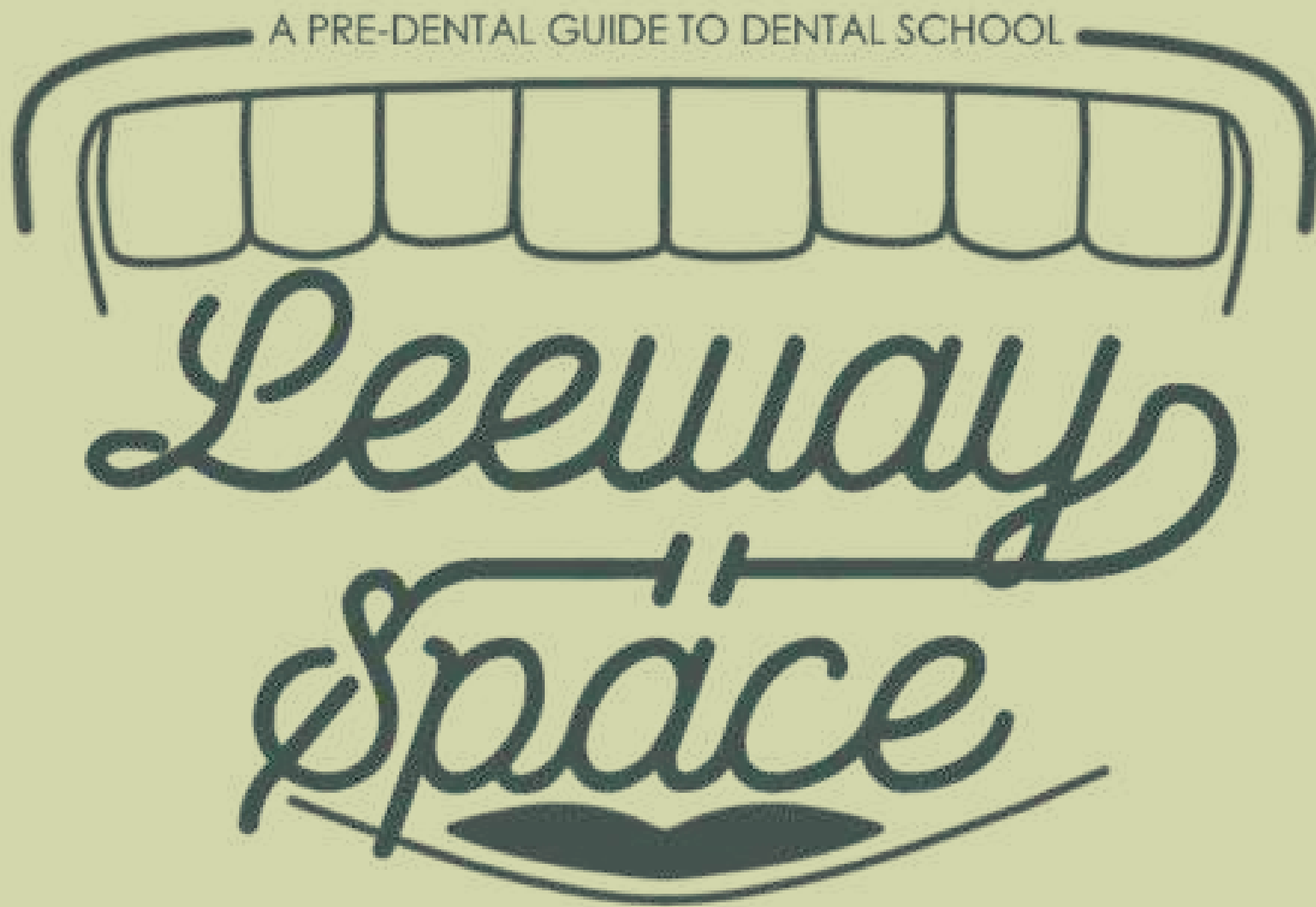


SPRING 2025

VOLUME 10 ISSUE 2



A PRE-DENTAL GUIDE TO DENTAL SCHOOL



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MESSAGE FROM PRE-DENTAL OUTREACH CHAIRS



As we wrap up Leeway Space for the 2024-2025 academic year, I'd like to wholeheartedly thank everyone on the newsletter team: our chief editors for doing an excellent job leading, our graphic designers for stunning visuals, and our writers/editors for sharing valuable messages through their articles. We all came together with the same mission goal of guiding pre-dental students in their journeys, and I believe we've achieved that. I sincerely hope you all enjoy this issue of Leeway Space!



We welcome you to read the Volume 10, Issue II publication of our Leeway Space newsletter, written by and for pre-dental students! Dentistry is a complex and ever-evolving field, and there are always opportunities for those who are interested in dentistry to learn and be amazed by its topics. The Leeway Space newsletter is an opportunity for our writers team to express and explore what they love about dentistry and oral health. The ASDA at UCLA Pre-Dental Outreach Committee and the 25-25 Leeway Space Newsletter team invite you to read our articles and to begin your own first steps in engaging with the dental community and its world of scientific exploration and patient care!

MESSAGE FROM EDITORS-IN-CHIEF



Dear Readers,

We're thrilled to welcome you to the Spring 2025 edition of Leeway Space, Volume 10: Issue 2! This issue shines a light on the ever-expanding world of dentistry, seen through the diverse passions, experiences, and curiosities of today's pre-dental students. From volunteering abroad to exploring the economics behind oral healthcare, our contributors dive into the many ways dentistry intersects with broader social, cultural, and political landscapes.

In this edition, you'll find stories about international service, cultural mentorship, student advocacy, and the vital role of public dental programs. You'll also hear from international pre-dental students whose unique journeys highlight the truly global nature of care. We hope these pieces challenge traditional perceptions of dentistry and encourage you to think boldly, compassionately, and creatively about your own path forward in this field.

Thank you for joining us in this edition of Leeway Space. It's been an honor to continue a publication dedicated to empowering and guiding pre-dental students. We're incredibly proud of the passionate team behind this issue and deeply grateful for the support and leadership of Evana and Victor, the Co-Chairs of the ASDA at UCLA Pre-Dental Outreach Committee. Lastly, we want to thank you, the readers, for being part of this journey and we wish you all the best on your future endeavors!

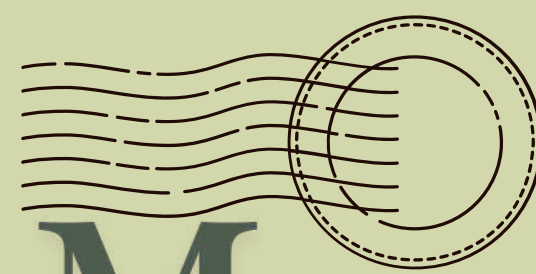
Warm regards,

Terrence Chi & Misheel Unur
Leeway Space Editors-In-Chief

Terrence Chi & Misheel Unur



MEET THE NEWSLETTER TEAM



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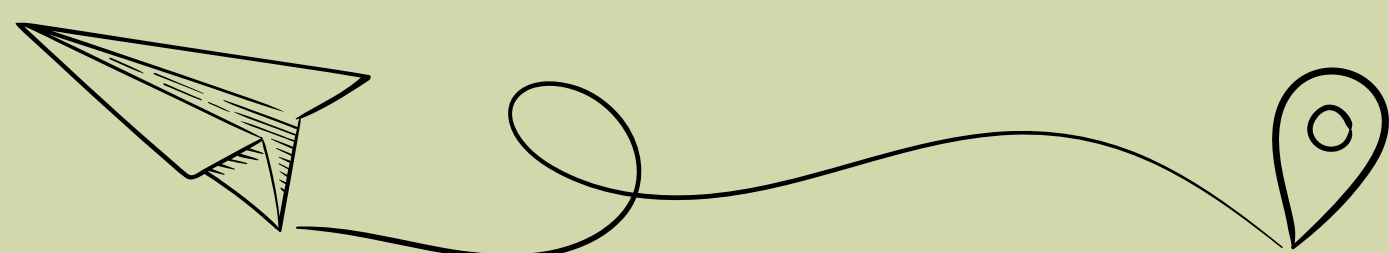
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CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES AND MENTORSHIP IN DENTISTRY

Growing up under the supportive wing of immigrant parents allowed me to accept and embrace my culture. As a squirmy child, my family would often drag me through Korea's "boring" historical landmarks. I also attended Korean school on Saturdays, where I performed in cultural talent shows and practiced my Korean. In hindsight, all of these experiences were shaping me into who I am today. However, as I entered middle school, I began to struggle with my identity as a Korean-American, often feeling caught between two worlds.

Seeking both new experiences and meaningful friendships, I auditioned for UCLA's Korean Culture Night (KCN) traditional fan dance team, drawn by the chance to perform like I once used to. What I didn't expect was how much it would reshape my understanding of culture and identity. Now, in my third year as a dancer and first year as a choreographer, I have come to realize how much culture influences both our identities and how we interact with the world around us. It wasn't until I participated in the Korean American Dental Association (KADA) Pre-Dental Mentorship Program that I discovered how profoundly cultural perspectives shape even the most routine aspects of life - such as visiting the dentist.

My time in KADA's Mentorship Program highlighted the critical role of cultural awareness in patient care. By engaging with diverse cultures and connecting with mentors, pre-dental students can learn to deliver quality care to patients from all backgrounds, while recognizing that "quality care" can look different depending on each patient's cultural perspective and experiences.

Cultural Representation

What does "cultural perspectives" mean in the context of dentistry and healthcare? Cultural perspectives refer to the beliefs, values and practices that shape an individual's perception of health and treatment. In dentistry, these perspectives can largely influence patient expectations, doctor-patient interactions, and views on preventative care. According to a study assessing oral health-related cultural beliefs, "Culture organizes the group's norms of family life, birth, childrearing, aging, and death [2] as well as their recognition of illness and care-seeking practices around health or medical conditions" (Butani et al., 2008). This shows how significant of an impact culture makes on a patient's decision to seek preventative care. I grew up believing that trips to the dentist were equivalent to trips to the emergency room. My parents never emphasized the importance of preventative care, which I later realized was a pattern among minority communities.

As a child of immigrants, I often wondered if the reason why my parents did not emphasize regular dental visits, compared to the parents of my second-generation Korean-American friends, was because they held on to more traditional cultural beliefs about healthcare. The oral health study supports this idea, noting that "cultural knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about health and sickness, however, especially of causes, recognition and consequences of illness, and proper treatment, change far more slowly, often not until the next generation is born and raised in the new country of residence" (Butani et al., 2008). This lag in cultural adaptation could help explain why families like mine fail to prioritize preventative care and view dental visits as necessary only in emergencies. Experiencing this cultural

perspective first-hand has helped me to recognize the importance of advocating for dental care that emphasizes the necessity of preventative care, while making sure to respect cultural beliefs. As a future dentist, I hope to educate other dentists on ways to foster trust in patients to successfully encourage seeking consistent, proactive care. I aspire to be a dentist that communicates the benefits of preventative care in a way that aligns with the patients' cultural values and circumstances, ensuring that they feel understood and respected.



Daisie Lee
UCLA '25

Mentorship

Beyond cultural perspectives, mentorship has been an invaluable part of my pre-dental journey, particularly through my recent involvement in the Korean American Dental Association (KADA) Pre-Dental Mentorship Program. This experience has shown me how powerful mentorship and networking can be in fostering not only professional growth but also personal growth, particularly in embracing my culture. I connected with mentors who understood the complexities of navigating multiple cultural identities. In addition to technical guidance through biweekly lectures, dental school tours, and a practical workshop, the program provided me with a vision of the kind of dentist I aspire to be. Through various shadowing opportunities across the greater Los Angeles area provided me with firsthand insight into how different dentists interact with their patients and provide quality care. Many of the dentists had experienced the transition from practicing in South Korea to practicing in the United States, allowing me to hear countless stories and perspectives.

My experience with KADA and with dental appointments in South Korea highlight the importance of mentorship and cultural competence in dentistry. This mentorship experience not only solidified my desire to pursue dentistry, but also helped me to clarify what I want to carry forward in my future practice: catering personalized, quality dental care to patients by valuing understanding and respect. Thus, I believe all students can benefit greatly through mentorship programs.

List of Mentorship Programs!

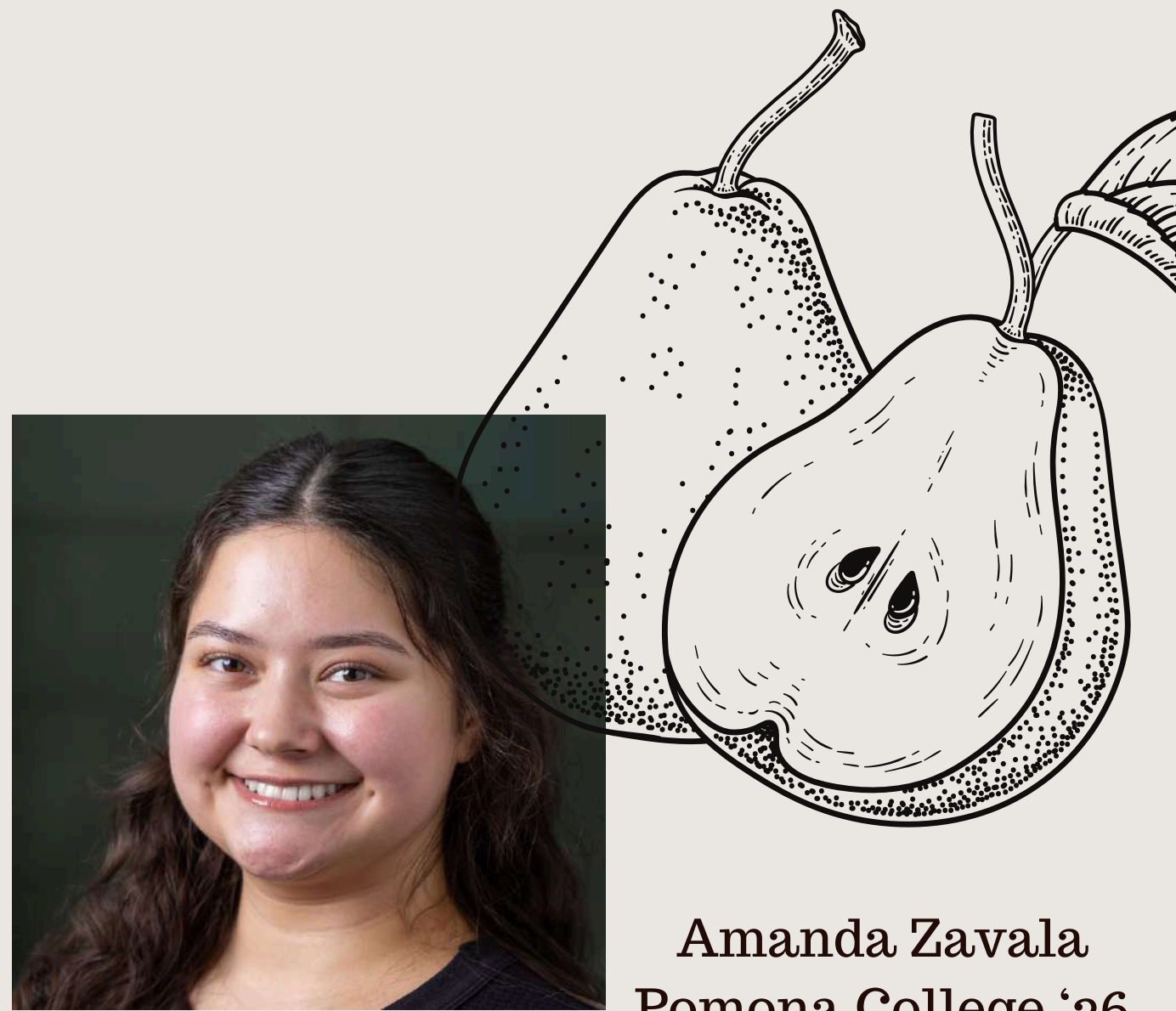
1. American Student Dental Association
2. Korean American Dental Association
3. Hispanic Dental Association
4. Diversity in Dental Mentorships

... and more!



EXPLORING PATHWAYS: THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF PUBLIC DENTAL SERVICES

Access to dental services remains a luxury, not a right, for low-income communities. I have witnessed patients in an affluent private dental clinic receive same-day services while I have always had to wait months for appointments at a public clinic in South Chicago. This sharp contrast highlights the necessity for change. Dentistry has the potential to improve the quality of life for everyone. Yet, its benefits remain unattainable for millions across the United States. Dental insurance is often the biggest outlet for affording services, but the problem begins when over 70% of dentists enter the private sector—a sector that does not typically accept government insurances such as Medicaid. With a majority of dentists working in clinics that are not accessible to low-income communities, the gap in oral healthcare widens and becomes increasingly determined by socioeconomic status.



Amanda Zavala
Pomona College '26

The Importance of the Public Sector of Dentistry

The potential benefits of entering private practice, such as higher pay, better work-life balance, and ownership tends to overshadow the equally important public sector. With over 72 million adults and seven million children being enrolled in Medicaid and/or Children's Health Insurance Programs in 2024 (Medicaid, 2024), public dental clinics are crucial for ensuring an equitable disbursement of services to underserved populations. These programs provide coverage for low-income communities that may otherwise be unable to access dental care; however, only about 33% of dentists accept these forms of insurance (Nasseh et al., 2022). Many dentists opt out of participating in these programs primarily due to lower reimbursement rates and the increased paperwork associated with public insurances. This low percentage prevents underserved communities from enjoying the same benefits as their privately-insured counterparts, such as increased availability and personalized care.

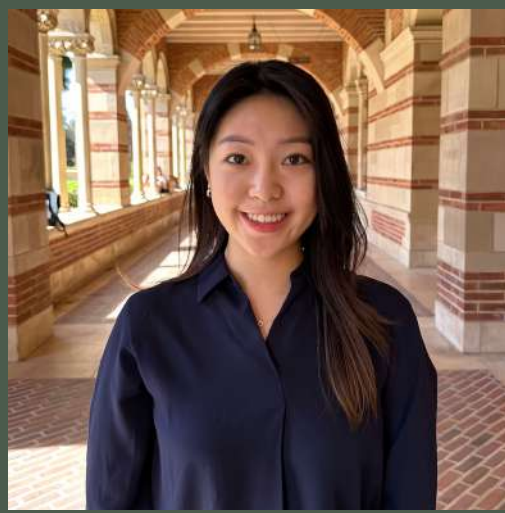
Benefits of the Public Sector of Dentistry

Working in public dental clinics comes with a variety of benefits to help alleviate the financial burdens of receiving a dental education. There are expanded options for financial assistance, including the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program and Public Service Loan Forgiveness. The National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program (NHSC) awards dental students two-to-four year full-ride scholarships in exchange for their service in a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) post-graduation. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program is a federal program that forgives dentists' remaining student loans after 10 years of service in an underserved community. On a personal level, many find fulfillment in working within the public sector due to their contribution to dental accessibility, diverse patient pools, and helping local communities.

Conclusion

As future dental students and dental providers, it is important to recognize sources of disparity within the dental field. I encourage students to consider the ways in which they can increase accessibility for all patients, regardless of their socioeconomic factors. In acknowledging the benefits of entering the private sector of dentistry, we must also highlight the crucial role of the public sector. We should encourage each other to contribute to the advancement of dentistry as a human right rather than a privilege. Everyone has the opportunity to make a meaningful impact, whether by serving in the public sector after graduation or integrating accessible care into private practice. Together, we can advance the field of dentistry for the benefit of all.

Advocacy is about making our voices heard, and pre-dental students deserve to be a part of the conversation. As future healthcare providers, pre-dental students are responsible for advocating for our future patients and the advancement of the dental profession. By engaging in advocacy early, we can bring pre-dental perspectives and experiences to the table, influencing decisions that directly affect our education and future careers. Beyond policy impact, advocacy builds essential skills—from public speaking and networking to critical thinking and understanding of complex healthcare systems—all of which will serve us well in dental school and beyond. If you're wondering where to begin, here are some of the key pathways for pre-dental students to get involved in advocacy:



Rachel Chung
UCLA '27

AMPLIFYING PRE-DENTAL VOICES: PATHWAYS FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN DENTAL ADVOCACY

Staying Informed

The foundation of advocacy is knowledge—policy changes in healthcare impact dental education, accessibility to care, and professional practice. By staying informed through reputable organizations such as the American Dental Association (ADA), the American Student Dental Association (ASDA), the Student National Dental Association (SNDA), and the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), pre-dental students can gain insight into key issues shaping dentistry and learn how to make their voices heard. Most of these organizations offer dedicated resources for students in dentistry, often through free newsletters, advocacy toolkits, webinars, and virtual events. Signing up for email updates, following their advocacy efforts on social media, and even joining as a pre-dental member equips students with direct access to timely information and practical resources.

Direct Communication with Legislators

Communicating directly with legislators is one of the most effective ways to create real change. ASDA Action, a grassroots advocacy platform, allows students to send letters to lawmakers, track state and federal legislation, and sign up for advocacy alerts. By taking the initiative to contact legislators and request their co-sponsorship of bills that support dental students and patients, pre-dental students can actively contribute to shaping policies that affect their future careers. Moreover, building relationships with elected officials helps ensure that dental issues remain at the forefront of legislative priorities.

Exercising the Power of Voting: Advocacy at the Ballot Box

Voting is a powerful tool in advocacy. ASDA Action provides resources to help students research candidates, understand their positions on dental-related policies, and register to vote. Knowing where candidates stand on key issues—such as student debt relief or Medicaid dental coverage—ensures that pre-dental students make informed decisions at the ballot box.

Attending Advocacy Events and Conferences

Attending annual advocacy conferences at the national, state, and regional levels offers pre-dental students firsthand experience in federal-level advocacy and policy discussions. ADA Dentist and Student Lobby Day: Organized by ADA, National Lobby Day is one of the most prominent advocacy events in dentistry, held annually in Washington, D.C. More than 500 dental and pre-dental students, alongside dentists, gather to advocate for policies affecting dental education and patient care. Participants undergo training on legislative policy and effective communication before heading to Capitol Hill to meet with

members of Congress. Pre-dental students can apply to attend through their regional ADA/ASDA chapters. ASDA National Leadership Conference: Hosted annually in Chicago, the conference attracts over 700 dental and pre-dental students for three days of focused learning in professional development. Through interactive workshops, expert presentations, and networking with ASDA leaders, attendees develop skills in financial planning, practice management, and advocacy strategy. For pre-dental students, NLC offers early insight into the leadership and policy roles dentists play in shaping the profession. Applications to attend are available through ASDA.

ASDA District 11 Conference: This regional conference brings together dental and pre-dental students from California, Nevada, and Hawaii. With over 200 attendees, the event focuses on advocacy, leadership, and professional development. A variety of breakout sessions are offered, covering topics tailored to specific interests and career goals in dentistry. Each year, 30 pre-dental students are selected to attend, where they gain exposure to state and national policy discussions, networking opportunities with leaders in organized dentistry, and guidance on advocacy involvement. CDA Advocacy Day: Organized by the California Dental Association (CDA), the event gathers dental students and dental professionals in California to meet with state legislators and staff to advocate for critical issues impacting dentistry and oral health, such as workforce shortages and access to care.

Connecting with Advocacy Leaders

Pre-dental students seeking guidance on contributing to ongoing advocacy efforts can reach out to legislative liaisons or national advocacy chairs within ASDA and other organizations. Pre-dental students can start by visiting ASDA's website to find contact information for national and district leaders, or by contacting their local ASDA chapter for introductions. Additionally, the California Dental Association (CDA) has oral health policy analysts who focus on state-level dental issues; students can learn more through the CDA website. The pre-dental experience includes barriers that dental students may no longer face; sharing these challenges helps advocacy leaders better understand the full pipeline into the profession.

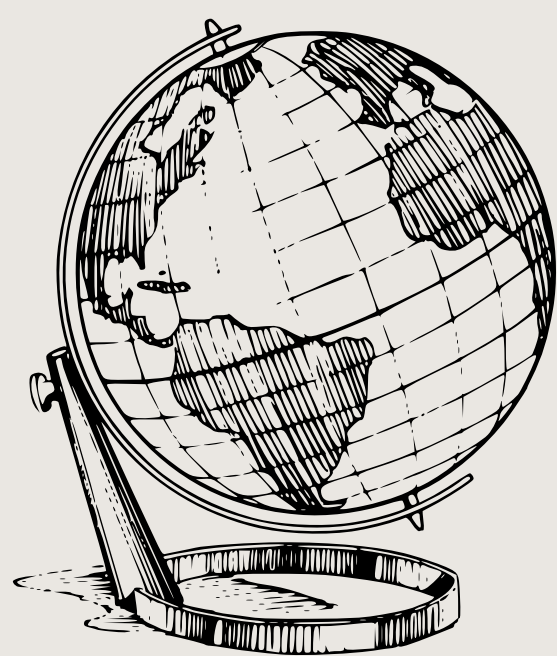
Getting involved in dental advocacy may seem intimidating, but our engagement impacts the future of our profession. By staying informed, joining advocacy organizations, writing to legislators, attending conferences, and voting, pre-dental students can amplify their voices and influence policies that will shape dentistry and the oral healthcare system. Advocacy is not reserved for practicing dentists—it starts with us. The time to get involved is now.

FROM DIVERSE GENES TO HEALING BEYOND TEETH; INTERNATIONAL PRE-DENTAL STUDENTS



Kiana Adli
California
Lutheran
University '25

Dental care is an art form that incorporates not just science but also history, culture, and the human element. Our unique genetic origins, language fluency, and global views shape our approach to healthcare as international pre-dental students. Our stories of perseverance, change, and dogged curiosity have brought us together from all over the globe. Our capacity to comprehend and treat patients as whole people, not just as teeth, is even more priceless than the technical knowledge and textbooks we bring to the table.



International students left behind loved ones, our native languages, and the comfortable surroundings of home to follow our ambitions and studies. Along the way, we've encountered challenges specific to international students—navigating visa requirements, adapting to unfamiliar educational systems, and often taking on financial responsibilities independently. These challenges, meantime, have made us more resilient and flexible. But these challenges don't make us who we are; they only make us more resilient and better able to adapt to the environment around us.

Different populations have vastly different genetic susceptibilities to oral illnesses. Periodontal disease, enamel hypoplasia, and caries susceptibility are all linked to genes, and certain ethnic groups seem to be more affected than others, according to research. As aspiring dentists educated in a global context, we have an opportunity to connect the dots between genetic knowledge and culturally sensitive patient treatment.

My path to dentistry has been anything but typical. I didn't grow up surrounded by opportunities; I had to chase them across continents. From teaching myself English during COVID lockdowns to eventually moving to California on a single-entry visa, every step has been intentional—and at times, intimidating. I knew grades and clinical hours were essential, but what I didn't expect was how crucial it would be to learn the art of connection.

One of the most transformative moments in my journey was attending the 2025 ADEA GoDental Recruitment Event. As an international pre-dental student, I often felt like I was navigating a system built for others—but that event shifted my perspective. Speaking directly with admissions officers from over 60 dental schools helped demystify the application process. I finally understood what programs value beyond numbers: authenticity, clarity of purpose, and the ability to advocate for oneself. I also met other pre-dental students whose journeys echoed my own, and for the first time, I felt seen. For many international students, including myself, one of the biggest challenges is simply finding the right words—words to describe our academic backgrounds, our service, our resilience, and our aspirations. These events aren't just about collecting brochures or hearing presentations; they're about learning how to tell your story with confidence. That's something I'm still learning—but now, I no longer feel like I'm doing it alone. Aside from attending networking events, making use of appropriate resources is just as crucial.

There is no universally applicable paradigm for healthcare. Dental treatment is seen differently by patients according to cultural beliefs, dietary habits, and health practices. As an example, tooth loss with age is seen as an inevitable part of aging in many cultures, rather than something that can be avoided. Some people may still choose old-fashioned cures rather than cutting-edge treatments. As foreign pre-dental students, it is our hope that by learning about diverse points of view, we can develop a dentistry that is more welcoming and focused on the needs of individual patients.

Language is just as important as cultural awareness when it comes to having productive conversations. Trust is built and treatment results are improved when healthcare providers are able to educate communities, explain procedures, and alleviate patient concern in several languages. It is our responsibility as foreign students to help bridge cultural and language barriers in healthcare settings so that every patient feels heard and understood.

Dentists of the future will not be limited by national boundaries. Beyond our extensive dental education and expertise in anatomy and occlusion, we bring with us an appreciation for the unique challenges faced by each patient, a willingness to listen and learn, and a dedication to providing care that goes beyond the restoration of teeth.

STARFISH EFFECT: WHY PRE-DENTAL STUDENTS SHOULD VOLUNTEER ABROAD

What Is The Starfish Effect & Its Relation to Pre-Dental Students

In 1969, Loen Eiseley published a book titled *The Unexpected Universe*. The book contained a parable about a young child throwing starfish back into the ocean. According to the Starfish Foundation, a foundation dedicated to providing scholarships, tutoring, and leadership development to impoverished youth, a man approached the child saying, “You can’t save all these starfish.” The child responded, “Well, I made a difference for that one!” This simple yet powerful statement encapsulates what is now known as The Starfish Effect: the idea that every individual has the ability to make a meaningful impact, no matter how small. Pre-dental students have an intrinsic drive for service and a desire to improve healthcare resources across the globe. Each individual's unique skills, passions, and talents allow for endless opportunities to make an impact. Ultimately, success is not solely measured by financial earnings but by the positive outcomes made in the lives of others. The Starfish Effect is also an impact of the collective. According to the Center for Creative Leadership, an effective leader embodies integrity, self-awareness, compassion, and the ability to collaborate. The cooperation of students and professionals with a passion for dentistry offers a unique opportunity for improving the field by integrating personal experiences and understanding of diverse cultures.

Benefits of Volunteering Abroad

While local volunteering can strengthen community relationships, volunteering globally can expand one's scale of networking, improve social skills, explore a global understanding of healthcare disparities, and strengthen a community's ability to maintain proper oral hygiene and maintenance skills. According to the MEDLIFE Movement, volunteering abroad cultivates “an enhanced sense of empathy and understanding, through direct cultural immersion.” It is no secret that volunteering has many benefits, both for the individual who volunteers their time and for the person being served. The Mayo Clinic Health System proposed three primary health benefits correlated to volunteering: Improved physical and mental health, a sense of purpose, and the development of valuable skills and relationships (Angela Thoreson, 2023). Establishing long-term partnerships between volunteer programs and communities is key to fostering sustainability and managing change. Global Brigades is a non-profit organization started by pre-medical students wanting to make a lasting impact in global communities that do not have access to healthcare and economic resources. The “holistic approach” focuses on factors that dramatically influence the well-being of communities while also providing needed resources to assist others in learning how to maintain sustainable and ideal living conditions. Service programs offering these trips encourage volunteers to step outside of their local surroundings and to contribute to global development.

Choosing Ethical Global Service Programs

One of the most important aspects of working in the healthcare field is the passion for serving others. Many pre-dental students have access to volunteer opportunities, both locally and globally. However, it may often be difficult to determine what global service program will be ethical and feasible for communities in need.



Ariana
Ahumada-
Stevens
Pepperdine
University '27

The Journal of Dental Education emphasizes the issues associated with voluntourism and the possibility of promoting dental school curricula regarding ethical and sustainable service trips. Health care voluntourism can often be considered a “band-aid” approach, as “such service trips often focus solely on curative and/or emergency care without tackling the upstream risk factors of poor oral health or water source” (Journal of Dental Education, Volume 82, Number 4). Communities needing dental resources should not have a dependent relationship with medical voluntourists, who are often short-term or one-time volunteers. Global service programs that are dedicated to empowering communities to enact change and imposing preventative strategies will not only improve the current state of health but will increase a community's ability to remain independent in the long run.

When searching for ethical global service programs, many questions arise to determine the goal of an organization. While some may have a common goal of simply providing healthcare resources to communities for a limited amount of time, others may have a goal of providing economic, health, business, and sanitation resources and strategies to these communities to build new infrastructure and systems that will benefit the communities for generations. Global Brigades was designed to “provide regular access to affordable healthcare services and medication, and daily access to trained Community Health Workers,” in addition to building water and sanitation infrastructure which “supplies continuous access to a clean water system maintained by trained local water committees” (Our Holistic Model, Global Brigades). The mission of ethical volunteer organizations is to permanently improve impoverished communities by providing long-term services that align with community goals and government standards. Whether a volunteer is short-term or long-term, the resources remain consistent through permanent systems that promote independence.

Staying Knowledgeable

Many communities around the world lack much-needed resources. Those living in developed countries do not often have the opportunity to experience what life is like for those experiencing dental and medical disparities. One example of an area in need of urgent dental and medical assistance is Athens, Greece. Many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have found themselves in difficult living conditions with a lack of financial means to pay for proper wellness essentials. While Athens is one of the most popular summer vacation destinations, many people fail to realize the existing demand for better healthcare for those who cannot afford to pay for their essential needs. When helping just one “starfish,” volunteers can create a ripple effect, leading to long-term change for many.

BRIDGING FIELDS: HOW ECONOMICS INTERSECTS WITH DENTISTRY



Sydney Bach
UCR '25

On the surface economics and dentistry are seemingly independent disciplines, with dentistry relating to treating diseases and other conditions affecting the teeth and gums. In contrast, economics is a social science that analyzes the choices of individuals, businesses, and governments to allocate and maximize limited resources. Fundamental economic concepts involve scarcity, choice, and opportunity cost, contributing to how

individuals and institutions make decisions. Scarcity occurs when the demand for a good or service exceeds the resources available. For example, the number of dentists accessible surpasses the resources needed to provide effective care for everyone; thus indicating how resource limitations impact provider and patient choices (Listl et al., 2019). Selecting various options is often difficult, especially in health economics, where funds can be allocated toward a more effective but expensive material to fill decayed teeth, resulting in few teeth fillings for a patient (Listl et al., 2019). The reallocation of additional resources does not exempt choices from being made since the opportunity costs and the benefits of one choice are abandoned for the best alternative. Economics examines resource efficiency and its role in advancing oral healthcare (Listl et al., 2019). This intersection between economics and dentistry provides a holistic view of oral health and its influence on an individual's physical, mental, social, and economic well-being.

Researchers often categorize the economic impact of oral health into direct, indirect, and intangible costs. Direct costs include treatment expenditures, whereas indirect costs involve productivity loss from missing school or work days. Intangible costs, such as lowered quality of life, encompass a broader consequence of poor oral health (Listl et al., 2015). Goods and services relate to health because they possess value, highlighting the economic utility or satisfaction individuals gain from consuming commodity bundles. However, unlike goods and services, health cannot be purchased; rather, it depends on determinants of health which can positively or negatively impact an individual's oral care. Certain factors, such as private goods (e.g., toothbrushes, toothpaste, and oral care) can be purchased directly, while water fluoridation is considered a public good that benefits communities (Listl et al., 2019).

Social determinants of health include income and poverty, education, and employment. From a global perspective, oral diseases continue to increase primarily due to reduced exposure to fluoride (in the water supply or oral hygiene products), affordability and accessibility of high-sugar foods, and limited community access to oral healthcare (World Health Organization, 2024). Therefore, the combination of scarcity, utility, and determinants of health create oral health implications, from the individual level to the macro scale, affecting communities and populations. Given that economics and the natural sciences are traditionally studied separately, recognizing their connection in oral health care is essential to understanding the consequences of socioeconomic factors, which can address patient obstacles and influence oral care.

The intersection between economics and dentistry is considered an interdisciplinary study, which combines insights from multiple fields to develop a more comprehensive understanding (Newell et al., 2001). Since each discipline typically focuses on a specific concentration, the definition of a problem (question, topic, or issue) depends on the context and scale of the subject (Newell et al., 2001). For example, economists view the burden of oral disease in terms of costs, production, and efficiency, whereas dentists focus on providing restorative treatments. This further illustrates how an issue depends on the varying perspectives and contexts compared to what another discipline sees. The interdisciplinary research challenge identifies and studies the typically non-linear linkages between different fields (Newell et al., 2001). If a pattern arises, such as the prevalence of oral diseases, and falls outside a dental provider's scope, a multidimensional approach including economics and public policy can be applied to improve the issue. By connecting economics and oral health, we can develop solutions and advancements to complex systems that require a holistic and diverse outlook.

As pre-dental students, we are expected to focus on the natural sciences. Yet, embracing diverse perspectives is essential to recognizing and addressing inequities, such as the disproportionate burden of oral disease among marginalized groups. During my undergraduate studies, I pursued a minor in economics alongside my biology major to broaden my worldview through an interdisciplinary approach, unveiling the multifaceted nature of dentistry. I encourage other pre-dental students to explore disciplines beyond their majors, by enrolling in different elective courses or declaring a minor since bridging disciplines combines analytical tools to tackle problems and questions that challenge traditional disciplinary boundaries (Youngblood, 2007). Overall, the integration of economics and dentistry is exemplified through the key concepts of scarcity, utility, and determinants of health, creating a broader framework for addressing oral health disparities and promoting more effective, equitable care.



Figure 1: Social Determinants of Health (U.S. Centers for Disease Control, 2024)

Citations by Article

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Cultural Perspectives and Mentorship in Dentistry

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Exploring Pathways: The Crucial Role of Public Dental Services

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