

Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

[5/22/2026]



COMMUNITY MESSAGE

FROM THE DESK OF DEAN YANG CHAI

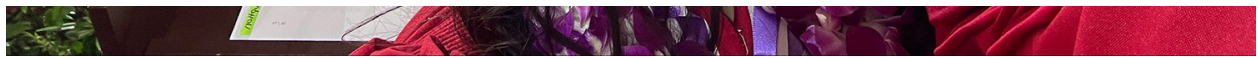
Dear Trojan Dental Community,

Last Friday, Ostrow's Class of 2026 officially graduated! The energy in the air that day was just so exuberant and nearly crackling with excitement. You could see smiles, hugs and joyful tears as our graduates closed this chapter in anticipation of the next. As I congratulated and shook hands with every graduate (and more than a few cute babies), I felt immense pride and joy in what we do here at Ostrow,

propelling the profession forward. We were treated to inspiring speeches from

keynote speaker **Carol Gomez Summerhays**, ASB Immediate Past President **Asha Green**, ASPID Class of 2026 President **Abraham Dukes** and DDS Class of 2026 President **Tracy Pham**, who snapped a stage “selfie” before her speech (see below). Thank you to those who delivered remarks. I’d also like to acknowledge **Mahvash Navazesh** and **Anita Tourah** for their respective roles emceeing and announcing our graduates’ names as well as the **Group Practice Directors** and the **Program Directors**, who hooded our graduates during the Commencement ceremony. I’d also like to thank the **faculty members** who attended; it means more than you know when the students see their instructors and mentors there to support them. Finally, I’d like to thank the **Office of Development and External Relations** (especially **Kim Eeles**), who really spearhead this effort every year, as well as **Christy Wade** from the **Office of Admissions** and our **Student Ambassadors** for their assistance. Without our staff and student support every year, we wouldn’t be able to pull this event off successfully. Finally, congratulations to our graduates. We are so proud of you all. Fight on!





Speaking of our graduates, we hosted two awards ceremonies before Commencement for our outgoing class. First, Ostrow's chapter of Omicron Kappa Upsilon (**OKU Zeta Chapter**) recently held its annual OKU Dental Honor Society Convocation, during which the national dental honor society chapter welcomed more than 20 new OKU inductees from the Class of 2026 and celebrated the year's OKU scholarship recipients. Then, on the Thursday afternoon before Commencement, we held the Senior Awards Ceremony at the Sheraton Grand Los Angeles, where we bestowed more than 50 awards to the class's best and brightest and held a ceremony for the **Health Professions Scholarship Program participants** whose next chapter involves military service. We are all so proud of the awardees from both ceremonies as well as the OKU inductees. Please join me in congratulating these talented students and residents!

Earlier this week, we held our annual Faculty Appreciation Awards and Dinner, an event to show our **full-time, part-time** and **volunteer faculty members** our deep gratitude for all that they do for the school, for our students and patients. We also present "Years of Service" awards to those hitting a milestone. This year's biggest prize — for 50 years of service — went to both **Terry Loeffler** (who was unable to attend) and **Diane Melrose** (pictured below). It was a truly special evening, and I enjoyed getting to spend some quality time with our faculty members. I'd like to thank many individuals and departments for their assistance with the event. Thank you to the **Office of Development and External Relations** (especially **Christie D.C. Van Paepeghem** and **Vianca Marquez**) and the **Office of Human Resources** for their assistance in conceiving, organizing and facilitating the evening. I'd also like to thank **Mahvash Navazesh** for serving as our emcee for the evening, **Jill Yoshimi** for helping distribute the awards as well as outgoing Dental Faculty Assembly President **Amirali Mirenayat** and current Chair of the Part Time Faculty Assembly **Azadeh Ahmadi** for delivering remarks. Congratulations to all our "Years of Service" awardees and, once again, thank you to all our faculty members who give so selflessly to our profession and its future.



Celebrating a Golden Anniversary

Professor **Diane Melrose** (and **Terry Loeffler**, not pictured here) reached their golden anniversaries this year, celebrating 50 years at Ostrow. Congratulations to Diane, Terry and all of our "Years of Service" awardees. We thank you for your commitment to our students and to the profession at large!

We were very excited to announce that, effective July 1, 2026, **Sean Mong** will be joining the Trojan Dental Family to serve as our new Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs. Sean was selected following an extensive national search that included many highly qualified and respected candidates. Mong joins us from the UCLA School of Dentistry, where he has served as the Clinic Director for the Dental Student General Clinic since 2021. Executive Board Member of the Faculty Group

Student General Clinic since 2021, Executive Board member of the Faculty Group Practice since 2023 and Section Chair of Interdisciplinary Dentistry since 2020. Before his time at UCLA, he held leadership positions at UC-San Francisco, including Vice Divisional Chair of General Clinical Dentistry and Clinic Director of the UCSF Dental Center. His work spans clinic operations, informatics integration, quality and accreditation and inclusive mentoring. He has helped lead financial and operational initiatives that improved clinical performance while supporting student success and equitable patient care. I would like to thank our search committee — co-chaired by **Mahvash Navazesh** and **Casey Chen** and comprised of faculty members **Yaara Berdan**, **George Cho**, **Lisa Popkoff**, **Piedad Suarez Durall** and **Marlene Talley** as well as staff members **Dan Cheock** and **Jill Yoshimi** — for their hard work and unconditional support throughout this search process. I would also like to thank both **James Tom** and **Sillas Duarte** for their time in the interim position as we searched for the best candidate. Please join me in welcoming Sean Mong to the community when he arrives in July!

And finally, we recently received word that Professor **Dechen Lin** has received another R01 research project grant for “Defining MLL3 as an Early Driver of Oral Neoplastic Evolution and Anti-Tumor Immune Regulator Using Human Organoids and Murine Models.” It is the third R01 Dechen has earned since coming to USC — a feat made even more impressive when you take into consideration how competitive the funding environment is currently. We will have more information about the award soon. Please join me in congratulating Dechen on this award.

With that, I wish you a happy, relaxing Memorial Day weekend!

Fight On!

Yang 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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