

STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

VIEWS ON THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Tapping into the Alumni Network

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As a student, it is easy to limit my vision to what assignments are due next week, what exam is coming up, what lab work I need to complete, etc. If we only see a list of tasks hanging ahead of us, then that is all we will put our energy towards. In connecting with fellow students and alumni over our experiences as women in the dental field, my involvement with the Penn Dental Women's Network has expanded my perspective on what is meaningful in dental school.

The mission of the Penn Dental Women's Network (affectionately known as PDWN) is to empower future women dentists through professional development and networking opportunities. We do our part to connect students with alumni, provide mentorship sessions, and support community engagement, which, as you may imagine, has become significantly more difficult since March of 2020. How do you meet alumni if you aren't meeting...anyone? How do you get a sense of a specialist's daily life if you can't shadow? How can we make events actually worthwhile for alumni and students? These

are the questions I focused on as the president of the Women's Network as our team planned for the new socially distanced landscape.

On the PDWN executive board, we brainstormed, we reached out to alumni who inspire us, and we hoped they would be interested in what we were offering: a virtual event series. The Women's Network has hosted six virtual events so far in our ongoing Mentorship Series, which has connected dozens of current students with mentors in the fields of general and esthetic dentistry, oral medicine, and pediatric dentistry. In an effort to provide content that serves students and alumni, the Mentorship Series is a departure from the traditional presentation format. What makes these events so unique is that they aren't lectures, they are open conversations. Attendees have the opportunity to learn about not only our speakers' many accomplishments, but also their

stumbling blocks and how they have overcome them. Hearing my role models discuss how they worked through the challenges of starting their practices, publishing their stories, and living fulfilled lives while in dental school helped me to redefine my goals, shift my mentality, and celebrate my interests.

Dental professionals are networking over social media now more than ever, so in an effort to continue connecting students and the wider Penn Dental Medicine community, PDWN embarked on an ambitious social media series for Women's History Month in March. We partnered with the School's Institutional Advancement team to collect short videos from students, alumnae, faculty, and staff covering everything from meaningful moments in their careers to their life stories. This was an opportunity unlike any we have had so far as a student organization! While my career experience is limited to my time as a student dentist, I took the plunge and shared what I have been working on this year with the greater Penn Dental Medicine community. My hope is that others in our community will see this as a chance to voice their struggles, celebrate their victories, and guide students through the ups and downs of a dental career.

Alumni mentors have made every stage of my Penn experience possible. I worked for Penn Dental Medicine alumni who encouraged my interests and wrote my letters of recommendation, I was interviewed by an alumna who mentors me to this day, and I rely heavily on alumni for guidance as I begin my clinical experiences. I am so grateful for the opportunities the Penn Dental Medicine alumni network has afforded me both on and off campus. In particular, the generosity alumni have shown PDWN over the course of this "unprecedented" year has impacted my trajectory, inspiring me to adopt mentorship roles now and aspire to more in the future.

BECOME A MENTOR

Penn Dental Medicine alumni interested in mentoring opportunities, please reach out at www.dental.upenn.edu/mentor.