

Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

[5/8/2026]



COMMUNITY MESSAGE

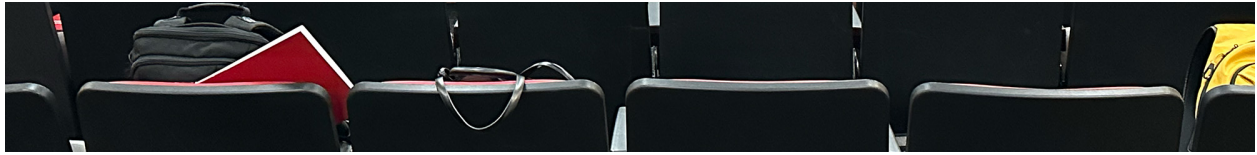
FROM THE DESK OF DEAN YANG CHAI

Dear Trojan Dental Community,

We recently announced our keynote speaker for Ostrow's 2026 Commencement Ceremony. Ostrow alumnus and Board of Councilors Chair Emerita **Carol Gomez Summerhays** DDS '78 will be addressing our grads before they toss their mortarboards in the air to celebrate the end of this educational chapter in their lives. Carol is quite an accomplished Ostrow graduate. After finishing her DDS degree at USC, Carol — a Health Professions Scholarship Program participant — served four

years active duty in the U.S. Navy Dental Corps followed by seven years inactive duty, continuing a proud family tradition of four generations of military service. Her career has included leadership positions in both the nonprofit and corporate sectors, including terms as president of the American Dental Association and the California Dental Association. She has also served as a director for a publicly traded dental laser company, advisor to several dental companies and consultant in global professional relations at Henry Schein, Inc. Today, she is the treasurer for FDI World Dental Federation, the principal representative body for more than 1 million dentists around the world. Her honors have included the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, the Pierre Fauchard Gold Medal, the American Association of Women Dentists' Lucy Hobbs Award and inclusion in the U.S. 114th Congressional Record. We're really excited to welcome this successful alumna to share her advice on how to get the most out of your oral healthcare career. As a reminder, Ostrow's satellite ceremony takes place Friday, May 15 at 4:30 p.m. at the USC Village Great Lawn. If you need any information about the festivities, visit [Ostrow's satellite ceremony page](#). And while I strongly encourage you to attend in-person if you are able, you can also [livestream the ceremony](#).





WELCOME TO OSTROW, ASPID '28!

The **ASPID Class of 2028** joined us last week during their Orientation Week, where they were brought up to speed about life at Ostrow as well as being issued their equipment and scrubs to be able to hit the ground running. Please join me in welcoming the cohort to the Trojan Dental Family. They will put on their white coats and take their official oath as a healthcare professional in the fall with the incoming **DDS Class of 2030** (!)

In other news, **Dechen Lin** was recently promoted to the rank of Associate Professor of Biomedical Sciences with tenure. In the years since Dechen joined us in 2022, he has built a highly innovative research program, with a focus on transcriptional regulation and the molecular mechanisms underlying head and neck and esophageal cancers. He is widely known for his pioneering contributions to the understanding of squamous cell carcinoma, with his research providing critical insights into tumor evolution, epigenomic regulation and tumor-immune interactions, including the identification of key regulators of tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes that may enhance immunotherapy outcomes. In addition to his work at Ostrow, he is also the Associate Director of the USC Head and Neck Center at the Keck School of Medicine. He has received numerous prestigious honors, including the NIH/NCI R37 MERIT Award and has published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles that have been cited more than 14,500 times, showcasing the impact of his work. Please join me in congratulating Dechen on this well-deserved promotion!

We recently completed a mobile clinic event for veterans — the ninth such event since we began a partnership with Village for Vets in 2021. In total, we provided treatment to more than 100 of our nation's bravest women and men. We completed

treatment to more than 100 of our nation's poorest women and men. We completed nearly 1,300 procedures, including dental exams, radiographs, prophylaxis, scaling and root planing, composite restorations as well as simple and surgical extractions. I would like to thank the USC Mobile Dental Clinic for their continued efforts to increase access to oral healthcare across the region. Thank you to the faculty members who — under the leadership of **Sunny Fereshteh** — instruct and supervise our students, including **Liz Brummel, Rebecca El-Khoury, Maya Fulcher, Kathryn Nakamura, Robert Peters** and **Daniel Romo**. Thank you also to the staff members, the unsung heroes of the mobile clinic, who do so much work behind the scenes to ensure these events go successfully. These staff members include **Epifania Juarez, Juan Landeros, Vladimir Lima, Edwin Salgado** and **Anthony Santiago**. And, finally, the USC Mobile Clinic faculty and staff would like to congratulate the **Class of 2026** and thank all the students who participated in mobile dental clinics throughout the academic year.

Finally, speaking of community service, we were recently notified that Ostrow student **Somkene Okafor-Okwuego** was selected the winner of the United States Public Health Service Dental Award of Excellence, a prestigious honor recognizing final-year dental students who demonstrate exceptional leadership, service and commitment to public health dentistry. “Your accomplishments during dental school are truly commendable and reflect both your passion for dentistry and your commitment to public health,” said Rear Admiral/Assistant Surgeon General/Chief Dental Officer Michael Windsor Johnson in the governmental award letter. “The dedication and professionalism you have demonstrated suggest a promising future in advancing oral health and addressing the public health needs of diverse populations.” I personally can’t think of a more deserving student than Somkene, who has dedicated herself to bridging the gap to oral healthcare access for individuals at the Union Rescue Mission as well as Angeles House Family Center throughout her dental school career. You can [read more about Somkene’s award here](#). Congratulations and fight on, Somkene!

Fight On!

Yana Chai, DDS, PhD

Dean

G. Donald and Marian James Montgomery Professor of Dentistry

University Professor of Dentistry, Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine, and
Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery



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Our mailing address is:

925 W. 34th Street DEN 202

Los Angeles, CA 90089

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