and Hidden Wonders of the American Southwest) was held in Rosenfeld Hall on Dec. 9, 2025.



Jack and Clarice Kurtz

Michelle Chiang '25, P.D. '27, earned the American Student Dental Association's District 12 and 13 Trailblazer of the Year award on Jan. 24, 2026.

Nicole Lee '19 graduated from a six-year, M.D.-integrated Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery residency at UC San Francisco in June 2025 and began working as an associate at Santa Clara Oral Surgery and Dental Implants.



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Expanding the Traditional Boundaries of Dental Education

Join the growing community of supporters of the Apollonian Society Fund and invest in the education of current and future students. The Apollonian Society empowers Dean Paul H. Krebsbach to direct funds where they are needed most.

Current initiatives include the Special Patient Care Fund, which enables student doctors to subsidize care for underserved patients, and the Integrative Mind-Body Wellness Initiative (IMBWI), which supports students' holistic mental and physical well-being, along with many additional programs that prepare our D.D.S. candidates to become the oral health professionals the world needs.



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From p. 9



Meet the Technologists

Shahed Al Khalifah, B.D.S., M.S. '16 and **Denny S. Chao, D.M.D.** co-direct the School's Innovative Digital Dentistry Systems (iDDS). Established in 2018 with generous funding and the vision of Dean Paul H. Krebsbach, iDDS prepares students for a rapidly advancing profession by integrating technologies like 3D printing and virtual reality into the School's curriculum.

Dr. Al Khalifah – an associate clinical professor in the Section of Restorative Dentistry who was recently installed as the Alumni and Friends Presidential Endowed Chair – chairs D2, D3, and D4 clinical courses. Dr. Chao, an associate clinical professor, serves as associate director of the postgraduate residency program in advanced prosthodontics. As early-career clinical educators, students often find it easy to connect with both; Dr. Al Khalifah was voted by the 2025 D.D.S. graduating class to participate in its doctoral hooding ceremony, while Dr. Chao recently accompanied a group of ten D3s on an educational and cultural exchange trip to Japan.

One of the ways digital tools enhance teaching and patient care, Dr. Al Khalifah explained, is by allowing dentists to deliver treatment faster. "Rather than waiting weeks for the lab to create a restoration, we are increasingly capable of delivering treatment the same day. We can scan the tooth, design it, print it, or mill it, and deliver in a single day."

When learning how to prepare a tooth, students can use scanning and software for magnified views and to compare against ideal preparations. "They're exposed to the whole process, including designing the tooth and understanding the anatomy and occlusion of the tooth."

"Digital technology is rapidly evolving, and I believe dentistry will be mostly digital in the future," Dr. Chao said. "In the meantime, we want to incorporate new technology on a larger scale where it makes sense and where it makes things better and more efficient. So the first step is to research and validate."

"3D printing is constantly evolving, and materials continue to improve, but it does not yet rival milling. We aim to expose students to as many digital dentistry tools as possible; however, even as we teach these technologies, we are simultaneously evaluating their effectiveness."

Drs. Al Khalifah and Chao believe iDDS benefits from their perspectives as co-directors hailing from different specialties within the School.

"We wanted digital to be a separate unit that, rather than being under one section, serves the entire School of Dentistry," Dr. Al Khalifah said.

From p. 11

Graduates leave prepared not only to treat children but to expand access, influence policy, and advance prevention-focused models nationwide. The program's scale and rigor attract applicants from across the country; more than 225 applicants each year compete for just seven positions in the two-year cohort.

For Dr. Ramos-Gomez, that broader mission defines the program's purpose.

"We are not just training clinicians," he said. "We are training socially accountable pediatric dental leaders."



Dr. Francisco Ramos-Gomez

Continuing Dental Education Calendar

May through November 2026

UCLA is widely recognized as the preeminent continuing dental education provider. We understand the needs of clinicians: From in-depth hands-on training programs to the latest scientific and clinical breakthroughs. Our courses are evidence-backed, unbiased, and presented by top clinicians and educators – covering a wide scope of topics and procedures.

Our goal is to provide you with the knowledge, skills, and experience to be more productive and successful, with a class schedule that minimizes disruption to your practice. We have trained some of the most sought-after clinicians in the world, and we look forward to helping you achieve your professional goals.



2026 Hawai'i Symposium
July 6 to 10 | Royal Sonesta Kaua'i Resort

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20
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On-Demand Self-Study Online Courses

California Required Courses:

- Responsibilities and Requirements of Prescribing Schedule II Opioid Drugs (2 units - D.D.S.)
- California Infection Control (2 units)
- California Dental Practice Act (2 units)

Also available:

MATE Act: Substance Use Disorders and Pain Management

In-Person/Live Zoom Courses

Saturday, May 30

Practice Management Considerations of an Orofacial Pain/Dental Sleep Medicine Practice

Saturday, June 20

Intro to Acupuncture Points and Needle-Based Therapy in Everyday Dentistry

Monday, July 6 to Friday, July 10

Hawai'i Symposium 2026 (Royal Sonesta Kaua'i Resort)

Thursday, Sept. 17 to Sunday, Sept. 20

11th Biennial COAST Conference
(UCLA Lake Arrowhead Lodge)

Thursday, Oct. 15 to Saturday, Oct. 17 and

Thursday, Oct. 22 to Saturday, Oct. 24
Endodontic Continuum

Saturday, Nov. 14

Re-Certification in Pediatric Oral Sedation


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For more information about including a gift in your estate plans or for sample bequest language, please contact Esmeralda Garcia, Director of Development, at  EsGarcia@dentistry.ucla.edu or 310-469-1757.

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