

SIU SDM Honors Exceptional Students with Annual Scholarships

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE – Each year, the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine (SIU SDM) honors exceptional students with scholarships to enhance their learning opportunities. This fall, the SDM has awarded four students with its annual Dean's Scholarship and two students with the Dr. Larry A. Lowe Memorial Scholarship.

The Dean's Scholarship was created to reward academic merit, assist financial aid and increase student diversity within the SIU SDM. This year's Dean's Scholarship

recipients include Jordan Bolletta, of Alton, Janice Choo, of Savoy, Rhett Farmer, of Mattoon, and Brooklynn White, of Maryville. Each has been awarded \$5,000 for the 2020-21 academic year.

Bolletta appreciates receiving the monetary award as it enabled his application to multiple residency programs, allowing him to reach his dentistry goals without a financial burden.

“Receiving the Dean’s Scholarship is an honor for anyone, but the award means even more to me as this is the first scholarship I’ve ever received,” he said. “I’m thankful to be recognized for the hard work that I’ve put in throughout my academic career.”

Upon graduation, Bolletta’s goal is to become an orthodontist and help patients with craniofacial abnormalities and deformities.

Choo was inspired to enter the profession to help others by increasing affordability and access to dental care. She plans on utilizing the scholarship to pay for the Central Regional Dental Testing Service (CRDTS) exam and a new pair of dental loupes.

“I was surprised and extremely grateful that the school would recognize me as a Dean’s Scholar,” Choo said. “There are many times where I feel that I fall short, but receiving this award underscores that I am not here by accident. It is motivation to keep trying my best each and every day.”

Amazing community role models inspired Farmer to pursue dentistry. After dental school, he hopes to follow in their footsteps by volunteering on committees to help improve his community while starting a family.

“To be chosen is humbling,” he said. “The monetary award helps relieve some burdens that COVID-19 has placed on me and my family. The most rewarding part is the connections that I have made through the application process and my time as a student. Those connections are key in pursuit of my academic and life endeavors, and I certainly do not take them for granted.”

White felt a calling to pursue a career in medicine at a young age. After graduation, White hopes to serve as an associate dentist. She later aspires to focus her area of expertise in cosmetic dentistry and deliver beautiful smiles while providing access to dental healthcare to those who need it most.

“To me, the most incredible thing about dentistry is the ability it gives to provide both physical and mental health benefits to patients,” said White. “Every day in clinic, I have the great privilege to not only diagnose oral diseases such as cavities, dry mouth,

periodontal diseases, and even the possibility of cancer, but also I get to help people feel better about their appearance by improving their smiles.”

The recipients of this year’s Dr. Larry Lowe Memorial Scholarship are Lauren Nicholson, of Oswego, and Hunter Watson, of Brighton. The annual scholarship was established by Sherry Baker in memory of her late husband, a SIU SDM Class of 1977 alumnus.

“Receiving such a wonderful scholarship means that my hard work and dedication to the dental profession is starting to pay off,” said Nicholson. “I am extremely appreciative of amazing alumni like Dr. Lowe and his wife who believe in young dentists and aid in their education.”

Nicholson hopes to return to her hometown and work in a private practice upon graduation. While practicing as a general dentist, she plans to continue her education and stay knowledgeable about new technologies developing in the field.

Watson’s ultimate goal is to be an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, where he can apply his dental background to highly complex surgical cases in the operating room.

“I was surprised to receive this generous scholarship,” Watson said. “It is nice to know that others appreciate my hard work in dental school. I was able to put the scholarship towards my residency applications, which lifted a huge financial burden. I am grateful that the Lowe family has helped support my future endeavors.”

The SIU SDM presented scholarships to nine additional students. The Keith W. and Peggy G. Dickey Scholarship Award went to Olumayomide Coker and Michael Hudson. Premier Dental Partners Scholarship Awards were presented to Daniel Setzke and Stephanie Wiechmann.

Sally Ayoob and Kaveh Shokoufi received the Dr. and Mrs. Sami Latif Student Scholarship Award. Kapil Jadhav was presented the Dr. Sondra K. Naegler Memorial Scholarship Award. And, Dr. Christopher L. Maurer Memorial Scholarship Awards were granted to Jessica Chellis and Colin Kelliher.

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.

Photos: (L-R) SIU School of Dental Medicine Dean's Scholarship recipients include (L-R) Jordan Bolletta, Janice Choo, Brooklynn White and Rhett Farmer.