



SIU SDM Confers 56 Doctor of Dental Medicine Degrees During Virtual Commencement

by Doug McIllaga
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EDWARDSVILLE – In an “unconventional, but heartfelt” virtual commencement ceremony held Saturday, June 6, the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) conferred doctor of dental medicine (DMD) degrees on 56 students comprising the Class of 2020.

“Graduates, you are a special group of people,” said SIU SDM Dean Bruce Rotter, DMD. “During the last four years, you have put in many hard hours and distinguished yourselves through your academic achievements, the delivering of high-quality dental care, your community outreach and service efforts, and your research accomplishments. You have also demonstrated your resolve and resiliency during these last few months as we all stepped into the unknown realm of pandemic.”

The Class of 2020 represents the SIU SDM’s 45th class of graduates. SIU SDM students achieve high ratings on clinical and national board exams, and go on to serve their communities with excellent skill sets. The Class of 2020 excelled on the National Board Dental Exams, earning a 91% first-time pass rate on Part I and an 86% first-time pass rate on Part II.

During the virtual ceremony, the SIU SDM also celebrated the commencement of eight students completing the International Advanced Placement Program (IAPP). The IAPP enables qualified dentists who have graduated from an acknowledged international dental school to pursue a DMD degree at the SIU SDM. Program graduates are able to obtain licensure to practice dentistry in the U.S.



EDWARDSVILLE - SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke congratulated the SDM graduates on the tremendous achievement of earning a DMD and offered his confidence in their ability to shape a changing world.

“Graduates, today’s virtual commencement is a formal celebration of your honor,” Pembroke said. “You should be extremely proud of your accomplishments. But, you

haven't succeeded by yourselves. Wherever you happen to be at the moment, please give a cheer for your supporters, including family, friends, alumni, as well as SIU SDM administration, faculty and staff for their steadfast leadership of this excellent program."

Selected by her peers, Michelle Hickey, DMD, offered remarks on behalf of students. She emphasized the valuable lessons learned throughout the pandemic, and how the Class of 2020 has helped lead a new age of education.

"With the push from the current climate, we have opened the door for other students to have alternate routes for competencies and licensure," Hickey said. "We proved that no matter what happens, the education you receive and the connections you make at the SIU SDM will prepare you for anything. I have no doubt we will all go on to be successful clinicians, teachers, researchers, board examiners and members of society."

SIU SDM President of the Student Council Alexis Polczynski, DMD, addressed her fellow graduates and colleagues noting the unexpected detours they encountered during their final year of dental school.

"No one could have predicted our paths, but that's okay," noted Polczynski. "It's impossible to know what life will throw at you. This experience has shown us the truth in that statement. While the current situation and the emotions surrounding it are at the forefront of our minds right now, let's focus for a minute on what we have accomplished. We did something truly amazing. We learned and began mastering something that most could never dream of achieving over the course of four years. I am beyond grateful for my time at the SIU School of Dental Medicine."

Rotter closed the virtual ceremony by referencing an anonymous quote: "This is the beginning of a new day. You have been given this day to use as you will. You can waste it or use it for good. What you do today is important, because you are exchanging a day of your life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever. In its place is something you have left behind. Let it be something good."

He extended his heartfelt congratulations, wishing the Class of 2020 success and happiness in both their personal and professional lives.

"You are special people," he exclaimed. "You are bright and ambitious, with great minds and even greater hearts. Celebrate your accomplishments, your new profession, and mostly, each other and those close to you."

To view the SIU SDM virtual commencement ceremony, visit 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.