

# **SIU School of Dental Medicine women inspired to lead and achieve success**

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ALTON - Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) female faculty, staff and students were encouraged to build confidence, pursue their desired work-life balance, negotiate and network to achieve professional success during a women's empowerment presentation held Tuesday, May 29 on the SIU SDM campus.

"Getting Prepared to Succeed in the Market" was sponsored by Monsanto and featured speakers Elzandi Oosthuizen, vice president of Global Strategy at Monsanto and

president of its Women's Network, and Silvana Regitano de Lima, global business and integration planning lead at Monsanto. It was the first of a series of collaborative events aimed at empowering women at the SIU SDM.

The event was presented on behalf of the SIU SDM Office of the Dean, SIU American Dental Education Association's (ADEA) Women's Liaison Officer Nathalia Garcia, DDS, and the SIU SDM American Association of Women Dentists (AAWD).

"As a collective group, we aim to increase leadership skills among women dental students and faculty by increasing development opportunities and creating a sense of community to enhance success at the SIU School of Dental Medicine," explained Garcia, section head of periodontics in the Department of Applied Dental Medicine.

Garcia's keen interest in gender issues and her participation in the [ADEA Enid A. Neidle Scholar-in-Residence](#) program have fostered her commitment to empowering women in the SIU SDM dental community.

"With the remarkable support of SIU SDM Dean Bruce Rotter, DMD, and in collaboration with other females and organizations on campus like the AAWD, I have been working with the ADEA to establish partnerships with organizations like the Monsanto Women's Network to receive mentorship, ideas and cooperation to provide developmental programs to SIU SDM women."

The goal of the May 29 presentation was to prepare students to leave the dental school and enter the workplace with not only technical skills, but also leadership abilities and business intelligence.

"A profession is one of the most valuable assets we have in life," said Regitano de Lima. "It helps us make a living, gives us personal fulfillment, allows us to apply knowledge and gain experience that help us grow as individuals, and gives us the opportunity to share our learning with others as role models and influential professionals."

"I challenge you to open your minds, think broader and bigger, and stretch yourself out of your comfort zone to overcome some of the primary development barriers that challenge women," said Oosthuizen.

Oosthuizen offered advice on four challenges women face across industry and discipline, including:

- **Confidence:** "Confidence comes from within. You have to take time to slow down, get to know yourself and get comfortable in your own skin. The sooner you

understand your strengths and weaknesses and figure out how to grow out of a weakness or make peace with it and learn how to use your strengths to overcome your weaknesses, the sooner your colleagues will see the value that you bring to the team, and the difference you're making in people's lives. You build confidence, earn trust, and they will follow your lead."

- **Work/Life Balance:** "I never second guessed if I could make this work: advance my career and work toward the c-suite, while at the same time have a fulfilling family life. There's no simple recipe. What works for me, won't necessarily work for anyone else. But, as long as we as a family have a plan and execute that plan, we can have it all. You have to ask yourself, is it more important that my daughter see me next to her at every basketball game, or that she sees me at 60 percent of them, while also witnessing how I can make my dreams come true and figure out solutions to every challenge and hurdle that comes my way? Recognize that it's not always going to be easy or perfect. Nothing that's worth it comes without sacrifice."
- **Negotiation:** "Females in general are not good negotiators when they have to negotiate for themselves. What's funny is that when we negotiate on behalf of someone else we really care about, we're exceptional. But, we don't do that for ourselves. My advice is that anything is possible. When it comes to a career offer, you can ask for anything, it all depends on how you ask. You have to do your homework and present good reason. You have to open your mind and understand your real value and be crisp and clear in selling yourself. Do not just accept it. You can make that advice applicable in any situation."
- **Networking:** "I'm originally from South Africa and have worked around the globe. I haven't been to a country where networking doesn't have a significant impact on success. Educate yourself. Find ways to become comfortable with networking and be strategic about it. Do not shy away from it. You can accelerate the success of your business, if you surround yourself with a strong network. Networking is all about give and take. You offer value and receive in return."

"It was wonderful to learn and be inspired by these female leaders," said SIU SDM third-year student Roxanne Dudovitz, president of the School's AAWD organization. "In school, we mostly learn about the technical side of dentistry and working with the patient, but the business side of the industry is also incredibly important. I appreciated Elzandi's advice on confidence and approaching networking as the creation of a supportive community."

The SIU SDM's next women empowerment event will be conducted at Monsanto on Wednesday, June 20. A seminar entitled "Defining and Refining your Personal Brand" will provide leadership skills to help women continue succeeding in their careers and serving as examples and mentors to others.

The [Monsanto](#) St. Louis Women's Network has been in existence for approximately 15 years and has supported the interests of women through various programs and networking activities. It seeks to further the professional development of women, foster leadership growth and create a sense of community to enhance success at Monsanto.

[The SIU School of Dental Medicine](#) students manage approximately 35,000 patient visits each year at its patient clinics in Alton and East St. Louis. In addition, students offer oral health treatment, screenings and education to more than 10,000 people annually through a wide variety of off-campus community outreach events. These opportunities provide students the training they need to graduate and become highly skilled dentists. The School of Dental Medicine is a vital oral health care provider for residents of southern and central Illinois, and the St. Louis metropolitan region.