

**Ashna Patel, North Carolina '27****How do you work with or lead a team?**

When working in a team, I believe in fostering open communication, active listening, and collaboration. I approach leadership as a shared responsibility guided by a collective mission. Effective leadership is grounded in empathy and a genuine desire to uplift others. Whether I am leading a project or supporting a teammate behind the scenes, I strive to foster an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone feels valued.

Being a district trustee requires prioritizing building trust and fostering strong relationships within the team, while recognizing that a cohesive, motivated group is critical for achieving success. By actively listening to the team members' input, valuing their contributions, and providing guidance when needed, I aspire to create an environment where everyone feels empowered to excel. As Trustee, I aim to serve as a bridge between students across district and national ASDA, ensuring that resources are shared equitably. I strongly envision these qualities to be valuable in any dynamic environment, where collaboration, leadership, and adaptability are key to achieving our goals. Through this approach, I seek to help advance ASDA's mission of supporting dental students.

**What leadership experiences have equipped you for the District Trustee role?**

My leadership experiences across local, district, and national ASDA have equipped me with skills and perspective to effectively serve as District Trustee. Since my D1 year, I have had the privilege of supporting the missions of several student organizations, including SNDA, ASDA, and ADSO, which helped shape my understanding of advocacy, service, and collaboration within the dental profession.

At the district level, I have served as Logistics Event Chair and Director of Events. Through these roles, I managed complex timelines and logistics as well as collaborated with sponsors and speakers. While fulfilling these roles, I also gained valuable insight into the needs and operations of local chapters while working alongside other cabinet members. I worked closely with the liaisons, communications, and membership teams to design and execute a cohesive conference experience that reflected the goals and values of District 4 ASDA.

At the national level, I serve as a Contributing Editor on the Contour Editorial Board. This role has given me a unique opportunity to connect with dental students nationwide and gain insight into the diverse experiences within dental education. It has enhanced my ability to communicate ASDA's mission and initiatives while acquiring insight into national operations. Being part of the editorial board has been especially meaningful because it allowed me to help amplify student voices nationwide. Across all these roles, I have learned to view leadership as collaborative and flexible, stepping in wherever support is needed to ensure collective success.

**Why are you interested in the District Trustee role and what do you hope to accomplish in this position?**

Through my roles as District Trustee, I want to help bridge the gap between national, district, and local ASDA, ensuring that students feel supported, informed, and connected at every level. Through my involvement in ASDA, I have seen how impactful ASDA can be in advocating for and supporting dental students. I want to foster an environment where all students feel empowered to engage regardless of their school, leadership status, or background.

As a District Trustee, I aim to improve accessibility to resources by strengthening communication between national ASDA and local chapters. This includes translating national ASDA strategy into actionable support for chapters, while also relaying district-wide student concerns back to national leadership. I am particularly interested in supporting initiatives focused on mentorship, wellness, financial literacy, and student engagement. This would include promoting structured mentorship programs that connect students across schools and class years, hosting educational webinars on student-identified needs, and amplifying awareness of ASDA's resources.

Additionally, I aim to increase inter-chapter communication and collaboration to give chapters a space to support one another. Through my experience in District 4 ASDA retreats, I gained a valuable perspective on how different ASDA chapters operate. This strengthens district unity while also helping students and leaders better support their chapters. Ultimately, my goal as District Trustee is to foster an inclusive and well-connected district where students feel inspired to actively engage with ASDA. ASDA should feel like a resource for every dental student, not just those in leadership positions.

**What are 2-3 issues important to dental students?**

1. Financial burden and uncertainty about student loans –

In light of the recent policies, many students matriculating into dental schools have been experiencing significant stress navigating loan options available to fund their education. Current dental students are also unaware of their repayment options upon graduation. Increasing transparency, financial education, and advocacy is essential to support students. Students should be given resources that can help mitigate the limitations affecting access to dental education due to their financial background. On a national level, advocating for these resources along with comprehensive loan education is essential to promoting long-term sustainability in the dental profession. Within the local chapters and district, it is essential to create a platform for students outside of leadership roles to voice their questions and concerns surrounding financial literacy, as well as host webinars that can provide key insights to promote informed decision-making.

2. Burnout -

The rigorous curriculum of dental schools, combined with high expectations and time constraints, can put students in a position susceptible to emotional and mental exhaustion. Expanding conversations about mental health and providing students with open, accessible avenues for support can help reduce stigma and encourage students to seek resources early on. Providing access to external resources, such as a counselor, can help create a supportive environment that allows students to voice their thoughts. Within districts and local chapters, spreading the word about resources as well as promoting structured mentorship programs and wellness initiatives, encourages dental students to thrive both academically and individually.