

Dear Ostrow Community:

We have just completed the fifth week of the “Safer at Home” social distancing effort to curb the spread of coronavirus, and I know that while many of us are feeling the effects of cabin fever — especially as the warm, spring sun begins to really shine outside — it’s a small price to pay to ensure the safety and well-being of our fellow Angelenos. It’s looking like our efforts are making a difference, and it’s because of this shared sacrifice, so hang in there.

This week, our students completed their final exams. Students, I have been so inspired by your resilience during these unprecedented times. Your commitment to your education is admirable. Thank you for adapting to virtual learning and finishing your final exams, from wherever in the world you are sheltering in place.

I would also like to thank our faculty and staff who managed to deliver Ostrow’s first-ever, online-only final examinations successfully. You can imagine that doing this all online comes with its own complications — technological and otherwise. Your commitment to our students and willingness to troubleshoot through some of those complications was critical in helping us pull this off. A special thank you goes to **Anna Chen, Ben Creighton, Cathy Tomlin, Jessica Ostroff** and **Ruth Perez** whose support and expertise were critical in the delivery of these examinations. I would also like to thank the Office of Student Life and Well-Being — **Kim Eeles** and **Mariam Agazaryan** — for your support to our students during these challenging times.

As we finish this week, I was curious to hear how some of our faculty, staff and students were spending their days (outside of their myriad Zoom meetings and classes), how they were managing to find a semblance of normalcy during the most abnormal of times and what they had learned during this great opportunity to reflect. I asked **Piedad Suarez Durall, Ben Creighton** and **Valerie Hernandez** to share with us their thoughts. This is what they had to say:

Piedad Suarez Durall

Associate Professor of Clinical Dentistry

It is incredible how the days are moving so fast, and most of my days are literally in front of the computer in Zoom meetings.

I realized that it is harder to have a balanced life working from home. I am not good balancing my days even though I am trying to have a routine. I have a schedule and shower immediately after I wake up because I don't want to spend my day in PJs.

Something that I am doing more of these days is cooking. I am making recipes that I have not done in years.

What this unprecedented time has taught me are so many things ... but being witness of a pandemic of this magnitude is something that I never thought I was going to see in the 21st century in the United States. This time has shown me, more than ever, the importance of team work and how crucial is to belong to one. It's also shown me how much I miss my colleagues, students and patients. But, most importantly, this time reinforces the value of family and loved ones and what is really important in life. We are not eternal, and we have to enjoy life now because we really don't know what tomorrow is going to bring us...so love the people around you, and be thankful for what you have.

Ben Creighton

Enterprise Applications Supervisor

A month in, and the unfathomable has become somewhat routine. As you might imagine, my colleagues and I have been busy doing our best digital approximation of all our classes, rotations and exams. While it has been taxing, I've been amazed at the generosity of spirit, kindness and cooperation of our faculty, staff and students. Outside of work hours, I make a point of only reading the newspaper every morning and then doing my best to tune out — or at least mitigate — the ceaseless pandemic discussion. I have no trouble filling up what remains of my day with family, walks, reading, training, podcasts, running, bike rides — and, of course, the never-ending project that is our 120-year-old house. I think, more than anything else, this time has shown me how incredibly fortunate I am. I have a job I enjoy; a family who (for reasons unknown to me) love and support me; a beautiful, comfortable home; and continued good health — truly an embarrassment of riches. For this reason, I try to find time in my day to return this good fortune to others where I can and show a little empathy and kindness to those around me. While I look forward to the day I see everyone again, it is nice seeing so many of you in little 2-inch rectangles assembled on my monitor — especially since I can always hit mute.

Valerie Hernandez DDS '21

Over the past few weeks, I have found myself with rare time to bask in self-care and spend a little time with myself — be it trying new workout classes on Instagram, attending virtual game night, reading a book, participating in cooking challenges, coloring, catching up on sleep, and of course, binge watching television shows. These days have allowed me to enjoy new and old hobbies. Additionally, with FaceTime and Zoom a click away, these avenues have allowed me to reconnect with far and old friends, while keeping in touch with the faces I miss seeing every day. While this last month has undoubtedly been chaotic, staying positive, checking in on one another, and sending that virtual hug will help us all stay connected until we can all be together soon!

Before I go, I want to once again remind you all that we are all in this together, and though we're socially distanced, a Trojan Dental Family Member is never far away. I'd also like to express my sincere condolences for anyone in our community who has lost someone due to COVID-19. Please know that our hearts break for you, and even more importantly, we are here for you.

Stay safe, stay healthy and Fight On!

Avishai

Avishai Sadan, DMD, MBA
Dean
G. Donald and Marian James Montgomery
Professor of Dentistry

P.S. Given all the time we spend on Zoom — for school, work and even socializing — we have created several USC Dentistry-themed virtual backgrounds for you to use, if you would like. They can be found at <https://dentistry.usc.edu/zoom-virtual-backgrounds/>