

EXPLORATIONS

JOHN C. GREENE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER
FALL ISSUE 2020



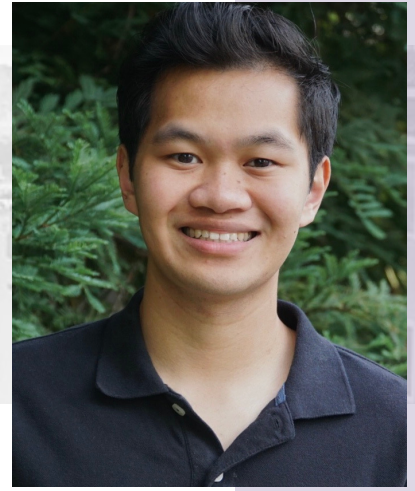
PHOTO CREDIT OLGA W BOEVA / SHUTTERSTOCK

Amidst the global pandemic, JGS remains committed to diversity and inclusion (see page 4). Turn to page 8 for an exclusive interview with Bradley Morgan on her experience as a transgender woman in the world of academia and research.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Members of the UCSF Dental Community:

I'm excited to share this new edition of Explorations with you all. Diversity, inclusion, and Covid-19 remain pertinent issues; this edition explores the intersection of research and these topics.

Fatigue is a word that largely describes the experiences of this past quarter. Video calls, political disunity, pandemic anxiety, and daylight-savings have all been staunch sources of exhaustion. Still, in spite of such weariness, I've witnessed incredible verve and resourcefulness within the UCSF community. D2 researchers have demonstrated admirable commitment continuing their summer research projects into the school year in spite of challenging coursework. D1's have shown a similar enthusiasm for research: many have wasted no time reaching out to faculty mentors and expressing their interest in specific projects. Bonus kudos to those who enrolled in the Fall IDS 186 elective: the JGS board and elective organizers appreciate all you participants! Moreover, we cannot thank our faculty guest speakers enough for donating their time to share their research projects with us.

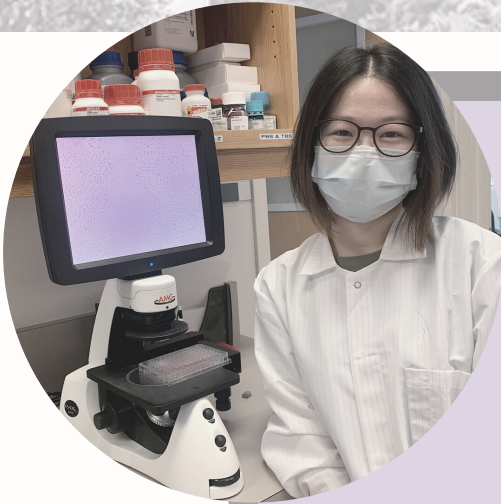
In this issue of Explorations, topics discussed in our previous newsletter are reviewed with fresh perspectives. Our very own Dr. Ganksy (he/him) expounds his role in voicing the School of Dentistry's concerns about carrying on research in the pandemic, in addition to emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion in research. Bradley Morgan (she/they), the first openly transgender student at UCSF, discusses her research and thoughts on fostering an inclusive space for all parties at UCSF. Finally, an interview with Vandan Kasar (she/her) examines her recent publication about oral healthcare and Covid-19 in addition to her experience as a fourth-year student in the midst of a pandemic. We are extremely grateful to these guest interviewees for their willingness to open up about relevant issues - we hope that everyone can learn from their wisdom.

Lastly, I encourage everyone to stay strong, safe, and focused in spite of the difficulties we've all faced this quarter. Let's not forget to maintain due diligence in cultivating inclusivity both within and outside UCSF - we still have work to do to uplift the underprivileged and move towards true equity. I behoove you to leverage your relational interconnectedness to promote a culture of safety, humility, and selflessness in our community.

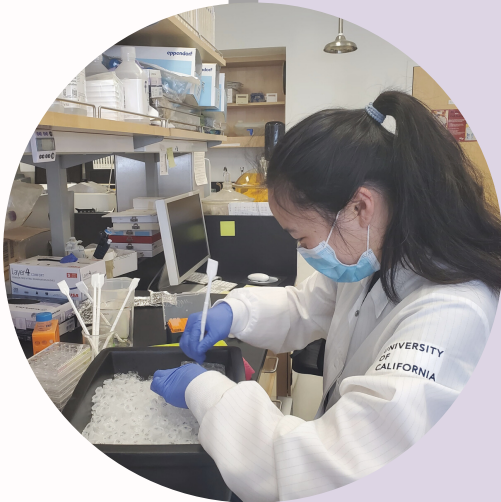
I'm grateful for you all. Take care,

Wesley Kuo (he/him)

THE JOHN C. GREENE SOCIETY



The John C. Greene Society was founded in 2002 under the mentorship of Dr. John S. Greenspan and Dr. John C. Greene, whose leadership was instrumental to the dental school's rise to prominence as a premier research institution. A major goal was to encourage active student participation in meaningful research, bringing student research into alignment with the quality investigations being conducted by the UCSF dental faculty.



Since that time, the John C. Greene Society has grown into one of the most recognized and respected student groups on campus. Student research participation at UCSF is at an all-time high, with dozens of students conducting fellowships each year, and many more traveling to present their findings at conferences across California, the country, and the world.



2020 Summer Research fellows conducting their respective research: Joy Geng '23 (Top) at the Kapila lab, Tiffany Huang '23 (Middle) at the Schneider lab, Alexander Le '23 (Bottom) doing remote research with the Lazar lab.

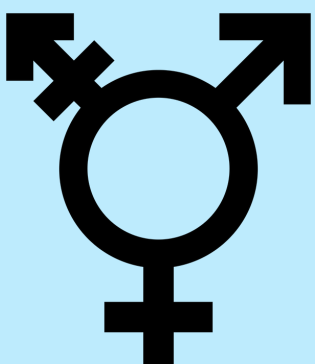
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: PART II

We at JGS are committed to anti-racism and challenging the unconscious biases and practices that perpetuate oppression. In our last issue, Dr. Obadan-Udoh, Assistant Professor of Preventative and Restorative Dental Sciences, shared her perspective on diversity in science, and her experiences as a black woman in academia. We learned about the importance of having strong, black, female role models and senior colleagues in positions of leadership, the social isolation of being an "underrepresented minority," and the need to build a pipeline for minority students through mentoring programs in low-income neighborhoods. As Dr. Obadan-Udoh said, "When there are diverse voices in a room, the conversations are richer, our collective experiences are improved, and our achievements are bigger."

As part of our ongoing series on diversity and inclusion in science and academia, we spoke to Bradley Morgan, Class of 2022, in this issue on her experience as a trans woman, student researcher, and former summer research fellow.

As before, we would like to pose the following questions to you--what is diversity and inclusion? Why is it important in science and research? And perhaps, what can we do to be better? If you have any ideas for future issues or have any feedback, please email us at jgs@ucsf.edu.

-Tiff, Steph, Vivian, and Jai Eun



New Associate Dean of Research:

Dr. Stuart Gansky

Dr. Stuart Gansky, MS, PhD is the new Associate Dean of Research in the UCSF School of Dentistry. Here, he discusses his role within the school and his plans for the future of research.

Why were you interested in becoming the new Associate Dean of Research?

In my career, I've worked with many researchers through collaborating on grants and papers or helping them analyze data. In this process, I've gotten to know about a lot of the research conducted in the school. I also have a depth of knowledge about how things work at UCSF and UC in general. I've been the UCSF system-wide representative, UC Research Policy Committee, and the chair of the research committee at UCSF for 2 years. Given this experience, I pursued the role of Associate Dean of Research to share my knowledge with people who are struggling and make the process easier for them.



PHOTO CREDIT UCSF.EDU.



What are you hoping to accomplish in your new role, and how has COVID-19 affected your goals?

A big role that I have is to represent the School of Dentistry's research within UCSF. When COVID-19 first hit, there was a vacancy in the Dean of Research position, so the SoD was not part of the conversation on safely ramping down research. Now that I have been part of that conversation, we have been able to discuss the unique elements that affect our school. It has been extremely important to have that representation and to be a voice.

My initial vision for the position was very different. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, I knew a lot of the ideas that I had were not going to be put into reality. What I am currently trying to do is to communicate with people and let them know about different opportunities to collaborate and brainstorm. A big part of my role is bringing groups of people together so they can discover their commonalities and work together in a big team science project.

We also plan to have more clinical research in the future. We will migrate from AxiUm to Apex/Epic with Wisdom, which will enable us to ask questions about how oral health and general health connect. Once we have EHR integrated, we will be able to access rich data from both medical and dental sides and to incorporate important health technology interventions into the clinic.

“What I enjoy the most right now is what I have been enjoying for the last 10 years, which is getting a chance to work with great and intelligent people - to mentor them, to help them get their research projects up and going, and to assist them in becoming more proficient researchers.”



How is the direction of research within the School balanced, given the funding from different organizations?

NIH and NIDCR are our biggest funders and their goals are national priorities, so we tend to follow their directions. NIDCR priorities have been (1) to train the most competent, rigorous researchers, (2) to support the most rigorous cutting edge research, (3) to reduce health disparity, and (4) to utilize precision medicine to improve human health. Many of these goals are general and consistent throughout the decade, and we are already meeting some of these goals. The next strategic plans will not deviate largely from the current strategic plans.

UCSF also has our own institutional planning that integrates education, clinical care, service, and research. However, University of California assures us freedom of intellectual pursuits. So if somebody wants to research a specific area, they can do it. We are assured complete scientific and academic freedom. So the larger questions that I have are: How can we synergize each individual effort to become a larger effort, and how can we anticipate future trends?

As the Associate Dean of Research, why do you think that diversity and inclusion is important in science and research?

Diversity and inclusion are vital in order to have different perspectives in science and research. My area of research is in health disparities, and in the past, our NIDCR director had realized, “Although we know how to prevent and cure disease in a lot of cases, what we don’t do well is getting it to people in a way that they can understand, accept, and embrace.” That last step is what bounced us a lot in terms of improving human health, so that has been an area of focus for me.

“While I may be an expert on what statistical model to use in analyzing data for a study, community members are experts on what works for them. We need to have the right representation and to include the people whose lives may be impacted from the start. In addition, certain things in human research are going to be universal, and other factors will vary depending on the specifics of the individuals, such as their genes or epigenetics. That is why diversity and inclusion are important from a scientific perspective, not just a moral or ethical obligation.”

Do you feel that UCSF is fostering this culture of diversity and inclusion?

UCSF is a leader in this field, but we still have a long way to go. Recently, I had a colleague who wrote an editorial on why she was leaving academic medicine due to the inadequacies in our field. This made me question the role that I had--was there something more that I could have done to make it a better environment for her or to make her research more successful? I have been thinking a lot about that and about my interactions with other people in research lately. We still need to change some of the systemic factors that favor people who have had advantages growing up and who have already achieved a lot. We need to think about ways to ensure that everybody can be successful.



Meet Bradley Morgan, '22



Could you tell us a bit about your research project?

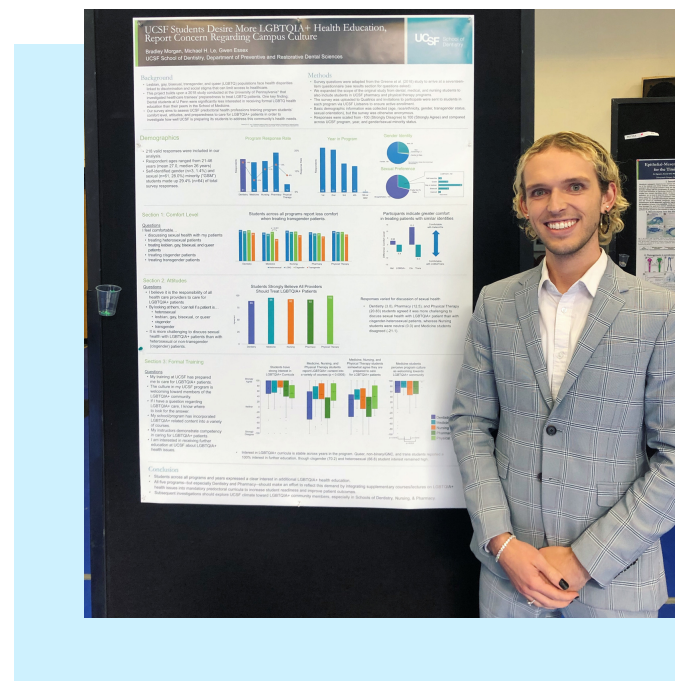
I participated in the summer dental student research fellowship program in summer 2019. This fellowship meant so much to me because I built my project from the ground up: I settled on a research topic close to my heart, searched the literature, designed a survey, and drafted a proposal under the guidance of my research mentor, Dr. Essex. My study investigated UCSF professional student attitudes, perceptions, and preparedness in treating members (patients) of the LGBTQIA+ community.

“All of our findings consistently supported the fact that there is a huge need, for dentistry in particular, to improve culture toward members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as for all five programs to increase LGBTQ+-centered patient education in their curricula.”

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We built on a study from the University of Pennsylvania and expanded it to include all five UCSF professional degree programs. One of our most interesting additions was a question asking respondents to rate school culture towards members (students, faculty, staff, patients) of the LGBTQIA+ community. We found that the School of Dentistry performed significantly the worst out of all five programs in terms of culture. Six of the nine total respondents who rated their program culture as unwelcoming toward LGBTQ+ members were from SOD. We also found that dental students strongly disagreed that LGBTQ+ health issues had been incorporated into their predoctoral curriculum. Not surprisingly, these same students felt the least prepared to treat LGBTQ+ patients. We believe the depth of LGBTQ+ health education has major implications in clinical practice.

I had the opportunity to present my independent project at UCSF School of Dentistry's Research & Clinical Excellence Day (R&C day). It was my first time ever presenting a poster and I remember feeling extremely nervous. I was constantly fighting feelings of inadequacy and a sense that my project was not as important as the others in the room because it was outside the realm of basic sciences...that somehow, public health research was inherently inferior to wet lab research. In the end, my project ended up tying for first place in the predoctoral category, and so receiving that



(surprise) validation of winning R&C day felt instrumental to my work. It gave me that validation that the public were hearing me and seeing my work, seeing my passion, seeing the importance and relevance of LGBTQ+ research. I left RCED with a newfound sense of pride and passion for my work, and I believe that other people saw that within me too.

If you are comfortable sharing, what has your experience been like in the field of science and research?

“In terms of inclusion for trans people at this school, I feel a personal responsibility to push these [diversity and inclusion] initiatives forward, and to make changes. The burden of improving climate and culture shouldn't be placed on the backs of the same people who are suffering.”

Being the first openly transgender student at UCSF School of Dentistry has been incredibly challenging. I have a lot of outsider or imposter syndrome in dental school--feeling like I don't fit in within the school more broadly and in research especially.

There's almost no dental-specific LGBTQ+ research. There just weren't a lot of people doing that kind of research in the dental realm, so I didn't have an established group or support system of people who were investigating similar topics. It felt very lonely at times.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you, and in what ways do you think it is important to the field of dentistry and research?

These topics are SO important. Misrepresentation or underrepresentation of racial/ethnic/gender/sexual/etc. minorities affects research outcomes every single day. Everyone approaches a project with their own biases and lived experiences and scientists are absolutely no different. When researchers fail to reflect the demographics or lived experiences of the populations they are studying, it becomes far too easy for them to make inappropriate conclusions because they are not integrated into those cultures or just don't have the appropriate lived experiences or background they need to be able to understand the full context of what they are even studying. If you belong to a majority group, and are studying a minority group, there are so many important ethical considerations. It is important to not just come in and study a population, but also to follow up with the results and make sure that something actually comes out of the research. Failure to do so is neglect.

“

From my experiences as a gender and sexual minority student at UCSF, I believe we really need to get serious not only about trying to accept a diverse class, but also about making a long-term concerted effort to build pipeline programs to give more resources to our minority students and to educate, mentor, and recruit students of color and LGBTQ+ students. We need to make them feel supported when they come here...the institutional support is SO important.

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A very personal example in my life has been my experience with Kawasaki disease, a cardiovascular condition that presents with rashes or lesions on various locations on the skin. These lesions are very noticeable in White people, and are considered the “textbook” clinical presentation, but many doctors are not educated to notice the same lesions in darker skin tones. They present totally differently. My diagnosis was fairly straightforward, but if I had a darker skin tone I could have been misdiagnosed or diagnosed much later, and you can imagine the potential downstream effects of that. Diversity and inclusion absolutely spills into patient outcomes for the translational research and patient-centered education that we consume as health professional students.

Do you think that UCSF is fostering a space of inclusion?

I acknowledge that I approach this question with plenty of privilege, most prominently due to my White racial identity. The school needs to make sure that minority students have the support and the opportunities that they were promised when they were interviewed, not to mention hiring more faculty of color, especially Black faculty, and more queer and trans faculty to serve as mentors to our students. Also, it is important for the school to fund research projects centered around underrepresented populations in health care, and to ensure the students conducting the research feel supported and get the mentors they need. At the end of the day, people seek community; they want to feel loved and supported, and this absolutely means being able to lean on colleagues with similar lived experiences.



Any last thoughts?

The message that I want to get across, especially to underrepresented students in research, is that your research interests MATTER. You may be one of the only people in the country with the same focus that you have, and this may cause you to feel extremely alone. That's how I felt with my project. But even when it is hard to take that initiative, when you don't have anyone to model your research after, still know that your research is SO important, and the work you're doing is important and valid, no matter how many people try to convince you otherwise. It's important to keep that fire and passion going and to break ground on those important research topics because there are so many people that will come after you and build on your foundation. Your research will have so many downstream effects, for your community, for patient care, for improving the lives of so many people. So stay motivated, stay focused. Please know I'm always here for support for anyone who needs it!

UCSF DENTAL STUDENT PARTICIPATES IN COVID-19 RESEARCH

We interviewed Vandan Kasar, who conducted a literature review on COVID-19 research in an academic setting. Here we delve into her scholarly commentary, as well as her perspective as a dental student provider during COVID-19.



Fourth year dental student Vandan Kasar published “Critical comments on COVID-19 outbreak: succinct advice for dentists and oral healthcare professionals by Cirillo” in Bioinformation on July 31, 2020 alongside two of her former UCLA Principal Investigators, Dr. Olivia S. Cajulis, and Dr. Francesco Chiappelli. The paper provided commentary on a letter to the editor published in Clinical Oral Investigations in May 19, 2020 by Nicola Cirillo of Melbourne Dental School, and helped to elucidate COVID-19 infection control standards across pre-DMD and pre-DDS programs in the US. Given the uncertainty and fear surrounding COVID-19, and its methods of transmission, her primary motivation was to provide transparency and sound evidence to dental schools, pre-Doctoral providers, and patients about the highest level of safety protocols in delivering dental care.

Vandan found that the infection control curriculum UCSF DDS students are taught was already very similar to the best practice standard of infection control. “I was pleasantly surprised that we [UCSF dental students], were already following most of the CDC-ADA guidelines on how to protect ourselves from these infectious diseases,” Vandan stated. These requirements include running water and suction lines in the morning and between patients, wearing PPE including gowns, eye wear, face shield, hair net, N-95,

and a surgical mask over that. She noted that Dr. Rai and infectious disease faculty teach DDS students to assume every patient has the potential to be unknowingly infectious, which aligns with universal dental infection control protocols. However, a difference she found was that UCSF dental students do not regularly employ HVAC systems in their daily treatment practices. Instead, Vandan recognized that UCSF protocol requires all patients to test COVID-negative prior to undergoing aerosolizing procedures, which also requires the presence of an assistant.

While Vandan is proud that her peers have a comprehensive understanding of all protocols, she admits that dental students can “get a little lax” about their infection control at times. There is still uncertainty with COVID-19, and she often sees some providers wiping down the cubicle only once instead of twice, or forgetting to run the water lines between patients. She recommends dental students to contemplate the question: “What if your 90-year old grandma is going to be your patient? How clean would you want this cubicle for her? And what if you got her sick because of a failure to wipe down the chair one more time?”

To Vandan, her patients are like her family and friends, and she cares a lot about their safety. As such she tries her best to uphold the highest standards for them, and as patient providers, it is our job to do the same.

PPE CHECKLIST:

- Disposable gowns ✓
- Eye wear ✓
- Face shield ✓
- Hair net ✓
- N-95 ✓
- Surgical mask ✓
- Disposable gloves ✓



In addition to patient safety, Vandan recognized the protocol needed to keep herself and other providers safe while being in the UCSF dental clinics. She understands that “as cumbersome as it can be to follow every infection control step, and wearing all the PPE- just do it and wear it all the time. And take all the precautions. For me, that includes getting home after the clinic and taking a shower right away, and putting everything in a separate laundry basket.” Vandan also gets COVID-19 tested regularly as well.

As a fourth year dental student, Vandan has the perspective of comparing pre-Covid times to now. She noted that the patient experience has changed a lot- “I used to see patients almost every day of the week, but now I’m lucky if I see 2-3 patients a week.” Even though free time and relaxing are important, Vandan advises students to come in to assist as much as possible to make up for the lost patient exposure.

“

After 4 years [of dental school and into the real world], no one is going to be watching over your work. Really take advantage of the learning experience and feedback from the faculty dentists that are there in the clinics right now. And we always need the assistance”

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Mika Katsura '21 (left) and Vandan Kasar '21 (right) pose in their costumes and partial PPE for a photo taken on Halloween 2020.

2019-2020 UCSF JGS Board Members

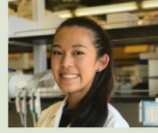
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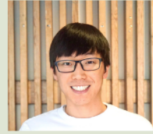
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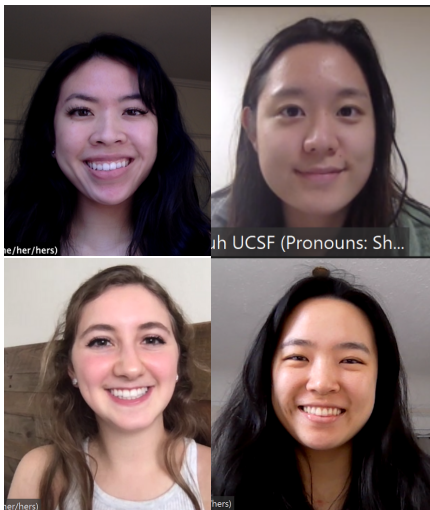
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Special thanks to...

Lisa Berens, DDS, MPH
Roger Mraz



Newsletter Editor Notes

The JGS Newsletter team is excited to welcome Vivian Nguyen '24 and Jai Eun Huh '24 as the Junior Newsletter editors. We are confident that they will bring the JGS newsletter to greater heights with their critical eye for design, prolific background in design and writing, and passion for research. They were important contributors to this issue and we look forward to their future work.

The goal of this issue was to introduce the new Associate Dean of Research Dr. Gansky, as well as to continue the conversation around diversity and inclusion in science and academia by hearing from the experience of our classmate and fellow student researcher. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed creating it!

Sincerely,
JGS 2020-21 Newsletter Editors in Chiefs
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