

Family Dentistry: Sibling Pairs To Earn Degrees From SIU School Of Dental Medicine

by Megan Wieser
June 3 2020 1:59 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - The journey toward completing a doctor of dental medicine degree is long and rigorous, yet incredibly rewarding. For some, like the Dudovitz and Habibi sisters, it's an academic milestone worth sharing!

During its 2020 virtual commencement ceremony being held Saturday, June 6, the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SDM) will confer degrees upon 56 students, including sisters Tara and Maya Habibi, of Springfield, and twins Roxanne and Shawna Dudovitz, of Deerfield.

“When my sister and I were little we would help each other pull out our baby teeth,” recalled Shawna Dudovitz. “Our mother works for a dentist, so growing up we were always around dentistry. We both had a passion to help people and knew this would be a great way for us to give back, together.”

“Dental school is hard, and to have a built-in support system really helped make the process easier,” added Roxanne. “There is no one I would have rather done this with than my sister.”

Having proven their abilities to successfully support and encourage each other through a challenging academic program, the sibling pairs have long-term plans of practicing dentistry together. The Habibi’s even hope to make it a trio someday by opening multiple practices with their older sister Natalia, a 2016 SIU SDM alumna.

“I was grateful to have a piece of home with me during dental school,” noted Maya Habibi. “As far as academics and personality types go, Tara and I could not be more different. She was always pushing me to be better, and I hope, I had a calming effect on her. We have a small family, so I cherish having such a close relationship with my sister.”

“Going through all four years of school together made the hard times a lot more bearable,” said Tara. “We definitely became a support system for each other.”

All of the aspiring dentists were involved students at the SIU SDM, noting how their extra-curricular commitments amplified their overall experience.

“Both my sister and I participated in the Association of American Women Dentists (AAWD),” Shawna said. “Through this group, we were able to help create community in the School through philanthropy. It was a great opportunity to give back. Additionally, through our clinical training, we saw the incredible impact dentists can make. We made many connections with patients. It was a wonderful experience and reminded us why we wanted to pursue this profession.”

“The highlights of my time at the SIU SDM include involvement in campus organizations like the Xi Psi Phi Dental Fraternity, AAWD and SDM Student Council,” added Tara.

“I served as a representative of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), assisted and started the first SIU SDM Impressions Day in 2019, participated in the Xi Psi Phi Dental Fraternity, served on the SIU SDM curriculum committee for two years, volunteered at the 2018 Mission of Mercy event in Springfield, and went on the Jamaica Dental Mission Trip in 2019,” Maya noted.

Upon graduation, Roxanne will work in O’Fallon and Shawna in Shiloh. Tara plans to practice general dentistry and then apply for an endodontic residency. Maya will be practicing general dentistry in Festus, Mo.

The SIU SDM virtual commencement will go live Saturday, June 6 at siue.edu/dental/virtual-commencement.

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.