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DEAN'S REPORT: DETROIT MERCY DENTAL

**Evolving with Purpose, Value, and Pride:
A Look at the Past Year and
the People Who Made It Happen**

By Mert N. Aksu, DDS, JD, MHSA, Cert. DPH
Dean, University of Detroit Mercy
School of Dentistry



In the year since my last report in the *MDA Journal*, the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry has continued to adapt and evolve, while emphasizing our values and mission.



As always, the underlying focus remains centered on evidence-based clinical education with a focus on preparing ethical, culturally sensitive graduates ready for practice. Our students, who have been back on campus and seeing patients since June 2020, have experienced several changes to our physical and virtual educational settings. As we navigate through a post-pandemic world, we have found that many of the adaptations borne from the pandemic have become a welcomed normal.

One significant change resulting from the post-pandemic period is how students are taught; students now have the increased flexibility of a HyFlex classroom. With HyFlex our students can now attend class in person, virtually, or by viewing recorded lectures. Although this method has required faculty to be more agile, the on-demand course information has provided students with flexible and unique learning and studying opportunities. HyFlex format allows students to listen to or view lectures, slides, and videos on demand — which has benefited students when studying, referencing past course information, and accommodating individual learning styles.

Since returning to patient care, we have consolidated clinic time and clinic sessions, and have reduced the frequency of open chair time. The clinic now operates in two 5.5-hour sessions, allowing students, faculty, and staff to work staggered shifts. Between rotations and clinic assignments, the average DS3/

(Continued on next page)



Commencement — The 2022 ceremony took place in person and hosted nearly 1,000 family and friends. The ceremony was also live-streamed for loved ones near and far.



Graduation — The smile on the face of Lauren Young, DDS '22, shows how excited the Class of '22 was on graduation day.

DS4 student now spends 28-30 hours per week of direct patient care. The remainder of their time is allocated for lab work, one-on-one faculty interactions, academic activities, and clinic preparation.

University Health Center/Detroit Medical Center

A more notable change centers around the University Health Center (UHC) clinic. For nearly half a century, UHC, located within Detroit Receiving Hospital, was a thriving medical center and 42-chair clinic for our program. The hallmark of UHC was that it was a destination for a medically compromised diverse patient base and provided our students with learning experiences many clinicians only read about.

Over the years, and especially in the post-pandemic period, both the volume and unique nature of the patient pool have steadily declined. In addition, the congestion of the academic medical center resulted in patients increasingly preferring to receive care at our Corktown Campus. Subsequently, we decided to discontinue our services at UHC, effective May 9, 2022. We are evaluating an alternative location to provide students with a different and diverse patient base and new learning opportunities. As we explore these options, we have been reflecting on the memories and experiences UHC has provided and look forward to what the future holds.

As we embrace these changes and embark on the School of Dentistry's 90th year, I am grateful for all who have added to the fabric of our history and look forward to future advancements both within our school and the profession. I am honored to share the following snapshots of what has occurred over the past year.

Grant funding and programming

Delta Dental Foundation. The Delta Dental Foundation awarded the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry more than \$30,000 for the Detroit Mercy Senior Oral Health Equity Project. The project aims to improve seniors' access to care and preventive oral health programs. "We want to see older adults feel empowered to take control of their oral health," said Holli Seabury, EdD, executive director of the Delta Dental Foundation. "That power is especially important for people who may have been historically disenfranchised." The Detroit Mercy Senior Oral Health Equity Project pilot began June 1 at the Hannan Center and St. Patrick's Senior Center, both in Detroit.

Professor Judith Jones, DDS, MPH, DScD, and Associate Professor Divesh Byrappagari, BDS, MDS, serve as co-directors of this project. "We want to bring preventive dental care to where seniors live and congregate and better understand what could make dental care access easier for them," Jones said. The program will provide students with experience in community-based care where they will perform health screening and preventative procedures, denture adjustments, fluoride treatments and oral hygiene education.

Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health Grant. Director of Outreach **Divesh Byrappagari, BDS, MDS,** has received a \$300,000 grant from Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health to support the School of Dentistry's mobile clinic. The grant will support the Titans for Teeth Mobile Clinic which offers comprehensive dental care to children in the Detroit Metropolitan Area and also provide a four-year scholarship to a disadvantaged/under-repre-



Volunteers — Second- and third-year dental students at the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church Back to School Fair.

sented dental student selected from the Summer Enrichment Program at Detroit Mercy Dental.

Community service highlights

Since resuming outreach activities this past fall, Detroit Mercy Dental students have provided dental care in underserved communities across the state. These experiences have provided even more learning opportunities than in the pre-COVID environment.

The school's Community Based Dental Education (CBDE) program partnered with affiliate clinics to provide care to 2,952 patients, with 3,924 patient visits and 7,122 procedures. In addition, the school participated in 11 community outreach events, where we provided more than 300 oral cancer screenings and distributed almost 1,800 oral health kits.

Afghan refugees. The School of Dentistry also partnered with the Arab American and Chaldean Council, Catholic Charities (ACCESS) of Southeast Michigan, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Samaritas, and HHS/NCI/National Institutes of Health to provide care to Afghan refugees. We have serviced more than 200 refugees, with several more scheduled to receive care at the School of Dentistry's Wayne Dental Clinic.

Titans for Teeth Mobile Clinic. Over the past year, the Titans for Teeth Mobile Clinic (TFTMC) has resumed a regular schedule and provided services at 20 sites, including community centers and K-12 schools. Dental and dental hygiene students completed 3,576 procedures over 1,422 patient visits and served approximately 500



Happy moment — Dental students in the Class of 2022 pose prior to being hooded at their Hooding and Awards Ceremony.

patients.

Detroit Public Schools — Student Empowerment Experience Conference. Former Director of Diversity and Inclusion **Melvin Lunkins, MA**, was a featured panelist at the Detroit Public Schools Community District Student Empowerment Experience (SEE) Conference. The SEE Conference provides a platform for inspiring young leaders and provides access to scholarship opportunities by informing them of ways to be involved in the issues and causes they care about while exposing them to career options.

Safety Street 2022. On Friday, Oct. 29, Detroit Mercy held its annual Safety Street trick-or-treat Halloween event. For the second year in a row, the curbside and contactless volunteers safely distributed candy and treats to neighborhood trick-or-treaters on the McNichols Campus. The event dates back to 1980 and has become an annual tradition. The School of Dentistry balanced more than 1,000 pounds of candy with oral hygiene kits that included a toothbrush, floss, and toothpaste.

Pediatric Dentistry Club joins New Detroit Unity Optimist Club. The Detroit Mercy Pediatric Dentistry Club joined the New Detroit Unity Optimist Club Community Day. This free event provided community children with valuable information about oral health, fire safety and bike safety. Children received free dental oral health kits and were entered into a raffle to win free bikes and helmets.

University of Technology — Kingston, Jamaica. While at the University of Technology in Kingston, Jamaica, Dean **Mert N. Aksu, DDS, JD, MHSA, Cert DPH**, who
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Impressions Day — The Student National Dental Association Impressions Day, sponsored in part by the MDA, hosted more than 60 pre-dental students, with hands-on activities, mock interviews, and dental school interviewing tips.



Summer Enrichment Program — Students volunteered at the East Family Reunion on Detroit's east side.

serves as a Commission on Dental Competency assessment consultant, was immediately struck by the school's need for simulation units. Unable to afford dedicated simulation units, students were performing pre-clinical exercises on decommissioned clinic equipment. Due to space limitations, not all students could participate at the same time.

Coincidentally, Detroit Mercy had 64 retired dental simulators. In the spirit of our Jesuit and Mercy tradition to assist in the needs of communities and foster learning, Detroit Mercy's donated equipment will have a second life in Jamaica, helping alleviate the current space situation, which caused some faculty to hold classes on weekends.

Detroit Mercy Dental partnered with donors to fund the shipping of unused surplus Detroit Mercy equipment. Some vendors who helped the university make all this happen include Benco Dental, A-dec, and the Benco Family Foundation. With the help of Great Shape Inc., a humanitarian organization based in Miami, 44 retired simlab units and \$5,000 worth of donated A-dec parts were crated and shipped to Miami, bound for Jamaica.

Diversity and inclusion

The demographic profile of the United States is ever-changing, as is the diversity of our profession and the patients we serve. By 2050, it is expected that half of the country's population will be composed of racial and ethnic minorities. This cultural shift underscores the importance of educating culturally sensitive practitioners — an important element of our Jesuit and Mercy identity. Having both a diverse workforce and student body benefits learners and patients alike. Cultural sensitivity improves patient compliance and care outcomes. To this end, Detroit Mercy is committed to recruiting and retaining



White Coat Ceremony — Together, the Dental Class of 2024 and the Dental Hygiene Class of 2023 recited their professional oath during the 2022 White Coat Ceremony, which formally marked the beginning of the patient care portion of their educational journey.

underrepresented individuals as part of the effort to enhance the diversity of the oral health workforce.

SEP Program. The Summer Enrichment Program, which began in 2013, provides mentorship opportunities for underresourced students and students from underrepresented backgrounds. The program helps future applicants develop their professional skills and gain experience to navigate the dental school admissions process successfully. SEP is an immersive summer residential program that provides housing, DAT preparation, and a stipend to cover food and travel expenses. SEP is supported in part by the Michigan Dental Association Foundation.

After two years of remote programming, we were excited to welcome the 2022 SEP class in person. Since its inception, we have hosted nearly 140 pre-dental undergraduate students and are proud to report that as of May 2022, 60% of our SEP graduates



Fun on Juneteenth — Faculty, staff, students, and friends celebrated Juneteenth with fun, games, dancing and a walk.

are enrolled in or have graduated from dental school. Many of the remaining SEP participants intend to apply to dental school soon or have explored other graduate health professions programs. We continue to

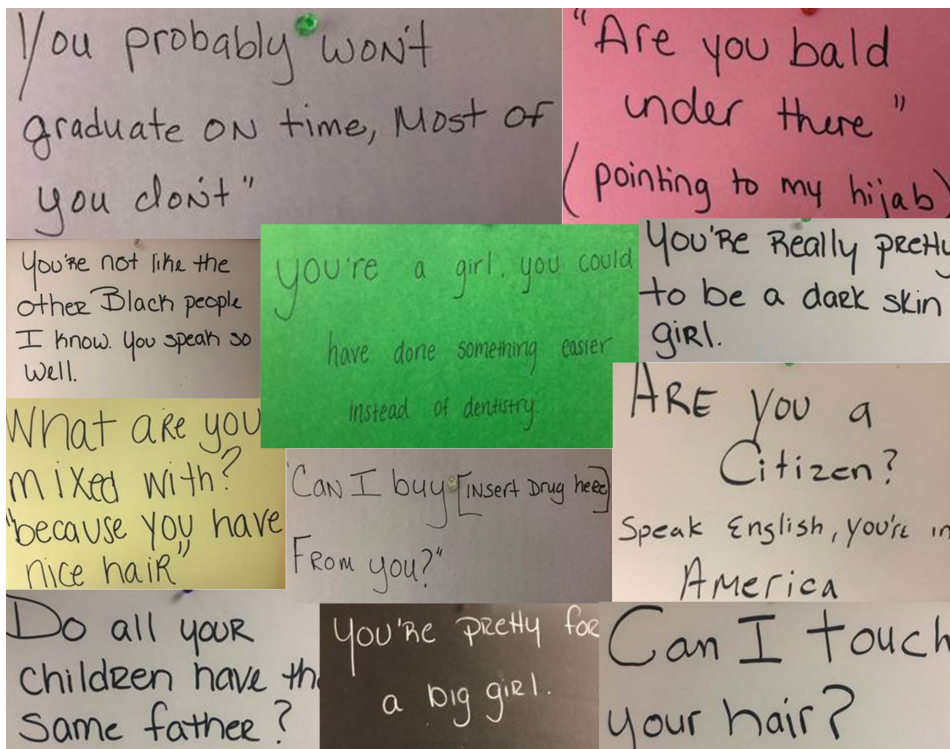
keep in contact with our SEP alumni and celebrate their successes in dental school and beyond.

Microaggressions Art Exhibit.

Over the span of a month and a half, the School of Dentistry held a Microaggressions Art Exhibit. The exhibit was created to foster increased awareness and discussion on implicit bias and the stereotypes that underlie microaggressions by featuring posters created by Detroit Mercy Dental students containing hurtful and unjust words written or spoken to them. The project served as an outlet for students to express their personal experiences with hurtful phrases in hopes of bringing awareness to the problem.

This exhibit presented a comprehensive examination of microaggressions ranging from racial prejudice to weight discrimination to discrimination based on sexual orientation. When the large-format posters illustrating microaggressions students have experienced were placed together, they left viewers realizing the power of their words.

Juneteenth. In recognition of Juneteenth, the school organized several activities to increase awareness of the newly recognized federal holiday, *(Continued on Page 38)*



Microaggressions exhibit — Dental students containing hurtful and unjust words that have been written or spoken to them.

beginning with a virtual conversation led by **Candace Ziglor, LMSW**, who discussed commemorating the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. Attendees learned about the significance of this milestone in African American history. Attendees participated in a freedom walk and an outdoor celebration complete with a food truck, DJ, games, and dancing.

Research notes

From 2021 to present, Detroit Mercy Dental faculty, staff, students, and residents have contributed to 50 peer-reviewed publications and four book chapters. Included in these publications were 30 faculty authors, two student authors, 10 resident authors, and two research lab authors. Below is a sample of the research:

■ Along with a team of faculty and residents from Graduate Periodontics and Orthodontics, Associate Professor **Bassam Kinaia, DDS, MS**, and private practice colleagues collaborated on a publication describing the six-year follow-up of an autotransplant procedure of a supernumerary tooth to replace a missing maxillary central incisor. The article was published in *International Orthodontics*.

■ As part of the Michigan Initiative for Maternal and Infant Oral Health project, **Joshua Thomson, PhD**, assistant professor, along with **Divesh Byrappagari, BDS, MSD**, associate professor, former faculty **Erin Relich, RDH, BSDH, MSA**, and MIMIOH Project Coordinator John Girdwood, PhD, published a research study in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. In this study, dental hygienists around Michigan provided prenatal oral hygiene education. Microbial tests to mea-

sure salivary *Streptococcus mutans* levels were performed. Patients viewed the microbiology-focused education very positively and, upon return after giving birth, showed a significant reduction in salivary *S. mutans*.

■ After a two-year (COVID-19) hiatus, the Student Research Group hosted the Annual Student Research Day on April 22. Student researchers presented their findings on various topics to a panel of faculty judges. The first-place winner was **Khansa Khusro, '25**, whose research was on “Resorbable Collagen Membranes Outperform Resorbable Amnion-Chorion Membranes for the Treatment of Peri-Implantitis.”

Student recognition

Ghali Ballani, '24, was awarded a certificate of recognition from the American Dental Association for his essay submission to the ADA's 2021 Health Literacy in Dentistry Essay Contest. Ballani's essay, “More Than Teeth: What Your Dental Team Wants You to Know About Health Misinformation,” was selected as the School of Dentistry's submission into the national contest.

Ellese Serena Blackmon, RDH '22, was named the recipient of the University of Detroit Mercy's 2022 Vivere ex Missione Award for the School of Dentistry. The award recognizes students who best exemplify the mission of Detroit Mercy. Blackmon has participated in securing donations for many oral-health-related organizations and oral health literacy projects, assisted with the student-led Malta Dental and Medical Clinic, and worked to increase the number of dental hygiene students at community and nonprofit dental clinics.

Christen Thompson, DDS '22, received the Delta Dental Foundation Community Commitment Award for her commitment to community service and underserved populations. Thompson also received the Dr. Jeanne Craig Sinkford Student Leadership Award in recognition of effective leadership and advocacy of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Alin Alias, '23, was selected for the American College of Dentists Michigan Section Outstanding Leadership Award. This annual scholarship is provided by the Foundation of the Pierre Fauchard Academy and is given to a DS3 student who shows promise of leadership within the profession.

Charandeep Ghotra, '23, received the American Student Dental Association Award of Excellence. This award recognizes outstanding leadership in the Detroit Mercy chapter of the American Student Dental Association. Ghotra served as the Detroit Mercy ASDA president for the 2021-22 academic year.

Hayden Sutton, '23, received the Pierre Fauchard Academy Scholarship in recognition of clinical excellence as a third-year student. This award is presented to a DS3



Sim lab — Dental students hone their skills during sim lab.

who has shown exemplary ethical conduct, leadership potential, technical competence and commitment to learning.

Rafaella Shammass, DDS '22, was selected for the Pierre Fauchard Academy Senior Student Award for demonstrated leadership, dedication to the advancement of dental literature, and excellence academically and clinically.

Brendan Krueger, DDS '22, was selected for the International College of Dentists Student Leadership Award for the dental graduate who has demonstrated outstanding leadership and great potential for continued future leadership.

Daniela Naumovski, DDS '22, received the American Association of Public Health Dentistry Senior Dental Student Recognition Award for demonstrating special interest and achievement in community dentistry and dental public health. Naumovski also received the International College of Dentists Student Humanitarian Award for significant leadership and exemplary character traits when participating in humanitarian service or projects. Additionally, Naumovski was honored with the School of Dentistry Community Service Award for outstanding service to the community, dedication to school community partnerships, and exemplification of our mission to serve others.

Grace Dahl, DDS '22, was selected as the Brian D. Stone Memorial Award recipient for having exemplified the spirit of volunteerism and care for patients with special needs and demonstrated determination to provide charitable care throughout her dental career.

Ellese Blackmon, RDH '22, and **Ashleigh O'Brien, DDS '22**, both received a Falcon Family Award for showing remarkable strength in overcoming significant personal challenges throughout their educational careers.

Kyle Radomski, DDS '22, was awarded the Academy of Dentistry International Student Servant Leadership Award for having demonstrated meritorious servant leadership and volunteerism, whose lifestyle reflects community, national, or international giving of oneself in the field of dentistry.

Faculty and staff accomplishments

Clinical Assistant Professor **Marinele de Campos, DDS, MS, PhD**, has been awarded the Primary Care Educator Fellowship with the National Dental Training Center for Primary Interdisciplinary Care Educators at the Eastman Institute for Oral Health of University of Rochester Medical Center. The training center serves as a resource and training hub for junior primary care dental faculty in the United States, preparing them to become inter-professional clinical educators capable of addressing issues of diversity and health equity, and leaders in primary care



Safety Street — Tommy Titan handing out bags of candy and oral hygiene products during the annual Safety Street event.

dentistry. The two-year fellowship begins in September.

Mert N. Aksu, DDS, JD, MHSA, Cert DPH, dean and professor, has been named the new president-elect of the Michigan Oral Health Collation. In addition, Detroit Mercy Dental has become a Platinum Partner of the Michigan Oral Health Collation. This partnership allows the School of Dentistry to work alongside the MOHC in advocating its mission to connect Michiganders to optimal oral health through policies and resources. The MOHC aims to create a network of local, state, and national advocates dedicated to improving the oral health of individuals through awareness, advocacy, and education.

Juliette Daniels, EdD, assistant dean for student services and enrollment management, presented "Protecting Your Well-Being When Preparing for Dental School" as the keynote speaker of the 2022 American Dental Education Association GoDental Recruitment Event in Philadelphia. Director of Admissions **Steven Chang, PhD**, was a featured panelist who answered important questions and presented a short video on admissions-specific topics along with other university admissions officers. In addition, former Director of Diversity and Inclusion **Melvin Lunkins, MA**, and dental students **Ja'Nay Jones, '24**, **Sierra Dowlen, '24**, and **Trey Hester, '23** represented Detroit Mercy Dental during the cumulative recruitment fair.

Rafael R. Pacheco, DDS, MSc, PhD, associate professor, was awarded the 2022 MDA Dental Faculty Award. This award recognizes an MDA member dentist who is actively involved in the education of dental or graduate students and has demonstrated outstanding commitment.
(Continued on Page 40)

ment to organized dentistry. Pacheco received the award during the April 2022 MDA House of Delegates meeting.

Tenzin Dadul, MDS, DDS, MS, director and associate professor, received the 2022 Michigan Section of the Pierre Fauchard Academy's Special Faculty Appreciation Award. The mission of Pierre Fauchard is to recognize and develop outstanding leadership in the profession of dentistry. Dadul joined Detroit Mercy Dental in 2019 and has since aided the school's digital integration, benefiting current and future students.

Robert Tremblay, DDS, affiliate professor, served as executive director of the Oakland County Dental Society.

Adjunct Professor (Ret.) **Cheri S. Newman, DDS**, was named the recipient of the 2022 Detroit Mercy Alumni Achievement Spirit Award for the School of Dentistry. Newman is a servant leader with a passion for underserved and marginalized communities. Newman is best known for her role in facilitating an outreach program for dental students at Baycliff Health Camp, which is a facility for disabled adults in Big Bay, Michigan. In 2013, she helped organize Michigan's first Mission of Mercy program, and in 2017, helped to establish a special needs clinic at the dental school. Newman has held numerous leadership roles in organized dentistry, including having served on the executive board of the Francis B. Vedder Society of Crown and Bridge Prosthodontics and for the Pierre Fauchard Academy.

Kathi Shepherd, RDH, MS, was awarded the Michigan Dental Hygienists' Association Frances Shook Award. This prestigious award is presented to a professional who emulates the qualities and attributes of Frances Shook, former president of MDHA, and has signifi-

cantly contributed to the dental hygiene profession.

Elizabeth Pitts, RDH, MS, affiliate clinical instructor, has been inducted as the Michigan Dental Hygienists' Association president. Pitts is a 2007 graduate from Howard University, where she received a bachelor of science degree in biology. She later graduated from the University of Michigan, earning a bachelor of science and a master of science in dental hygiene in 2012 and 2017, respectively.

Assistant Professor **Aman Gupta, MD**, and Clinical Assistant Professor **Ana Janic, DDS, MS**, presented at the 27th Annual Midwest Microbial Pathogenesis Conference. Hosted by Michigan State University, the MMPC provides an interactive scientific forum for investigators to present and establish collaborations.

Clinical Associate Professor **Reem Al-Abbousi, DDS**, has been elected as a director of the Michigan Dental Association Foundation Board of Directors. The MDA Foundation advances the profession of dentistry through various scholarship opportunities and other assistance to dental, dental hygiene, and dental assisting students. Al-Abbousi is currently serving the first year of a two-year term.

Clinical Professor **Susan Paurazas, DDS, MS, MHSA**, has been named chair of the Educational Affairs Committee of the American Association of Endodontic Education. Paurazas will serve as chair for the 2022-23 term.

Dental admissions and Class of 2026 stats

In 2021, we reported that dental school applications were up 9.9% nationally; however, this past cycle has seen a steep decline of 5%. Despite the national decrease, Detroit Mercy Dental's reputation for clinical excellence positioned us to remain a top choice for applicants, with an increase of 8.4% in applications over last year.

With new schools opening in the next few years combined with anticipated increases in the class size of other institutions, we expect the application process will become increasingly competitive. However, our goal is to continue to grow our applicant pool by highlighting the value of the Detroit Mercy Dental diploma through strategic and aggressive recruitment.

Please see the corresponding graphic on the facing page for the statistics on the Dental Class of 2026.

* * *

As dental professionals, we experience continuous change. Our clinical priorities, methodologies, and standards of care are constantly evolving. Change allows us to advance our profession, improve public health and provide the best and most compassionate care possible. As these changes occur, they affect how we educate and train our future colleagues.



Patient-centered care — Fourth-year dental student Carly Bachus explains the next steps of a patient care plan.

Experienced clinicians know all of this first-hand and in many instances can be valuable assets to schools of dentistry. In addition, many of our clinical faculty feel that a blended career reinvigorates them and can actually be a career extender. In this spirit, the School of Dentistry has been recruiting experienced dentists interested in a career in education for both full and part-time positions. Over the past several decades, the school has helped numerous clinicians transition their careers from clinical practice to educator, while these same clinicians transition our graduates from students to practitioners.

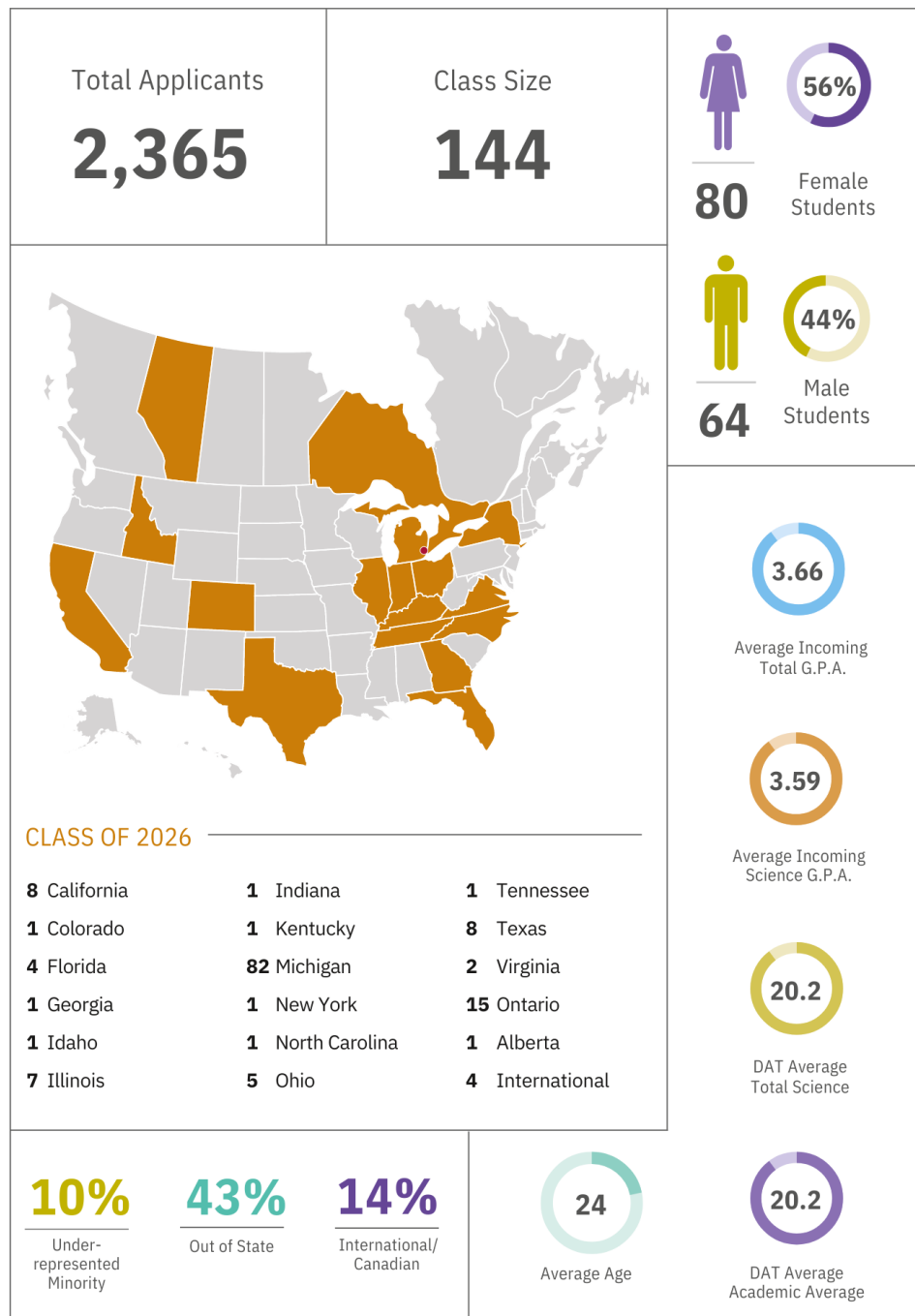
As Clinical Adjunct Professor **Linda Dobis, DDS**, states, she takes “immense pride in being able to educate future colleagues in an innovative and cutting-edge university.” Associate Professor **Rafael R. Pacheco, DDS, MSc, PhD**, chose Detroit Mercy Dental to be “part of a school known to foster meaningful relationships and connections.” Interested clinicians should consider the impact of making a difference as an educator.

As dean, I am incredibly proud of our people. Each student, faculty, and staff member are integral to our culture of caring for and educating and developing the whole person — a philosophy rooted in Jesuit values. I want to thank them and the alumni and former faculty and staff who have helped to establish our history and define what it means to be a Detroit Mercy Titan. Of the many traits and characteristics that distinguish us, I am most proud of the fact that not only do we provide great opportunities to learn the art and science of dentistry, but we also emphasize the individual development of the person as they transition from student to their role as a dentist or dental hygienist.

Our impact and legacy is measured by the way our alumni approach practice and life rooted in an



CLASS of 2026 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE



Class of '26 — Table shows statistics for the incoming Class of 2026.

education immersed in clinical experiences, life lessons, and reflection that has a foundation in Jesuit and Mercy values. Our legacy is in our people and how they impact the

lives of others. This is a mission we can all be proud of — and a unique and important role that the University of Detroit Mercy plays in the state of Michigan. ●