

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Outstanding UMB Student Award



The Student National Dental Association (SNDA) chapter at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry (UMSOD) has built an impressive list of achievements in recent years, earning recognition for its efforts to promote oral health care in underserved communities and advocate for the dental profession as a career path for minorities.

The chapter has earned first or second place in the national SNDA's Chapter of the Year competition (large chapter category) for 10 years in a row; won the National Dental Association's Legacy of Excellence Award, which recognizes a group's overall and continuing achievements; and has twice received the Colgate Bright Smiles, Bright Futures Award, which honors outstanding contributions to dentistry and community outreach.

Now it can boast of winning the 2024 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) Diversity Recognition Award for outstanding student group from the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), marking the second time in four years it has been honored with the award.

"I am beyond ecstatic to learn that all the work and service that our organization does is being recognized by UMB," said Chimezie Osondu, a fourth-year UMSOD student who was the 2022-23 SNDA chapter president. "I appreciate the fact that the University recognizes the impact that our work in the community truly has."

Taylor Bordes, a third-year UMSOD student who is the 2023-24 SNDA chapter president, said, "I am honored to be a part of such a commendable accomplishment. It is reassuring to know that our chapter is moving in the right direction. I hope the

award will provide momentum for our future within the school and surrounding community."

UMSOD's chapter is dedicated to fulfilling the national SNDA's mission to create opportunities for its members to develop strong alliances and sense of community while aiding in the advancement of minority students in the field of dentistry. In fall 2023, 56 percent of the school's enrolled students identified as Asian, Black, Hispanic, or multiple races.

"SNDA does a phenomenal job creating a safe space for an abundance of minority students within the dental field and nationwide," Bordes said. "It has generated an opportunity for so many to make professional connections and serve those around us. I love being able to watch as our family of students lean on each other while also being a resource and inspiration for those in the community."

The SNDA chapter encourages its 90 members to assume leadership positions, participate in community service, mentor one another, and take continuing education courses. It also organizes lab help sessions and study halls for its members.

Among its community outreach efforts, the group hosts minority undergraduates to inform them about the dental school experience in the Impressions Day program, participates in donation drives for food banks and other organizations that help the underserved in Baltimore, and tutors city students in grades 6 to 12 through the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy-led A Bridge to Academic Excellence program.

In another initiative called Lessons in a Lunch Box, SNDA members go to elementary schools in Baltimore to teach children about the importance of oral health care. The program encourages good oral care habits at a young age, which can help reduce easily avoidable health complications as children grow.

“Our chapter’s long history within the School of Dentistry has made a tremendous impact on the diversification of our school,” said third-year student Daryan Fisher, who nominated SNDA for the Diversity Recognition Award. “SNDA has created a safe space within the dental school for students to mentor each other, create community, and give back to the greater Baltimore community.

“This SNDA chapter has been a staple for diversity and inclusiveness for quite some time at UMB,” Fisher added. “Being an organization designated for minorities and allies of minorities, SNDA is always looking for unique ways to serve the community. This chapter is unique in its efforts because we have many different mentorship programs specifically designed to shape and guide the minds of youths locally and nationally.”

One such program is Generation NeXT, where dental students provide virtual monthly mentorship to high school students at Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy in Baltimore and work to inspire younger students to pursue Doctor of Dental Surgery or dental hygiene degrees. SNDA conducts a similar mentorship program with students at Morgan State University to provide aid and guidance to those interested in applying to dental school.

“What I find most rewarding about SNDA’s work is that we are able to make an impact both on campus and in the Baltimore community,” Osondu said. “From Impressions Day to oral health fairs to tutoring high school students, it’s apparent that our service is appreciated. It’s an honor to give back to the community in any way that we can as future health care professionals.”

Andrea Morgan, DDS, MS, clinical assistant professor and director of student advocacy and cultural affairs at UMSOD, has been the group’s faculty advisor since 2011. She appreciates that the SNDA students enjoy giving back to the community.

“My favorite quote by Dr. King is ‘Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?’ ” Morgan said. “I am so proud of each and every one of our members that goes above their responsibilities as a full-time dental student to help others in SNDA and in the community that surrounds the UMB campus.”

UMSOD Dean Mark A. Reynolds, DDS, PhD, MA, is impressed by SNDA, too.

“I am extremely proud of our SNDA chapter and its remarkable tradition of excellence,” Reynolds said. “This outstanding group of professional students finds new and innovative ways to have a meaningful impact on our community and advance our profession. In addition to successfully completing rigorous academic and clinical care workloads, SNDA members serve the community, mentor and encourage youths in the Baltimore area to pursue careers in oral health, and offer leadership and support to each other.”

— Lou Cortina