

# SIU SDM student earns national scholarship for academic excellence and giving heart

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ALTON - “In order for mankind to move forward, we must continue to give back.” That phrase is at the heart of the actions and aspirations of Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) fourth-year student Jaterra Castine-Ross.

Castine-Ross, of Chicago, has been awarded a \$5,000 scholarship from the [Dental Trade Alliance Foundation](#) in recognition of her impressive commitment to community service and academic excellence.

“My reaction to receiving this scholarship was shock, followed by joy,” Castine-Ross said. “This scholarship funding will allow me to further my academic education through coursework and continued service to the community.”

SIU SDM faculty nominator Katie Kosten, DMD, assistant professor and director of community dentistry, says Jattera’s professionalism and aptitude are impressive. Her path to dental school and her motivation for entering the dental profession, in particular, make her stand out.

“Jattera was raised in a community that has many socioeconomic challenges, so she has seen the need from a very personal perspective,” Kosten said. “She is a deserving recipient of this scholarship, because she has a heart for giving back to communities in need just like hers. She is also living proof that determination, hard work and sacrifice open up opportunities to make real change in the world. She will be a great dentist, because she is a great person. Young people need role models like Jattera.”

When considering a career path, Jattera says she narrowed her choices to either teaching or dentistry. She chose dentistry because she says it offers the best of both worlds.

“In dentistry, I not only get to help people with their confidence by improving their smile, but also I have the opportunity to educate them about how their oral health affects their overall health,” she explained.

Jattera has been actively involved in community engagement through volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club in Carbondale, participating in walks and donating time at events such as the Illinois Mission of Mercy, and providing free services with the Christian Dental Society during a mission trip to Jamaica.

“My passion and heart lie in community,” she said. “I have always been grateful and filled with joy anytime I can help someone who may not have the means or resources to help themselves. Upon graduation in June 2019, I plan to continue to volunteer my time and services through various outlets as often as I can to underserved communities.”

According to Kosten, service to others should be at the heart of any patient-centered profession.

“Not every dental student who graduates will enter the field of public health, and that’s perfectly fine,” Kosten explained. “Every dental student should understand, however, that he or she has a responsibility to others and the profession to contribute toward solutions that help all patients.”

“That may be volunteering time for programs like Give Kids a Smile or Mission of Mercy, advocating for solutions to policy issues, serving in an advisory capacity, or working full-time in a public health role,” she continued. “Regardless of how one chooses to give back, at the end of the day, if we “treat others the way we would want to be treated,” we will be on the right path.”

[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.