

My Rise, Fall, and Renewal

Jay Patel Class of 2025

My name is Jay Patel and I built this website. I tell my story not for me, but for you. I've been very passionate about the field of dentistry since I was 5. Both of my parents were dentists but they didn't inspire me to pursue the profession. Rather it was my parent's dental friends who grew to become my mentors. They were extremely wealthy, but they taught me that dentistry was bigger than myself. The well being of students and patients has always mattered more to me than money and ego. I had great mentors but my life wasn't the best before college. It was filled with abuse, violence, and cruelty. However, when I got to UCLA for undergrad in 2016 I fell in love with the campus, the community, the things to do, and the weather. It was PARADISE! I finally felt what happiness truly was. I didn't know what it was like to be treated with such kindness before and I finally felt loved all around from the UCLA community. I have so many fun crazy stories, and I got to experience some amazing things so insane, I'll never tell anyone. However, I didn't just goof off. I was always someone who lived in the future so I started networking. As a undergrad sophomore, I was able to sneak on a UCLA dental student bus to get to CDA CARES where I hung out with dental students. I also networked myself into running Dean Krebsbach's lab as an undergrad junior. The dental students especially from the Class of 2021 were so kind to me and I yearned to have a family like they did.

I graduated 6 months early from UCLA in biochemistry and when I applied to dental school I was shocked. I had gotten into some amazing elite schools but I failed to get into UCLA and UCSF due to an electronic error with the ADEA AASDAS application. UCLA and UCSF still took my application money even though they had filled their classes up which I had found out after I was rejected. Going from being so passionately desperate for UCLA SOD to an unfair rejection launched me into a multi-week depression. It was fucking brutal. A normal person may not be as depressed because they have a more well-rounded personality. However, I am naturally a very passionate individual but my career has always been the biggest part of my identity even though that may not be healthy. My parents never taught me any Indian language, and the Indians I grew up with were very cliquey so I wasn't accepted by them. I wasn't accepted by the white kids because I'm Indian. Fortunately the communities that accepted me the most were the Mexicans and a variety of Asians but alas I never was fully accepted. Therefore all of the passion and need for connection was filled by working on my career. It felt like it was everything to me at the time and I incorrectly thought I didn't have much else identity wise. Then when I got rejected I felt like a complete failure.

I managed to recover and reluctantly chose to take a gap year. I turned down other dental schools in the process. Good schools. During my gap year I did insane things. I traveled to Europe (which was cut short due to COVID), helped with dental lawsuits, ran the first COVID tests, and stabilized a multimillion dollar non-profit that houses students called UCHA with a team of other bright young adults in their early 20s. We dealt with financial ruin, scandals, falsified reports, and things you wouldn't imagine. When I reapplied to dental school I came in with an insane set of skills that few had in their early 20's. I got into UCLA SOD this time and was excited to start. This was the moment I was waiting for since I was 5.

I was excited, eager, and passionate to be a dental student but immediately noticed issues, even before school began. They had postponed our white coat ceremony a year in advance "due to COVID" even though other schools across the country were having their ceremonies. If my memory serves me correctly, they had venue issues and blamed their incompetence on COVID. I'm not sure about this but it's what I remember (UCLA SOD don't sue

me for defamation lol. I said I'm not sure). In the same way that the nonprofit UCHA was dysfunctional at the start of the pandemic, I noticed issues with our school. Communication was atrocious. There were rules and expectations that were not clear or consistent, faculty would not respond to important emails, and I noticed a strong lack of community. Part of this was due to COVID, and part of this was due to UCLA being an underfunded public dental school. I did not run for any class leadership because I was exhausted from helping manage that non-profit. At UCHA my friends and I worked like maniacs talking to lawyers, drafting projects, and I even had nightmares from evicting aggressive tenants and dealing with violent criminals in the middle of the night. Going from this to dental school I needed a break and thought there would be amazing leaders everywhere. However, as time went on the problems our class faced compounded. Faculty would post materials late or the night before and then give us an exam on it the next day, we would be told conflicting messages on what or how to study leading to high fail rates and faculty insulting our class instead of asking "Hey what went wrong logistically?" I was very vocal but my classmates still had not seen the same issues I had. A lot of them had not really ran organizations before and had only experience being an elite student. Elite students are great at studying hard and doing what they're told but they're not the best at building and running organizations, questioning why things are the way they are, and understanding what goes on behind the scenes. They are terrible risk takers and innovators because they are used to operating in a system instead of running it. My elite classmates worried about our class's reputation, and when it came to calling out faculty on their problems my classmates spoke poorly of me. They thought we needed to work harder instead of keeping faculty accountable. They said I was crazy, disrespectful, and unruly. I felt grossly misunderstood. I would often go to bed extremely angry at the school and my classmates and it consumed me. I spiraled downwards and often would go into a depression. Everyone seemed to be so focused on themselves and coming into dental school, I expected a community filled with loving, intelligent, and selfless people. These people absolutely exist at our school but when you are overworked and constantly insulted, it brings the worst out in people. It brought the worst out in me. Regardless I managed to use the skills I learned during my gap year and would make little videos, guides, or projects that would benefit the class. When I became a D2 my class elected me as Vice President in a landslide even though a lot of people ran. My classmates noticed my hard work. I won my election even though someone very close to me condescendingly said "Jay, I don't think ASB or cabinet is the place for you."

I want people looking at my story to know that often the outside world will doubt and judge you, but if you know deep down inside that you are doing the right thing, then you MUST go for it. People who are leaders and are very successful tend to be often misunderstood because they see something others don't and are ridiculed and ostracized until they prove the world wrong. As Arthur Schopenhauer quotes, "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." The idea of having women and minorities as dentists or even as regular human beings was once considered "radical" and passed through these same stages. For me personally, I was upset with how things were being run and I was told standing up would make students "look bad", people did not take me seriously, then people started talking behind my back. Finally, those same people come running to me with their problems. If you are interested in being a leader and someone who is not just successful but insanely successful, I'd recommend watching this video [here](#). You'll understand that revolutionary scientists, businessmen, and leaders are all heavily criticized. The reason is that in order to be revolutionary you have to go against the grain otherwise you're a follower or a basic leader, not a revolutionary one. Being a revolutionary leader is not for everyone and that's ok too! People's brutal criticism has caused brilliant people

to kill themselves despite them being right (Ludwig Eduard Boltzmann, Horace Wells). Human beings need love and connection and part of seeing the world differently means there's going to be times you are isolated and depressed. However if these innovators can push through, they become legends (Steve Jobs was called a lunatic and was fired from his own company before Apple. That company is now worth over a Trillion). People can be monsters and they will tear you down because they cannot understand you. Therefore you have to believe in yourself when no one does.

Most importantly, I also want people to know that forgiveness is so important. That person who told me ASB wasn't the place for me is a wonderful person. They have worked hard to serve others multiple times. They've put others above themselves and sacrificed more than most. I wouldn't be where I am without them and they have been a huge advocate for me. They, me, and everyone deserve a chance to grow, change, and be forgiven. I can say the same for my classmates. They appreciate me boundlessly now and I hold no grudges against them. I'm not better than them. I have done things I'm not proud of and I wouldn't want people to hold on to that. None of us are perfect so we always must forgive and move forward.

D2 was harder academically, especially because I'm not the best in the lab, but I was happy. Even though we all were suffering more it felt good to solve problems and have some ability to take action as a class leader. However, being a class leader you get more information and I started learning more about the internal causes of UCLA SOD's problems. Dentistry is underfunded, public schools are underfunded, and alumni don't donate to schools that overwork their students so UCLA SOD is underfunded. Faculty prefer to insult each other or students than change poorly designed rules and communication systems. There's also faculty freedom. Faculty freedom is the concept that faculty can teach in whatever style they want even if that style isn't conducive to learning. Faculty would give terrible lectures and get mad that no one wanted to show up to them. Frequently faculty wouldn't show up to their own lectures or have incorrect dates on their syllabi. It would make me angry, but I had learned from D1 and I did not let it consume me.

I don't hate our faculty. They work insanely hard for little money and many of them are geniuses. The issue is that they cannot agree on what our values are together and that they often fail to empathize or listen to students. Many of them have massive egos and they care more about their egos than the wellbeing of students or the dental profession altogether. I think it comes from not getting enough love in their childhoods or encountering trauma. Their inability to deal with their pain grossly impairs their ability to gain a basic level of respect and connect with people which infuriates them even more. Their ego also impairs their ability to even run the school at a basic level. If this wasn't the case, our facilities would be looking better due to alumni donations like other schools and there would be less conflict. We also have a lot of old faculty who want to retire and are drained but because academia pays poorly and the newer generations are insanely jaded, no one signs up. COVID has obliterated not just student to student interaction, but also student to faculty interaction. Dr. Mito whom I'm a big fan of says that change in academia is like moving a yacht; it's slow. However, Dr. Park who retired from his deanship in 2016 said change in academia is like moving a graveyard. This seems bleak and I don't know what the future holds but I am optimistic and I like a challenge.

I've seen the student body resurrect traditions that were lost, dentistry's technology is evolving, and we have some younger faculty who are ready to make change. Dental school is hard and when people get pushed into a corner, they often revert to their lowest instincts. It gets harder to see the bigger picture or contribute to an organization when you're on the edge. Dental school is hard. Believe me, I know. I've wanted to drop out multiple times. This school tricked me and my classmates into thinking it was way better than it was. It was tough for me to

accept my dream was a lie and lower my expectations to find happiness and connection amongst so much loneliness and misunderstanding. The hardest thing I ever did was walking into my first student faculty meeting as a newly elected student body president after finding out my brother killed himself. He jumped off the golden gate bridge. I had to stay strong and stoic because I knew that a lot of the faculty there lacked empathy and if they saw me get emotional, they would rip me apart which would lead to students not getting the support they needed. Show your emotions to people who love you, but never show it to wolves because they will tear you apart and sleep well at night. The meeting went well and for the rest of my term, I stood strong with so many wonderful people who carried me through hell and the most grueling part of my life. We accomplished so much together and we've managed to have the coolest, funniest, and legendary experiences that no one has ever gotten to experience. I know this because faculty came up to me and said they'd never seen these things in their entire career. I won't say publicly what they are but I'm down to talk if you contact me. As I finished up dental school after making astounding changes with my friends it felt fulfilling but empty simultaneously. The school continued to lose money, faculty, and patients. The palisades fires, the palestine-israel conflict, and the cessation of various forms of governmental funding traumatized us all. My class managed to graduate and although I believe the student body is more organized than in the past, overall the school is on a path to shut down. I say this not out of my own experiences but because faculty whom I respect believe it too. I had a panic attack in January 2021 because I saw the operations of the school and foresaw a shutdown. Whether it is worth it to give your passion to UCLA School of Dentistry or not is questionable and I honestly do not know if students can do anything to prevent the school from collapsing when it is managed so poorly.

However, history tells us that when humanity comes together with sacrifice and passion, greatness is achieved. Every student who comes to UCLA wants greatness in some form and has their own unique set of skills. Ask yourself, what can I contribute? How can I create a space that is better than what I had to deal with? How can I use my actions, not just my words to make the world a better place with work that I am proud of? There are a lot of problems at our school and in the world. I won't deny that. Regardless, I think it is important to understand that there will always be a need for passion, hardwork, and creativity. Whether you give it to UCLA, your nation, your religion, your ethnic group or wherever, just know you are needed somewhere. Make sure that place is worthy of your efforts or you may end up feeling taken for granted which can be exhausting. However, if there is anything that life has taught me it's this. Alone we crumble, but together we succeed. Fortify your mind, stay resilient, and work hard. Happiness is right around the corner if you're willing to fight for it.

Regards,
Jay Patel
2023-2024 ASB President