LSU Health NEW ORLEANS
School of Dentistry

ALUMNI & COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Newsletter



FALL 2026

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This newsletter is published by the LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry's Office of Alumni & Community Affairs. If you have an event or article you'd like to publish, please email **ds-alumni@lsuhsc.edu** for more information.

A Message from the Dean



Dr. John Gallo

As we conclude another productive year, I am proud to reflect on the accomplishments highlighted in this issue of our newsletter. From honoring students during our White Coat Ceremony to celebrating the successes of our alumni, faculty, students, residents, and staff, LSUSD continues to advance its mission of excellence in education, patient care, research, and community service. The stories featured in these pages illustrate the dedication, compassion, and innovation that define our institution and the people who make it exceptional.

This fall has also showcased the many ways our School remains engaged with the communities we serve. Whether providing care and oral health education through TeamSmile, advancing scientific discovery through groundbreaking research, or preparing the next generation of oral health professionals through our academic and advanced education programs, our faculty, students, and residents continue to positively impact throughout Louisiana and beyond. Their commitment to service and lifelong learning reflects the values that have guided LSUSD for decades.

I am also pleased to share that our campus renovation project continues to proceed according to plan and on schedule, bringing us closer to an enhanced learning, clinical, and research environment for future generations.

We remain deeply grateful for the support of our alumni, partners, donors, and friends whose engagement helps us build on our legacy of excellence. Thank you for your continued connection to LSUSD and for all you do to advance the profession and improve oral health in our communities.

John R. Gallo, III, DDS, MS

John R. Gallo, III, DDS, MS

Dean, LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry

Students Receive White Coats, Affirm Commitment to Professionalism

The 2026 LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry White Coat Ceremony brought together students, faculty, family, and friends on September 26 at the Lions Eye Center on the LSU Health New Orleans Downtown Campus to celebrate a significant milestone in the professional journeys of LSUSD's students.

During the ceremony, students received their white coats and formally pledged their commitment to the responsibilities, ethics, and values that define the oral health professions.



Dental Laboratory Technology Class of 2027

In his opening remarks, Dr. John Gallo, III, Professor and Dean, reflected on the profound responsibility and empathy that comes with joining the oral health profession. "This ceremony signifies the day that these students take on the infinitely important responsibility of the health and well-being of the patients they will treat, beginning now until the very last day of practice," Gallo said.

The ceremony's keynote speaker, Dr. Conrad Pettit McVea, III, FAGD, MAGD, a 1987 LSUSD graduate, Past President of the American Board of Dental Examiners (ADEX), and current Chair of the ADEX Council on Examinations, encouraged students to recognize the unique opportunities before them and embrace the challenges ahead. He praised the School, its facilities, and its leadership while reminding students that the white coat is ultimately about character.

"Today you put on a white coat, but what matters most is not what you wear. It's who you become while wearing it. It is not a symbol of what you have achieved. It is a symbol of the trust you are about to earn," McVea said. "People will sit in your chair, or trust their case in your hands in the lab, at their most vulnerable, in pain, afraid, sometimes ashamed. What you do with that trust matters more than any exam score."



Dr. Conrad Pettit McVea, III, FAGD, MAGD, gives the keynote address at the 2026 White Coat Ceremony.

Drawing from nearly four decades in practice, Dr. McVea stressed the importance of teamwork across all oral health professions. "Whether you're headed toward the operatory chairside, the hygiene bay, or the lab bench, you are part of one team with one mission, giving people back their comfort, their function, and their confidence," he explained.

He encouraged students to value one another's contributions and pursue excellence through service, compassion, and integrity. "Technical skill is the price of admission. Character is what builds a career and a reputation that outlasts you," he said.



Dental Hygiene Class of 2027

Students crossed the stage to receive their white coats from faculty members they personally selected to present them.

"White Coat" continued on page 4

"White Coat" continued from page 3

Dental Laboratory Technology (DLT) students were coated by Julio Zavala, Program Director and Associate Professor.



Internationally Educated Dentists Class of 2028

Dental Hygiene (DH) students were announced by Tricia Barker, Program Director and Associate Professor and coated by Dr. Diedra Brewer-Hohensee, Associate Professor and Angie Marshall-Reech, Assistant Professor.

Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) students and Internationally Educated Dentists were announced by Dr. A.C. Liles, III, Associate Professor and Assistant Dean of Clinical Affairs and coated by Dr. Donald Bennett, Assistant Professor; Dr. Luis Infante, Associate Professor; and Dr. Molly Rosebush, Associate Professor.



Internationally Educated Dentists Class of 2029

Following the coating, students recited the Professional Oath, pledging to uphold personal and professional integrity, practice compassionate care, pursue lifelong learning, and earn the trust of their patients and colleagues.

Dr. Adriana Wilson, Associate Professor and Assistant Dean of Admissions and Student Affairs announced the recitation of the Class Honor Code, written by the students receiving their white coats. Student leaders Kori Brown Alexander (DLT), Claire Ancelet (DH), and Rebecca Simar (DDS) led their classmates in affirming the core values of integrity, excellence, innovation, devotion, and empathy, while emphasizing ethical standards and patient-centered care.



Doctor of Dental Surgery Class of 2029

In her closing remarks, Dr. Sandra Andrieu, Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, reminded students that the white coat is only a symbol and that true professionalism is defined by the character of the individual wearing it. "What makes a person a true professional is most definitely not the white coat. Though it certainly includes the knowledge and skills mastered, what distinguishes a person as a professional is the character and integrity of the person wearing that coat," she explained.

As students embark on the next phase of their education and clinical training, the White Coat Ceremony serves as a powerful reminder of the trust placed in them and the commitment required to provide compassionate, patient-centered care.

LSUSD especially thanks Heather Allen, RDH, BSDH, MSHCM, Director of Student Affairs and Associate Professor of Clinical Comprehensive Dentistry, and her team for their assistance with planning the ceremony.

Watch the recorded 2026 LSUSD White Coat Ceremony. ■

DEPARTMENT HIGHLIGHTS: Oral and Craniofacial Biology

About the Department

The Department of Oral and Craniofacial Biology is LSUSD's research enterprise, housing all basic science faculty members and research laboratories. The Department supports LSUSD's Advanced Education programs and the research activities of faculty, students, and residents. The Department's faculty members serve as mentors for residents and undergraduate dental students in their research projects. The Department also provides funding for the supplies of these research projects.

Zhang Rejoins LSUSD Faculty



Dr. Jian-Feng Zhang

LSUSD welcomed back Dr. Jian-Feng Zhang, PhD, Associate Professor for Research, on September 1. Dr. Zhang was a Research Associate in the Department of Oral and Craniofacial Biology from 2008 to 2014. He then worked for 12 years as a senior R&D scientist at Evonic Coporation in Birmingham, Ala. Dr. Zhang has extensive research experience in polymeric materials, biomaterials, dental materials, and medical devices. He has published 36 papers, four book chapters, and 53 meeting abstracts. He also has 11 patents or patent applications.

Two Key Research Projects Generate Innovations in Oral Health

Research Leads to Tissue Engineering Breakthroughs and Patent Application

Dr. Xiaoming Xu, Professor and Interim Department Head of Oral and Craniofacial Biology, recently completed a research project funded through the LSU Health Center-Wide Intramural Research Program (HS-WIRP). The grant, titled "Novel Antimicrobial Scaffolds by Reactive Electrowriting for Bone and Periodontal Tissue Engineering," was awarded to Dr. Xu and co-principal investigator Dr. Vinod Dasa of the Department of Orthopedics and provided $180,000 in funding from 2023 to 2026.

The pilot project explored the use of reactive electrowriting (REW), an emerging manufacturing technology, to create three-dimensional functional microporous scaffolds for tissue engineering applications. The research sought to demonstrate the feasibility of REW for producing novel hydrophilic and antimicrobial scaffold materials that could enhance tissue repair while helping control infection.

The project produced significant scholarly outcomes, including two manuscripts, three presentations at national and international scientific meetings, and a provisional patent application filed with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Dr. Xu shared the project's findings as a keynote presenter during LSUSD Research Day on June 5.

Understanding Oral Biofilms to Advance Disease Prevention and Treatment

Dr. Zezhang Tom Wen, the William and Sarah Pelon Professor in LSUSD's Department of Oral and Craniofacial Biology, leads a research program focused on understanding the complex communities of bacteria that live in the mouth. These microbial communities, commonly known as dental plaque, play an important role in maintaining oral health when they remain in balance. Dr. Wen's work explores how changes in the oral environment can disrupt that balance, leading to tooth decay, gum disease, and other oral health conditions. By studying how these microorganisms interact with one another and their environment, his laboratory aims to identify new ways to prevent disease and promote oral health.

"Department Highlights" continued on page 6

"Department Highlights" continued from page 5

A major focus of Dr. Wen's National Institutes of Health (NIH)-supported research is *Streptococcus mutans*, a key bacterium involved in dental caries. His team is investigating BrpA, a protein that helps the bacterium survive, form biofilms, and contribute to cavity development. Working with collaborators at Oregon Health & Science University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the laboratory is exploring ways to disrupt these disease-causing processes through targeted therapies. The lab is also examining the role of *Lactobacillus* bacteria in cavity formation and developing high-performance antimicrobial dental materials.

Through these efforts, Dr. Wen and his colleagues are helping advance a deeper understanding of oral microbial ecology and translating scientific discoveries into innovative approaches for preventing biofilm-associated oral diseases. Their work has the potential to improve oral health by supporting healthier microbial communities and developing new strategies to combat tooth decay and other common dental diseases.

Students and Faculty Represent LSUSD at IADR Annual Meeting

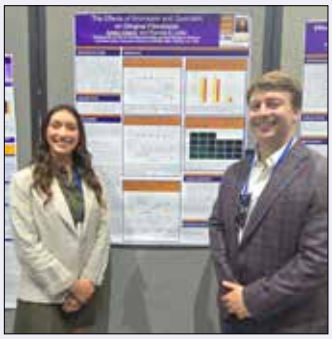
LSUSD was well represented at the 2026 International Association for Dental Research (IADR) Annual Meeting in San Diego, Calif. on March 25-28. Twenty-two presentations were co-authored and presented by our students, residents, postdocs, and faculty. Three other presentations were co-authored by our faculty members and presented by other institutions.



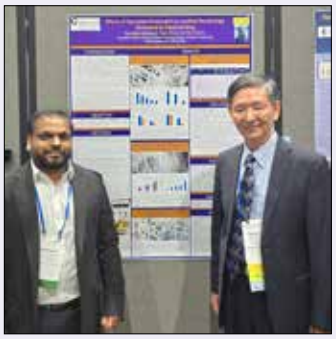
Large delegation represents LSUSD at the 2026 IADR Annual Meeting.

LSUSD's Oral and Craniofacial Biology faculty co-authored 20 of the 25 presentations: Dr. Xiaoming Xu (nine), Dr. Zezhang Tom Wen (four), Dr. Thomas Lallier (six), and Dr. Paul Fidel (one). These results reflected the important role the department plays in LSUSD's scholastic and research activities.

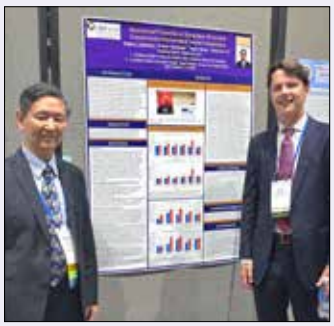
Shown below are some of the poster presentations. ■



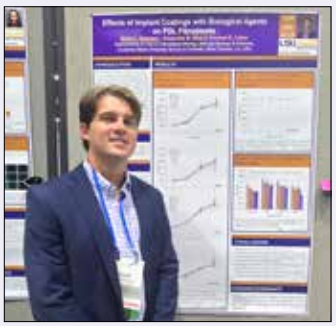
Dental students (from left) Ashley Gawey (Class of 2026) and Andrew Gottsegen (Class of 2027).



Postdoc Fellow Dr. Raj Kumer Sadasivam (left) and Dr. Xiaoming Xu.



Dr. Xiaoming Xu (left) and dental student Kade Edenfield (Class of 2027).



Dental student Eliott Reimann (Class of 2027).

Alumni Day 2026 Brings Colleagues and Classmates Together

The LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry welcomed alumni, faculty, staff, students, residents, and friends back to campus for Alumni Day 2026 in October. The event combined celebration and continuing education, allowing alumni to reconnect with classmates and colleagues while learning from innovators in dentistry.

The festivities began on October 22 with the Alumni Welcome Reception and Awards Ceremony, where attendees gathered to recognize outstanding alumni whose careers have advanced the profession and strengthened the School. On October 23, participants attended a full day of continuing education programming featuring two internationally respected speakers.



A recognized leader in dental sleep medicine, Dr. Steve Carstensen (left) has spent more than 25 years advancing the treatment of sleep-related breathing disorders. He presented "The Primary Care Dentist's Role in Sleep and Breathing," which explored the dentist's role in identifying and managing sleep-disordered breathing, and "Early Proactive Intervention Sets Up Optimal Breathing for Life," which emphasized the benefits of early, airway-focused treatment approaches.

The afternoon sessions featured Dr. Aaron (Seok Hwan) Cho (right), a board-certified prosthodontist, educator, and expert in digital dentistry and implant prosthodontics. His presentation, "4 Strategies for CAD/CAM Fundamentals for Digital Chairside Workflow: Clinical Strategy for Digital Dentistry," provided practical guidance for integrating digital workflows into clinical practice. He also presented "D.E.A.R. Full-Arch Digital Impression: Digital Engineering-Analog Reflection for Predictable Implant Prosthodontics," highlighting advanced digital impression techniques that improve efficiency and treatment predictability.



LSUSD extends its sincere appreciation to Drs. Carstensen and Cho for sharing their expertise, to the sponsors—ADS Lovelace and Associates, Inc., Brasseler USA, Campus Federal Credit Union, Louisiana Dental Association, LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry Alumni Association, LSU Health Foundation, LumaDent, The Olivier Group, PDS Health, Peachtree Dental, Shofu Dental, and United Concordia Dental—for their generous support, and to all whose efforts made Alumni Day 2026 a success. We thank all who attended and look forward to welcoming our alumni community back to campus for Alumni Day 2027.

2026 Alumni Association Award Recipients

A highlight of Alumni Day 2026 was the presentation of the LSUSD Alumni Association's highest honors during the Welcome Reception on October 22. This year's recipients, Drs. John Gallo and Gerald Evans, were recognized for their exceptional achievements, leadership, service, and longstanding commitment to the School and the profession.



From left, Dr. Gerald Evans; Dr. Gary DeWitt, LSUSD Alumni Association President; and Dr. John Gallo.

Distinguished Alumnus Award: Dr. John R. Gallo, III

The 2026 Distinguished Alumnus Award was presented to Dr. John R. Gallo, III, Dean of the LSUSD and a 1992 graduate of the School. Since returning to his alma mater as a faculty member in 1996, Dr. Gallo has dedicated his career to advancing dental education, clinical excellence, research, and institutional leadership. Over three decades of service, he has held numerous leadership roles, including Director of Clinical Education, Assistant Dean of Clinical Affairs, Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs, and, since 2024, Dean of the School of Dentistry. An accomplished educator, researcher, and advocate for the profession, Dr. Gallo's contributions have helped shape generations of dental students while strengthening the School's reputation for excellence.

Alumnus of the Year Award: Dr. Gerald H. Evans

The 2026 Alumnus of the Year Award was presented to Dr. Gerald H. Evans, Professor and Department Head of Periodontics. A 1979 LSUSD graduate who completed his periodontics residency in 1982, Dr. Evans has devoted more than 40 years to the institution as an educator, clinician, scholar, mentor, and leader. A Diplomate of the American Board of Periodontology, he has made significant contributions to education, research, patient care, and faculty leadership while mentoring generations of students and residents. His distinguished career, unwavering dedication to LSUSD, and commitment to service both within and beyond the School embody the spirit of the Alumnus of the Year honor. ■

TeamSmile Brings Healthy Smiles to New Orleans-Area Children



Dental hygiene students provided preventive services.

On October 29, the LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry (LSUSD) partnered with TeamSmile and the New Orleans Saints to provide free dental care and oral health education to children at Club XLIV in New Orleans.

The event brought together second-year LSUSD dental hygiene students (New Orleans and Alexandria campuses), pediatric dentistry residents, faculty, and staff who volunteered their time and expertise to deliver oral health services in a fun, welcoming environment. Throughout the day, children received dental screenings, preventive services, oral health education, and treatment designed to support their long-term oral health and overall well-being.



LSU of Alexandria dental hygiene students participated in TeamSmile.

TeamSmile is a national nonprofit organization that connects children with dental professionals to help remove barriers that can prevent families from receiving regular dental care. Through the collaboration of volunteers and community partners, children were able to receive important oral health services at no cost while learning healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

For LSUSD participants, the event provided a valuable opportunity to serve local families while gaining hands-on experience caring for pediatric patients. Dental hygiene students and pediatric dentistry residents worked alongside faculty to ensure each child received compassionate, high-quality care.



LSUSD pediatric dentistry residents participated in TeamSmile.

In addition to dental services, TeamSmile created an exciting and positive experience for children and their families, helping make visits to the dentist less intimidating while reinforcing the importance of maintaining good oral health.

LSUSD is grateful to TeamSmile, the New Orleans Saints, and the many volunteers and community partners who made this year's event possible. Through initiatives like TeamSmile, the School continues its commitment to improving oral health and expanding opportunities for children and families to receive essential dental care throughout the region. ■



Residents provided fillings and other procedures.



Dr. A.C. Liles, Assistant Dean of Clinical Affairs (left) and Dr. John Gallo, Dean (right) with dental hygiene students, faculty, and staff.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: Dental Hygiene

Student Creativity Showcased during National Dental Hygiene Month

As part of a long-standing tradition coordinated by the LSUSD's Student American Dental Hygienists' Association (SADHA) chapter, students design and wear commemorative T-shirts in recognition of National Dental Hygiene Month. This year's design, created by second-year dental hygiene student Claire Ancelet, features artwork inspired by a French Quarter building, celebrating Louisiana's rich architectural heritage and cultural identity.





Claire Ancelet models her 2026 National Dental Hygiene Month T-shirt design.

Faculty Achieve Professional Fellow Status in ADHA

Congratulations to **Angie Marshall-Reech**, RDH, BSDH, MEd, CH-ONC, Assistant Professor of Clinical Comprehensive Dentistry, and **Ashley D. Millon**, RDH, MSHCM, Assistant Professor of Clinical Comprehensive Dentistry, who were named Professional Fellows of the American Dental Hygienists' Association (FADHA), a distinction recognizing exceptional achievement, continued professional development, and meaningful contributions to the dental hygiene profession.

Two New Faculty Members Join LSUSD



LSUSD's Program in Dental Hygiene welcomed two new faculty members this fall. Pictured from left are **Bailey Granier**, RDH, Clinical Instructor of Comprehensive Dentistry, DH '18, and **Holland Smith**, RDH, Instructor of Clinical Comprehensive Dentistry. We look forward to the valuable contributions they will make to the education and training of our students. ■

Faculty Appearance on Local TV News



Catrina Lanza, MHA, BSDH, RDH, Assistant Professor of Clinical Comprehensive Dentistry appeared on Fox 8 News on October 21 to discuss National Dental Hygiene Month and share expert tips for maintaining good oral health. Watch the video replay.

Activities Held in Celebration of National Dental Hygiene Month

- LSUSD and LSU of Alexandria (LSUA) dental hygiene students participated in a series of Lunch & Learn workshops sponsored by Heartland Dental and PDS Health along with after hours activities such as golfing.

"Dental Hygiene" continued on page 10

"Dental Hygiene" continued from page 9

- The LSUSD second-year dental hygiene class hosted a give back event at Pandora's Snowballs in Mid-City New Orleans, where proceeds benefited SADHA.



Students enjoy snowballs at the SADHA fundraiser.

- Dental hygiene faculty, staff, and students were treated to lunch at LSUSD and LSUA in recognition of their vital role in improving oral health and changing lives.



LSUSD Dental Hygiene Lunch



LSUA Dental Hygiene Lunch

- Dental hygiene students and faculty held their annual "mascot" hide and seek contests where faculty hide the program's mascots for students to find and win prizes. Each week in October, LSUSD students are challenged to find Nevi, an adorable stuffed scaler, while LSUA students must locate a cute oversized dental mouth mirror. Congratulations to this year's winners! ■

LSUSD CONTEST WINNERS



Rikilyn Tassin (second-year)



Genesis Lopez (second-year)



Samiya Ford (first-year)



Alyssa Saavedra (first-year)



Mary Habeb (first-year)

LSUA CONTEST WINNERS



Harlie Leger (first-year)



Ryleigh Circello (first-year)



Amber Christie (second-year)



Jenna Guidry (first-year)

ADVANCED EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS: Applicant Rates Reveal Continued Interest in Programs

Strong Interest in LSUSD Advanced Dental Education Programs Reflects National Trends

LSUSD's advanced dental education programs continue to attract strong interest from prospective residents, with several programs reaching or approaching record application levels in 2026.

Across the School's programs, the latest application data reflect both the continued national demand for postgraduate dental education and the strength of LSUSD's programs as destinations for advanced training. Nationally, interest in advanced dental education has grown substantially over the past decade. According to the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), the number of applications to U.S. accredited advanced dental education programs increased 18% between 2018–19 and 2023–24, with much of that growth driven by endodontics and orthodontics.

Here at LSUSD, Endodontics recorded a program-high 300 applications in 2026, more than doubling the 137 applications received in 2019—a 119% increase in seven years. The program has experienced year-over-year growth throughout that period.

Orthodontics has demonstrated similarly strong long-term growth. LSUSD received 249 applications in 2026, compared with 144 in 2017—a 73% increase. That growth has occurred alongside a significant national increase in orthodontic applications, which rose from 487 in 2017 to 722 in 2025. LSUSD's applicant growth has outpaced the national increase over the comparable period.

The School's Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery programs have also seen notable interest. Applications to the four-year program increased from 89 in 2024 to 145 in 2026, a 63% increase in just two years. The six-year program received 90 applications in 2026, continuing a longstanding pattern of strong interest.

Other LSUSD programs are attracting substantial applicant pools as well. Periodontics received 102 applications in 2026, surpassing 100 applicants for the second time in the period represented by the School's data. Pediatric Dentistry received 76 applications, while Prosthodontics and Orofacial Pain each received 52.

The trends at LSUSD mirror a broader national interest in postgraduate education. ADEA's 2025 survey of U.S. dental school seniors found that 63% of respondents continuing their education had applied to a recognized dental specialty, up from 45% in 2021. Pediatric dentistry, orthodontics, and oral and maxillofacial surgery were among the specialty programs drawing the greatest interest.

Together, these numbers tell a compelling story: as more dental graduates pursue advanced training, LSUSD continues to be a strong choice for the next stage of their professional education.

LSUSD Advanced Education Program Applications by the Numbers | 2026

ENDODONTICS	300 (+119% since 2019)
ORTHODONTICS	249 (+73% since 2017)
OMFS (4-YEAR)	145 (+63% since 2024)
PERIODONTICS	102
OMFS (6-YEAR)	90
PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY	76
PROSTHODONTICS	52
OROFACIAL PAIN	52

"Advanced Ed" continued on page 12

"Advanced Ed" continued from page 11

Residents Present Case Studies at Fall Grand Rounds

Congratulations to the residents who participated in the Fall 2026 Grand Rounds on September 17, shown from left: (front row) Drs. Paul Savage, Manqi Wang, Masyn Cameron, and Rachel Healy, Endodontics; Dr. Andy Nguyen, Pediatric Dentistry; Dr. Sarah Dawson, Orthodontics; Dr. Mahya Sabour, Periodontics; Drs. Maria Rodriguez and Allen Revoredo, General Practice Residency; Dr. Mohamed Elshengab, Prosthodontics; Drs. Majdlia Aleksan and Swathi Mutteni, Orofacial Pain; (back row) Dr. Ganesh Shivaram, Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery; Dr. Landon Boeneke, Endodontics; Dr. Raymond Guan, Pediatric Dentistry; Dr. Olivia Wilks, Orthodontics; and Drs. Ryan Higgins, and Nicholas Lobo, Periodontics. ■



American Academy of Periodontology Installs Dr. Kristi M. Soileau as President



Dr. Kristi M. Soileau

The American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) has installed Kristi M. Soileau, DDS, MEd, MSHCE, as its president for the 2026–2027 term. Dr. Soileau began her term on Oct. 31, 2026, at the AAP Annual Meeting in Seattle.

A board-certified periodontist in private practice in New Orleans, Dr. Soileau brings extensive experience in clinical care, dental education, professional leadership, and health care ethics to her presidency.

Dr. Soileau earned her dental degree from the LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry in 1985, followed by certificates in Advanced Education in General Dentistry in 1986 and Periodontics in 1988. She also earned a Master of Education from the University of New Orleans in 1987 and a Master of Science in Health Care Ethics from Creighton University in 2017.

"Giving back has long been central to my work, from volunteering as a dentist for Notre Dame Hospice to spending decades in nursing home dentistry," Dr. Soileau states. "Throughout my career, I have encouraged colleagues to bring that commitment to their own communities. As AAP president, I plan to bring that same dedication and energy to my term."

Dr. Soileau is a gratis part-time Clinical Associate Professor in the Periodontal Postdoctoral Program at the LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry, which named her Alumna of the Year in 2016. Her leadership roles have included president of the New Orleans Dental Association, the Louisiana Dental Association, and the LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry Alumni Association Board of Directors. She has served as Editor for the New Orleans Dental Association since 1988 and is past Chair-Elect of the LSU Health Foundation Board. She previously served as president of the Southwest Society of Periodontists.

Dr. Soileau's national professional service includes the American Dental Association's Council on Ethics, Bylaws, and Judicial Affairs; the Council on Dental Education and Licensure; and over a decade on the ADA House of Delegates. She is the Louisiana Deputy Regent of the International College of Dentists, a member of the Pierre Fauchard Academy, and a past Area 6 Regent for the American College of Dentists. ■



Meet Louisiana's Future Care Team

LSU Health FOUNDATION NEW ORLEANS

Every year, **LSU Health New Orleans** graduates join hospitals, clinics, research centers, and communities across our state and beyond.

Behind every future caregiver is a network of support. Through the generosity of donors, **LSU Health Foundation** invests in the education, research, and innovation that advances healthcare for all.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

tinyurl.com/bab4bpxx

Dentistry and Dental Hygiene Students "Escape" into Midterm Exam Readiness

In the fall semester Local Anesthesia and Medical Emergencies course, second-year dental hygiene and dental students learn how to safely and effectively administer anesthesia to keep patients comfortable during procedures such as periodontal therapy and restorative treatment. This portion of the course is taught by Kellie Bourgeois, RDH, MEd, Clinical Assistant Professor.

To help the students prepare for their midterm exam in a creative way, Bourgeois administers a quiz designed as an escape room challenge. Organized into small groups, students work together to solve clues and answer course-related questions in order to advance through the quiz and ultimately "escape" by completing it.

The activity offers a fun and energizing way to review course material while reinforcing the importance of teamwork and collaboration, skills that are essential in real-world healthcare settings.

Congratulations to this year's winning team members for successfully escaping and demonstrating their knowledge, critical thinking, and teamwork under pressure! ■



Escape room winners from left are second-year dental students Isabella Morel and Brooke Whelan, and second-year dental hygiene students Rachel Rumney and Emily Taylor.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:
Dental Laboratory Technology



Dr. Louis Webre

From Dental Lab Technician to Dentist: A Journey in the Making

by Dr. Louis Webre, DLT '11, DDS '21, GPR '22

My ultimate goal was always to become a dentist. I just didn't take the most traditional route to get there.

My journey into dentistry actually started in a place you might not expect—with the movie business.

Before my career in dentistry, I worked in the film industry in New Orleans. At the time, dentistry was more of a dream than really on my radar. Then, while attending the University of New Orleans, I was partnered with a classmate who casually mentioned that her boss needed someone to help in his dental office. I knew absolutely nothing about dentistry, but I was curious. I figured, why not take a look?

That seemingly small decision ended up changing the entire direction of my life.

While working for Dr. McCombs, I was fortunate to have a wonderful mentor along with many great mentors in my life. He eventually suggested that I consider LSUSD's Dental Laboratory Technology (DLT) program. His advice was simple but incredibly influential: slow down, study longer, and make very good grades rather than rushing through and struggling. He also pointed out something that appealed to my background—if dental school didn't work out, the laboratory skills I developed could still be useful in the special-effects side of the film industry.

That turned out to be surprisingly prophetic.

Years later, I was contacted by John Caglione, Jr., who had also developed expertise with dental laboratory materials in conjunction with his special-effects work. So, in a strange way, the two worlds I had been involved with—movies and dentistry—were already beginning to overlap.

But first, I had to learn how to make teeth.

Learning to See Dentistry Differently

I spent three years in the DLT program, earning my bachelor's degree. During my third year, I focused specifically on maxillofacial prosthetics and had the opportunity to work/learn alongside well established prosthodontist/master ceramicists and prosthodontic residents.

Looking back, I can honestly say that I couldn't have asked for better preparation for dental school. The advantages are too many to count. I developed a strong foundation in dental materials, learned CAD/CAM technology, worked with fixed and removable prosthodontics, and, perhaps most importantly, developed my hand-eye coordination.

That last part is huge.

Dentistry is one of those professions where you have to be able to translate what your mind sees into what your hands produce. Your eyes are focused on one thing, your brain is processing what needs to happen, and your hands have to execute the plan with precision. The laboratory taught me that long before I ever picked up a dental handpiece as a dental student.

The Detour That Wasn't Really a Detour

By the time I was accepted into dental school, I had already spent seven years working as a dental laboratory technician. Some people might look at that and think I took the long way around.

I don't. I think I took the scenic route—and it turned out to be one of the best decisions I could have made.

Walking into dental school with seven years of laboratory experience gave me a completely different perspective. I wasn't just learning about dentistry from the clinical side. I already understood what happened on the other side of the case.

I understood materials. I understood fabrication. I understood what was realistic. I understood what wasn't.

And I understood that sometimes the thing that looks simple when you're sitting in the dental chair can be incredibly complicated once you get behind the scenes.

That perspective became invaluable.

Then Came Dental School

When I finally entered the DDS program, I realized just how much my laboratory background had prepared me.

My CAD/CAM experience gave me an advantage. My understanding of material science gave me an advantage. My laboratory experience with fixed and removable prosthodontics gave me an advantage.

But the biggest advantage was probably the ability to see with my hands. That may sound strange, but anyone who works in dentistry understands it.

"DLT" continued on page 15

"DLT" continued from page 14

You have to develop the ability for your hands to produce what your mind can see while your eyes remain focused on the field you're working in. That kind of coordination takes time to develop, and I had already spent years developing it in the laboratory.

I had essentially been training for dentistry without realizing that I was training for dentistry.

Treatment Planning: Where Everything Comes Together

My laboratory background has probably influenced my approach to treatment planning more than anything else. When I'm treatment planning, there are a lot of things happening in my head at once. If you've ever seen "The Hangover" scene where Alan is counting cards and suddenly all those formulas and numbers are floating around in his head—that's pretty close to what my brain feels like during a complicated treatment-planning session.

I'm thinking about the patient's concerns.

I'm thinking about their goals. I'm thinking about function. I'm thinking about esthetics. I'm thinking about materials. I'm thinking about what is clinically appropriate. I'm thinking about what is actually achievable.

And I'm thinking about how everything ultimately comes together as one treatment plan.

Having spent years seeing different cases from the laboratory perspective gave me an appreciation for the patient that I might not have developed otherwise. I had already seen countless variations of fixed and removable work. I had seen different techniques, different problems, different approaches, and different patient concerns. That experience sharpened the way I approach dentistry.

Two Careers, One Profession

Looking back, completing both programs has given me something I wouldn't trade. Being both a dental laboratory technician and a dentist allows me to troubleshoot problems from different angles. Sometimes I can see a potential issue before it becomes an actual problem because I've spent so many years on the laboratory side of the equation. And, even now, I still do a significant amount of my own laboratory work.

There's something incredibly satisfying about being able to understand the entire process—from the patient's needs, to the clinical treatment, to the laboratory fabrication, and finally to the finished result.

I don't think of my laboratory career as something I did before becoming a dentist. I think of it as something that became part of the dentist I eventually became.

If You're Thinking About Dentistry

My advice is simple: Go for it.

If your mind is set on becoming a dentist, don't let a less-than-perfect undergraduate record convince you that the door is closed. If your grades are so-so, consider slowing down. Consider pursuing DLT while continuing to work toward dentistry. You may take a little longer to reach the final destination, but you'll be building an incredible amount of knowledge and skill along the way.

You'll learn things that can become part of your professional "human capital" for the rest of your career.

And dentistry is a wonderful profession. It is this beautiful combination of art and science, with the human being sitting right in the middle of it all. That's what makes it so fascinating.

One Final Thought

If there's one thing I've learned throughout this journey, it's this: Stay curious. Stay as curious about the world as you were when you were a child.

Question ALL things. Take things apart. Figure out how they work. Don't become complacent in your thinking.

Mental complacency leads to what I like to call mental sedentism—the intellectual equivalent of sitting on the couch and never getting up. We have been given an incredible gift: our own human brain. It is as deep as the universe without limits.

And the more I learn about dentistry, science, art, technology, the human body, and the universe around us, the more I realize just how little we actually know.

That isn't discouraging. It's exciting, because the possibilities are enormous.

My journey from DLT, to dental school, and finally to becoming a dentist wasn't exactly the straight line I imagined when I started.

But maybe that's the point.

Sometimes the road that looks like a detour is actually preparing you for the destination.

And sometimes you have to learn how to make the teeth before you learn how to treat the person who wears them. ■

DLT Application Period Open for Fall 2027

LSUSD is accepting DLT applications for the Fall 2027 semester **now through January 31, 2027**. This is an opportunity for those passionate about blending healthcare, science, artistry, and technology to prepare for a rewarding career in creating the dental prosthetics and appliances that improve patients' lives.

The class size is 12 students, offering a personalized learning environment for individual growth, hands-on skill development, and professional mentorship. Classes begin in mid-August 2027, starting a two-year program that leads to an Associate of Science (AS) degree.

To learn more about the application process, email ds-admissions@lsuhsc.edu or call **504-941-8124**. ■

Louisiana Dental Center Presents 15th Annual Big Turnover

On September 15, the Louisiana Dental Center, the New Orleans Saints, and running back Travis Etienne, Jr. helped make our 15th Annual Big Turnover a success. In addition to hosting the event, Louisiana Dental Center founder Dr. Joey Lacoste, DDS '80, presented a generous $10,000 donation to support the LSUSD Chapter of the Student National Dental Association (SNDA) Summer Enrichment Program.



LSUSD's SNDA chapter welcomes college students interested in pursuing careers in dentistry to its annual Summer Enrichment Program, combining hands-on learning experiences with valuable resources, such as guidance on the dental school admissions process and student life, to help participants become more competitive dental school applicants.

LSUSD is proud to continue to partner in building future dental professionals for Louisiana. ■







ASDA's "Pie a Professor" Event Returns for a Second Year

The Philanthropy Committee of LSUSD's American Student Dental Association (ASDA) chapter, chaired by second-year dental student Mia Dallimore, held its second annual "Pie a Professor" fundraiser in September in honor of World Smile Day to raise proceeds for Smile Train, a nonprofit organization providing corrective surgeries for children with cleft lips and palates.

The hilarious event was a main attraction at the LSUSD Student Government Association's monthly TGIF social gathering. Students purchased tickets to enter a raffle for the chance to pie a participating faculty member, with a donation option on the day of the event to pie the professor of their choice. ■



From left, Drs. Nicholas Ehmann, Thomas Lallier, John Dagate, and Director of Student Affairs Heather Allen were this year's "Pie a Professor" participants.

Dr. Janet Southerland Retires from LSUSD



From left are Alicia Edwards, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Campus Life and Community Engagement; Michele Holmes, Staff Senator; Dr. Janet Southerland; Lynn Pittman, Assistant to the Dean; and Derrick Salvant, LSUSD Staff Committee.

At LSUSD's Staff Development Day on September 23, the School's Staff Committee honored Dr. Janet Southerland as she prepares to retire this fall. Since joining LSU Health New Orleans in 2022, Dr. Southerland has served in several key leadership roles, including Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Chief Academic Officer at LSU Health New Orleans, Institutional Research Officer, and Interim Dean of the LSU Health New Orleans School of Dentistry, while also serving as a tenured professor in the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery.

With more than 25 years of experience in academic health sciences leadership, she has provided strategic guidance and oversight that has strengthened the institution's academic, research, and student success missions.

The LSUSD community congratulates Dr. Southerland on an outstanding career and thanks her for the leadership, expertise, and dedication she has brought to the School and its students during her tenure. ■

Alumni: Stay Connected with LSUSD by Sharing Updates, Achievements, Reunions

Planning a Class Reunion? Send Us Details and Request a Party Box!

If you're planning a reunion for your graduating class, let us know! LSUSD's Office of Alumni & Community Affairs can help spread the word through our social media and emails.

We'll also send you a party box—a curated collection of branded swag, including cups, beads, koozies, pom poms, and napkins, to help you elevate your celebration and bring the Tiger pride!



Class Reunion Party Box

Send details including the program, class year, date(s), location, and contact person's information to **ds-alumni@lsuhsc.edu** and we can help your class reconnect and add flair to your event!

Keep Your Contact Information Current

Did you move, change jobs, or update your personal or business contact details? We want to stay in touch! Keeping your contact information current ensures you receive LSUSD updates, invitations, and opportunities tailored for our alumni community. **Update today**!

Celebrate Your Success: Be Featured on LSUSD Social Media

Our alumni are doing amazing things, and we'd love to celebrate you! Whether you've earned a recent award, reached a professional milestone, completed a degree, launched a business, given back to your community, or experienced another exciting, newsworthy moment—we want to know.

Alumni are invited to email a brief update and photo showcasing a recent accomplishment, accolade, or meaningful life event to **ds-alumni@lsuhsc.edu**. Selected submissions may be featured on LSUSD's social media platforms to inspire current students, fellow alumni, and the community.

Help us highlight the lasting impact of an LSUSD education and show the incredible paths our graduates take! ■

LSUSD License Plates Available at Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles

Did you know you can show your school spirit with an LSUSD license plate? Available through the Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles, these specialty plates support LSUSD's Rural Track Scholars Program, which aims to expand access to dental care across Louisiana.

Order yours today! For more information, call **504-941-8120** or email **ds-alumni@lsuhsc.edu**. ■



2027 and Beyond: LDA Continues to Schedule Travel C.E. that Interests and Entertains Our Members



Annette Droddy

By Annette Droddy
Executive Director, LDA

Continuing education is more than a licensing requirement—it is an investment in professional growth, clinical excellence, and the future of dentistry. In 2027, the Louisiana Dental Association (LDA) will offer dentists and their team members multiple opportunities to expand their knowledge, strengthen their skills, and connect with colleagues across the profession. Plus, we have chosen locations that also interest and entertain our members.

The year's schedule features programs designed to make continuing education both valuable and convenient. From the Winter C.E. with Character at Walt Disney World in February to the Summer Education Conference in Pensacola in June, the LDA offers opportunities to combine professional development with time to build relationships and share experiences with fellow dental professionals.

One of the year's signature events will be the New Orleans Dental Conference and LDA Annual Session, April 8–10, 2027. Attendees will have the opportunity to earn up to 18 hours of continuing education through courses led by recognized leaders in dentistry. The conference also provides opportunities to explore new products and technologies, connect with industry representatives, and engage with colleagues who share a commitment to advancing oral health in Louisiana.

Additional programs throughout the year include Kick-Off C.E. (virtual but live) in August, Sip & C.E. on the Bourbon Trail (NEW location for Sip & C.E.) in September, and the Last Chance Seminar in December. The LDA will also offer expanded duty dental assistant courses at four locations across Louisiana, Shreveport, New Orleans, Lafayette, and Gonzales. You can find the complete EDDA schedule at ladental.org/EDDA.

Whether the goal is to strengthen clinical knowledge, support team development, or stay current with advances in dental care, the LDA's 2027 continuing education calendar offers opportunities for every stage of a dental career.



Plan ahead for 2027. Visit ladental.org/events for the latest course information, registration details and updates to the LDA continuing education calendar.

And, we've already announced a new C.E. location for 2028 but the sooner you book it, the more options will be available for rooming. The LDA will host a Sail & C.E. to Alaska cruise on the Holland America Noordam ship, July 2-9, 2028. If you are interested, fill out the form at ladental.org/alaskancruise. ■

Upcoming LDA Events

LDA members save an average of $150 per C.E. event.

- **Last Chance Seminar** December 11, 2026
- **Bowden Leadership Conference** January 22, 2027
- **Winter C.E. with Character (Grand Floridian in Disney World)** February 7-9, 2027
- **Adult Sedation Renewal Course** March 5, 2027
- **New Orleans Dental Conference** April 8-10, 2027
- **LDA House of Delegates** April 10, 2027
- **Summer Education Conference (Hilton Pensacola)** June 16-19, 2027
- **Kick-Off C.E.** August 27, 2027
- **Sip & C.E. on Bourbon Trail (Louisville, KY at Hotel Bourre Bonne)** September 15-17, 2027
- **Pediatric Sedation Renewal Course** October 1, 2027
- **Last Chance Seminar** December 10, 2027
- **Winter C.E. with Character (Grand Floridian in Disney World)** February 27-29, 2028
- **Sail & C.E. to Alaska** July 2-9, 2028

ALUMNI & COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Newsletter

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