



*"That continued impact has been one of the greatest rewards of teaching and speaks to the camaraderie and mentorship that develop when like-minded people are genuinely invested in taking their education to the next level."*

## Teaching: A Reciprocal Experience

By Leila Zadeh, DMD, FAGD

Teaching is incredibly rewarding. From an altruistic lens, there is a unique satisfaction in watching a student navigate a difficult problem for the first time and then evolve from it. And, from a personal growth perspective, teaching also forces you to deconstruct your own thoughts and behaviors. You are forced to break down the instincts of doing things by muscle memory as you learn to analyze and justify your actions during instruction. Teaching has sharpened my own skills in ways I never expected because the true test of deep understanding is whether you can teach something effectively to others.

I always knew that I wanted to teach, but the opportunity came sooner than expected following my advanced education in general dentistry (AEGD) residency with NYU Langone's program at the Arizona School of Dentistry & Oral Health (ASDOH). I had a very positive training experience, and, shortly after graduating, I was asked to teach at the same postdoctoral residency program. Teaching postdoctoral residents was formative for me. Supporting their growth, answering questions chairside and helping with patient care confirmed something I had long suspected: Teaching was not just something I enjoyed; it was something I felt called to do.

A few years later, I returned to ASDOH as part-time faculty, this time working with predoctoral students in the simulation clinic and collaborating with the prosthodontics department for courses such as Complete Dentures. I was drawn to this role because of how influential the simulation environment is in training the minds and hands of young clinicians. It is where students first begin translating theory into confident clinical decision-making. Drawing on my background as a dental technician, I was able to help students better understand prosthetic design from both the clinical and laboratory perspectives.

The most rewarding aspect of teaching at ASDOH was the people. I worked alongside generous, dedicated colleagues who were deeply committed to their students. I also had the privilege of teaching a group of exceptional residents and students, many of whom I still mentor to this day. That continued impact has been

one of the greatest rewards of teaching and speaks to the camaraderie and mentorship that develop when like-minded people are genuinely invested in taking their education to the next level.

Despite all the positives, part-time university teaching does come with financial tradeoffs. Compensation is not comparable to full-time private practice, and benefits are limited. That said, it is predictable income, and the flexibility of a part-time academic schedule is invaluable. It has allowed me the time and space to complete the continuing education course requirements toward my AGD Mastership and the full Spear Education curriculum on an accelerated timeline. I also was able to balance teaching with other organizations, such as digitalDDS and NYU Langone's AEGD residency at Saint Vincent de Paul's dental clinic. These teaching experiences ultimately led to my current roles as visiting faculty and director of digital clinical content at Spear Education.

Balancing teaching with other professional responsibilities was not a problem because university days were scheduled well in advance, allowing me to plan accordingly. While steady, supplemental income can be an added bonus, my motivation for teaching has always been rooted in fulfillment. As Frank Spear often says, "Education is an act of love." That philosophy resonates deeply with me.

The best part about teaching is the human connection. It's the shared moment when someone feels seen or understood, a concept clicks, and confidence grows. Over time, I've come to appreciate that teaching is reciprocal. In helping others feel understood, I often feel the same in return. Whether in the clinic, simulation lab, classroom, or now helping build curriculum and hybrid learning experiences at Spear, that shared human experience is what continues to give my work meaning. ♦

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