

Student Commencement Address
University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry
Masonic Auditorium, San Francisco, California
June 13, 2021

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DDS Class of 2021

Three years ago, I got a call from Stephanie Chan who worked in the admissions office to tell me I was accepted to University of the Pacific, Arthur A Dugoni School of Dentistry, my first choice. My acceptance phone call ended with “Welcome to the Dugoni Family.” At first, I didn’t think much of it. But then on our first day of dental school, Dean Nadershahi once again said, “Welcome to the Dugoni family”.

Before we stepped through those glass doors on 5th Street, I’m sure we all thought family were the people you share biological DNA with, who took you to your first day of kindergarten, taught you how to drive a car, and moved you into your first college dorm. That definition of family was not wrong, just incomplete. Turns out, family also are the people who stay with you on the 5th floor in sim lab until 10pm, 5 days a week, remind you on a Sunday night through email that there’s a 9am quiz the next day, and who you fight the COVID-19 pandemic with. Family are the ones you go to dental school with. Our family, is sitting right beside us today.

With my Dugoni family, I lived through the three best years of my life. Before dental school, I thought the best years of my life were long gone. Now looking back, I can’t believe how far from the truth that statement is. You don’t realize that the best years of your life are over until they are. As I like to tell my friends from home, my dental school experiences were the three best years that I would not want to do over again.

I know for a fact that these years challenged all of us, intellectually, physically, and mentally in more ways than we would have liked. I mean, whose idea was it to give an exam question with 4 of the answer choices being: both A&B, A,B&(sprinkle of C) C, A,B,C, and (ounce of) D, and all the above? And with us being in the only accelerated dental program in America, I will never forget how many finals we had in a span of 3 days. To recount, we had 12. Even though these years were tear-inducing, challenging, and hard, being surrounded by the Dugoni family made it not only bearable, but enjoyable. During our three years here, members of our family got married, we met our life long best friends, became first time parents (or parents again, not sure how you handled that but I digress), and created memories that changed us as individuals.

Allow me to tell you a little bit about a conversation I had, with our very own Dr. Cindy Lyon. Before the start of our last quarter, I replied back to an email to Dr. Lyon about how bittersweet it felt to be almost across the finish line. I told her how this is a chapter I wasn’t ready to close quite yet. She said to me, “Your Dugoni chapter never really closes - you are welcome to come **home** for a visit anytime,” with home in bold. After reading that email, I thought of how much I admired my time here, and that I did in fact, create a home. A home where my Dugoni family will always be and where like every good home, we have all left our mark.

My Dugoni family, you all are the backbone to our school. In each and every one of you, I have found, seen, and learned kindness, empathy, diversity, devotion, laughter, leadership, and sheer greatness. I will never meet a group of people more bright, bold, hardworking, resilient, innovative and who love dentistry more than everyone in front of me. During our time in dental school, we have seen each other grow as clinicians, but more importantly, we grew into better people.

As one great man and dentist we have all come to know as Arthur A Dugoni once said, “We build people, and along the way, they become doctors.” We are not the same people that we were when we first walked through those glass doors on 5th Street. We are better. And it is because of all of us lifting each other up. We had an impact on each other. We have grown into better versions of ourselves, all while being a Dugoni student. The Dugoni School is the face of change – we will change dentistry into greater depths than ever before. We are the leaders in dentistry. We are visionaries. And it is no wonder I call Dugoni my home and everyone here my family.

Today, we celebrate because we have not only built each other up, but because we are now officially orthodontists, endodontists, dentists and dental hygienists. Enjoy this moment, and be the face of change. Congratulations to the Class of 2021. We did it!