
Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

[2/21/2025]



COMMUNITY MESSAGE

FROM THE DESK OF INTERIM DEAN YANG CHAI

Dear Trojan Dental Community,

We recently held our first Board of Councilors meeting for 2025. In addition to the usual business conducted at these meetings, we were very excited to welcome some of the Friends of Dentistry scholarship finalists (**Cory Cox, Courtney Fortier, Salony Jassar, Nathaniel LaSalle, Mailynh Nguyen** and **Andrea Woywitka**), who joined us for a discussion regarding the launch of a

Special BOC Student Leadership Committee. This newly formed committee seeks to help dental students continue to grow their leadership skills, in a variety of subjects, while pursuing their oral healthcare studies here at Ostrow. We also had an extensive and engaging conversation about how to continue growing professionally after graduating dental school. It was a very enlightening discussion, and I'd like to thank the students who participated, giving their invaluable opinions and perspectives as we continue to shape this leadership program.

On the research front, we were very pleased to see two of our research teams featured in high-impact journals earlier this year. The first, published in the journal *Immunity* by **Pinghui Feng and his team**, looked at the ways in which metabolic enzymes might be used to fight off viral infections and tumors. It's a study that could lead to the development of future antiviral and antitumor therapies. You can [read more about that discovery here](#). The second article, published in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine* by **Dechen Lin and his team**, details the discovery of a specific gene to further fortify immune checkpoint blockade therapy, a newer intervention that mobilizes one's own immunity cells to attack tumors. This could have profound effects on treating head and neck cancers in the near future. You can [read more about that here](#). Congratulations to both of these research teams on such high-impact work. You make us proud!

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Visiting Union Rescue Mission

Earlier this month, I had the honor of visiting our dental clinic housed within the Union Rescue Mission (URM). Established in 2000, the clinic is one of the only dental school-based operations that caters exclusively to the unhoused population. It was such an incredible experience to see the direct impact our students, faculty and staff have every single day on the lives of those looking to get back on their feet. The importance of a bright and healthy smile cannot be overstated in the ways in which it can affect one's self-esteem. It's often the first thing that someone notices about us, so its impact on building a new life (finding housing, community services and a job) can be quite profound. I'd like to thank **Mehdi Mohammadi** and the entire **URM faculty and staff** for their hospitality during my visit. I'd also like to thank **URM CEO Mark Hood** and

URM President Richard Baker for taking the time to meet with me. We truly treasure this partnership and look forward to nurturing it, so that our students can continue getting this incredibly unique experience, treating unhoused patients and improving their oral and overall health.

We recently held our Business Symposium, an annual event where our students get the opportunity to hear from industry professionals and recent alumni, who talk about aspects of dentistry that might not be covered extensively in our classrooms. This year, the event was keynoted by **Paul Guggenheim** from Patterson Dental with additional discussions centering around the business and legal aspects of running your own practice (led by **Jon Marashi, Steven Au** and **Levi Barlavi**). We were also joined by a panel of recent alumni, including **Daniel Adelpour** (DDS '19), **Corey Nasoff** (DDS '19, ORTHO '22), **Karen Sierra** (DDS '18) and **Nader Yermian** (DDS '09) as well as **Isabella Gantman** (UoP grad), who talked about what they wished they had known as dental students. In addition to participating in organized discussions, students were also able to network, ask questions of our experts and attend a vendor fair. Every year, the Business Symposium offers a truly enriching experience for our students and their oral healthcare education. I'd like to thank all the discussion leaders, panelists and vendors who took time out of their busy schedules to attend this event. I'd also like to thank the **Office of Student Life** for their efforts in putting this annual event together. And finally, thank you to the students who attended. I hope you walked away with new knowledge that you will one day apply to your burgeoning dental professions.

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Crepes for CDA

Last week, Ostrow's CDA representatives hosted a CDA Crepe Cart, with help from a CDA Spirit Grant. With the funding, the CDA representatives (**Andre Battikha, Inti Mendoza Carrasco, Steffi Chen, Daniel Ip, Victor Marrufo Mendoza** and **Arman Zograbyan**) invited students who had filled out CDA applications to enjoy sweet crepes from the L.A. Paris Creperie. I'd like to thank the CDA reps and the **Office of Student Life** for their efforts in bringing these sweet treats to Ostrow — along with increased Ostrow representation to the CDA .

Recently, under the leadership of Chief Operations Officer **Jill Yoshimi**, we

rolled out new emergency codes, which are modeled after hospital codes, for use on our school-wide PA system. Committing these codes to memory is essential to be able to take the appropriate action in such a scenario. For quick reference, you can see the codes below.

"Doctor STAT" is a **Medical Emergency** — Person with a medical emergency requiring a doctor's attention.

"Code Yellow" is a **Bomb Threat** — Suspicious-looking device is discovered or a bomb threat is received.

"Code Silver" is a **Weapon or Hostage Situation** — Person with a weapon and/or active shooter and/or hostage situation.

"Code Purple" is a **Missing Person or Child Abduction** — Missing person or suspected child abduction.

I'd like to strongly encourage you to [watch this video](#) for more information about these codes and other efforts that have been made to safeguard our community. It's a great way to brush up on safety protocol in the event of an emergency.

Finally, we have two ongoing searches occurring to fill the positions of Dean and Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs. The committees are working hard and have begun the process of filling these essential positions. I'd like to thank all who are participating; you are truly helping to shape the future of USC dentistry.

With that, I wish you all a nice, relaxing weekend.

Stay safe, and fight on!

Yang Chai, DDS, PhD
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