

**Sophia Acosta Avilés, Ponce '28****How do you work with or lead a team?**

I lead teams through collaboration, clear communication, and shared accountability. I believe effective leadership begins with listening, which helps understand the needs, strengths, and perspectives of team members. This way, goals can be approached collectively and efficiently. By fostering an inclusive environment, I encourage open dialogue and ensure that every member feels valued and empowered to contribute.

I prioritize organization and strategic delegation, assigning responsibilities based on individual strengths while maintaining transparency and follow-through. This approach fosters ownership, builds trust, and enables the team to work cohesively toward a shared objective. I also emphasize adaptability, recognizing that teams and circumstances evolve and that leadership requires flexibility and problem-solving under changing conditions.

Leading by example is a central part of my approach. I hold myself to the same standards I expect of others, maintaining professionalism, reliability, and consistency. When challenges arise, I address them proactively, balancing decisiveness with empathy to support both team morale and productivity.

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

My leadership experiences have equipped me with the organizational, collaborative, and advocacy skills essential for the District Trustee role. Serving as the founding chapter president of the Ponce Health Sciences University ASDA chapter was central to shaping my leadership style. Building a chapter from the ground up requires clear communication, trust in my team, and the ability to delegate responsibilities effectively while keeping everyone aligned with our mission. I gained firsthand experience in strategic planning, communication with national leadership, and representing the needs and interests of student members. This role strengthened my ability to serve as a liaison between leadership bodies and students, a core responsibility of a District Trustee.

Previously, I served as president of my undergraduate university's National Biological Honor Society, TriBeta, where I developed a strong foundation in team management, delegation, and accountability. This experience reinforced the importance of empowering others and fostering collaboration to achieve shared goals.

Additionally, serving as secretary of my university's Puerto Rico Pre-Dental Association chapter for two consecutive years provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the behind-the-scenes work required for an organization to thrive. Through this role, I strengthened my organizational skills, attention to detail, and appreciation for teamwork. Most importantly, I

learned that no president can lead effectively without the support of a strong, engaged team, and that it is the responsibility of leadership to uplift and support that team.

Together, these experiences have prepared me to represent my district with professionalism, empathy, and a commitment to collaboration and service.

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

I am interested in the District Trustee role because it allows me to further serve and advocate for dental students across District 5 while strengthening collaboration among our eight chapters. I am motivated by the opportunity to represent student voices at the district level and to contribute to creating a more connected, inclusive, and supportive ASDA community.

Having established the ASDA chapter at Ponce Health Sciences University two years ago, I bring a unique perspective on the challenges faced by newer or underrepresented chapters. This experience has given me insight into issues such as building engagement, navigating limited resources, and establishing continuity. As District Trustee, I aim to support these chapters by serving as a reliable resource and advocate for their growth and sustainability.

I am also passionate about encouraging inter-chapter collaboration. Within Puerto Rico, the three ASDA chapters have made intentional efforts to strengthen communication and unity through shared initiatives, including planning a three-chapter beach day and UPR ASDA extending invitations to the other two Puerto Rico chapters to attend its ASDA convention. I hope to expand similar opportunities district-wide to promote collaboration, shared learning, and connection among members.

Additionally, I aim to establish a mentorship initiative that connects ASDA members interested in future district leadership with current district officers, fostering leadership development and continuity within ASDA.

Through this role, I hope to contribute meaningfully to a unified District 5 where every chapter feels supported, represented, and empowered.

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

Two critical issues facing dental students today are financial strain and burnout, both of which significantly impact academic performance, well-being, and long-term professional success.

Student debt and financial stress remain a major concern. Dental education is associated with high tuition costs, rising fees, and expensive materials, all of which place a substantial burden on students even before entering the workforce. In addition, recent legislative and economic changes have introduced uncertainty for pre-dental and dental students alike, potentially

affecting financial aid availability and repayment structures. These challenges can discourage prospective applicants and place additional pressure on current students who are already balancing rigorous academic and clinical demands. Addressing financial literacy, advocating for affordable education, and supporting policies that protect students are essential to ensuring accessibility and sustainability within the profession.

Another significant issue is burnout. Dental school is academically intense and emotionally demanding, often requiring students to manage heavy workloads, high expectations, and patient care responsibilities simultaneously. In this environment, students may neglect rest, mental health, and self-care, myself included at times. Chronic stress and burnout can negatively affect academic outcomes, clinical performance, and patient interactions. Promoting wellness, encouraging balance, and normalizing conversations around mental health are vital to supporting student success.

By acknowledging and addressing both financial strain and burnout, ASDA can continue to advocate for a healthier, more supported dental student experience. One that enables students to thrive both academically and personally.