



# Diversity Advisory Council

## Outstanding UMB Student Award-SNDA

### Outstanding UMB Student Award

#### Student National Dental Association



Accolades are nothing new for the Student National Dental Association (SNDA) at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry (UMSOD).

For seven years in a row, the group has won first or second place in the national SNDA Chapter of the Year competition for its efforts to build minority representation in the oral health professions and spread inclusiveness at UMSOD and throughout the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) and its surrounding community.

In 2020, SNDA won the Colgate Bright Smiles, Bright Futures Award, a national honor that highlights outstanding contributions to dentistry and community outreach. And now, the group has won a 2021 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Diversity Recognition Award, which honors the individual or group achievement of UMB faculty, staff, or students whose work epitomizes the ideals, life, and work of the late civil rights leader.

“SNDA members take a multifaceted approach by targeting diversity and thereby expanding inclusiveness in order to build a pipeline of future oral health professionals who are representative of the populations they serve,” Valli Meeks, DDS, MS, RDH, clinical professor in the Department of Oncology and Diagnostic Sciences at UMSOD, wrote in nominating SNDA for the UMB award.

“They support and mentor their fellow dental students as well as promote awareness for oral health care through their participation in community health fairs. I am particularly impressed with their participation in programs that focus on building health literacy and encouraging youths to aspire to careers in dentistry.

“Through their efforts on and off campus, SNDA members offer inspiration and pay tribute to Dr. King’s ideals of equality, justice, and opportunity for all people.”

How does SNDA make an impact? Let’s take a look:

Through the 4-year-old Generation NeXT program, SNDA members mentor high school students who are training to be dental assistants at Baltimore’s Vivien Thomas Medical Arts Academy and educate them about other oral health professions.

SNDA members participate in Impressions Day, an annual event where pre-dental undergraduates are introduced to dental professions and learn about the UMSOD experience and application process. An in-person Impressions Day was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the chapter held a virtual event that drew 300 attendees.

SNDA annually participates in health fairs and festivals, winter coat or toy drives, and a walk to raise oral cancer awareness. In the 2019-20 academic year, SNDA members volunteered at nine fairs or festivals, providing more than 330 free oral health screenings to Baltimore residents.

Through UMB’s Project Jump Start and the Baltimore nonprofit Moveable Feast, SNDA prepares lunch and dinner for the poor or people battling serious disease or illness. It also organizes Lessons in a Lunch Box, where SNDA volunteers visit elementary schools, teach students about oral health, and hand out toothbrushes and dental floss.

“The members of SNDA are highly visible and inspirational ambassadors for UMB throughout the community,” Meeks wrote. “For more than four decades, SNDA has developed a true path toward greater justice and diversity. By inspiring minority youths who aspire to be dental health professionals, SNDA is working toward building a more just and inclusive future for all members of the community.”

Andrea Morgan, DDS, MS, clinical assistant professor in UMSOD’s Division of Operative Dentistry and director of student advocacy and cultural affairs, was thrilled about SNDA’s latest award.

“I was elated when I heard that SNDA would be recognized for its extraordinary accomplishments,” said Morgan, a faculty advisor to the chapter. “The SNDA members’ commitment to service is consistent and strong. And during these unprecedented times, they continue to do great work. They are knitting scarves, writing out Valentine’s cards for kids with disabilities, and holding virtual check-in sessions for each other.

“This is a diverse group of students who believe in the core principles of the organization. And one of those principles is to help educate the community on the importance of oral health. Their work in mentoring high school students, pre-dental groups at local colleges, and students in Generation NeXT is a labor of love. It warms my heart to see young health care providers realizing the importance of community service and engagement.”

— Lou Cortina

*(In photo: Members of the 2019-20 SNDA executive board)*

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