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# OMICRON KAPPA UPSILON

## A HISTORICAL AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

Founded by G. V. Black at Northwestern Dental School in 1914, Omicron Kappa Upsilon is the “Phi Beta Kappa” of dentistry, honoring students, faculty members, and honorary members for academic excellence and professional character. In addition, the honor society has a history of granting recognition of schools and individuals who have distinguished themselves and show promise for advancing dental education.

Omicron Kappa Upsilon (OKU) is the national honor society in dentistry, symbolizing the outstanding scholarship and character of graduating senior dental students, as determined by dental school faculty. The organization is generally referred to as the “Phi Beta Kappa” of dentistry, with membership restricted to dentists recognized in attaining a high grade point average upon graduation from dental school. More recently, OKU has broadened its sphere of influence beyond scholarship and includes such initiatives as service, mentorship, outreach, and research.

Primary alumni membership in OKU is first determined using a two-step process: first class rank is considered (top 20% of the dental school graduating class upon GPA), the faculty vote from this pool based on other qualities including character, service, research, etc (top 12% of the dental school graduating class). Therefore, in a class of 100 dental students, only 12 students are inducted into the local dental school OKU chapter as alumni members upon graduation.

Other categories of OKU membership are faculty and honorary membership. These categories also follow specific criteria for induction, such as excellence in teaching, research, and service to the component dental school (please see [www.oku.org](http://www.oku.org) for further details).

OKU has its origin with the senior graduating dental class of 1914 at Northwestern University in Chicago. Dr. Green Vardiman Black, known as

“GV Black,” dean of the Northwestern University Dental School, initiated the first OKU chapter (“Alpha” chapter). Black then invited the deans of 51 other schools to organize and form a national network composed of local honorary dental societies, unified with a gold OKU insignia (on April 8, 1915), a certificate of incorporation (state of Illinois on March 15, 1916), and constitution and bylaws (1921).

Several dental schools quickly followed and became charter members. These include, in order: the University of Pittsburgh (Beta chapter); Washington University, St. Louis (Gamma chapter); North Pacific Dental College, Seattle (Delta chapter); Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska (Epsilon chapter); University of Southern California (Zeta chapter); The Ohio State University (Theta chapter), Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee (Iota chapter), University of Pennsylvania (Eta chapter), and Medical College of Georgia, Augusta



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Table 1: OKU CHAPTERS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Active</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Inception</i>	<i>Secretary</i>
Alpha	No	Northwestern University	1914	
Beta	Yes	University of Pittsburgh	1916	Dr. Michael A. Dobos
Gamma	No	Washington University at St. Louis	1916	
Delta	Yes	University of Oregon	1916	Dr. Larry Doyle
Epsilon	Yes	Creighton University	1916	Dr. Gary H. Westerman
Zeta	Yes	University of Southern California	1916	Dr. John Sanders
Eta	Yes	University of Pennsylvania	1916	Dr. Arthur I. Steinberg
Theta	Yes	Ohio State University	1916	Dr. John Walters
Iota	No	Vanderbilt University	1916	
Kappa	Yes	Virginia Commonwealth University	1921	Dr. Carol Brooks
Lambda	No	Emory University	1923	
Mu	Yes	University of Iowa	1923	Dr. Heather Heddens
Nu	Yes	University of Louisville	1924	Dr. Gary A. Crim
Xi	Yes	Marquette University	1924	Dr. Thomas Smithy
Omicron	Yes	Baylor College of Dentistry	1925	Dr. Brent Hutson
Pi	No	Loyola University (Chicago)	1925	
Rho	Yes	University of Missouri at Kansas City	1928	Dr. John Rapley
Sigma	Yes	University of Illinois	1928	Dr. James Ricker
Tau	No	Loyola University (New Orleans)	1928	
Upsilon	Yes	Case Western Reserve University	1929	Dr. Madge Potts-Williams
Phi	Yes	University of Maryland	1929	Dr. Elaine Romberg
Chi	Yes	University of Michigan	1929	Dr. Philip Richards
Psi	Yes	University of Tennessee	1929	Dr. Mark Scarbecz
Omega	Yes	New York University	1929	Dr. Michael B. Ferguson
Alpha Alpha	Yes	University of Nebraska	1929	Dr. Paul Hansen
Beta Beta	Yes	University of Minnesota	1929	Dr. Carol Meyer
Gamma Gamma	Yes	Harvard University	1930	Dr. I. Leon Dogon
Delta Delta	Yes	University of the Pacific	1933	Dr. Robert Sarka
Epsilon Epsilon	Yes	Columbia University	1934	Dr. Jason J. Psillakis
Zeta Zeta	No	Georgetown University	1934	
Eta Eta	No	Saint Louis University	1934	
Theta Theta	Yes	Indiana University	1934	Dr. Lisa Willis
Kappa Kappa	Yes	Temple University	1936	Dr. Louis Tarnoff
Lambda Lambda	Yes	State University of N.Y. at Buffalo	1937	Dr. Gerard Wieczkowski Jr.
Mu Mu	Yes	University of Texas Houston	1940	Dr. Lisa Thomas
Nu Nu	Yes	University of Detroit Mercy	1941	Dr. James Winkler
Xi Xi	Yes	Tufts University	1944	Dr. Arthur Weiner
Omicron Omicron	Yes	Meharry Medical College	1945	Dr. William Scales
Pi Pi	Yes	Howard University	1948	Dr. Cecile E. Skinner
Rho Rho	Yes	University of California-San Francisco	1948	Dr. Molly Newlon
Sigma Sigma	Yes	University of Washington	1950	Dr. Douglas Verhoef
Tau Tau	Yes	University of Toronto, Canada	1950	Dr. Julia Rukavani
Upsilon Upsilon	Yes	University of North Carolina	1953	Dr. Allen Samuelson
Phi Phi	Yes	University of Alabama	1954	Dr. Merrie H. Ramp
Chi Chi	Yes	Loma Linda University	1956	Dr. Gregory Mitchell
Psi Psi	No	Fairleigh Dickinson University	1957	
Omega Omega	Yes	UMDNJ-New Jersey Dental School	1957	Dr. James Delahanty
Alpha Beta	Yes	West Virginia University	1961	Dr. Robert Wanker
Beta Gamma	Yes	University of Puerto Rico	1961	Dr. Darrel Hillman
Gamma Delta	No	University of Manitoba, Canada	1961	
Delta Epsilon	Yes	University of Kentucky	1966	Dr. Robert Kovarik
Epsilon Zeta	Yes	UCLA	1967	Dr. Carol A. Bibb
Zeta Eta	Yes	University of South Carolina	1970	Dr. Walter Renne
Eta Theta	No	University of British Columbia	1970	
Theta Kappa	Yes	Louisiana State University	1971	Dr. J. Lee Hochstedler
Kappa Lambda	Yes	Georgia Health Sciences University	1972	Dr. Kevin Frazier
Lambda Mu	Yes	Boston University	1972	Dr. Catherine S. Sarkis
Mu Nu	Yes	University of Texas, San Antonio	1973	Dr. Michael Huber
Nu Xi	Yes	Southern Illinois University	1973	Dr. Debra Dixon
Xi Omicron	Yes	University of Florida	1974	Dr. Ronald E. Watson
Omicron Pi	Yes	University of Oklahoma	1975	Dr. J. Mark Felton
Pi Rho	Yes	University of Colorado	1976	Dr. John D. McDowell
Rho Sigma	Yes	University of Mississippi	1977	Dr. William T. Buchanan
Sigma Tau	Yes	Stony Brook University	1977	Dr. Denise Trochesset
Tau Upsilon	No	Oral Roberts University	1979	
Upsilon Phi	No	University of Western Ontario, Canada	1984	
Phi Chi	Yes	University of Connecticut	1997	Dr. Steven M. Lepowsky
Chi Psi	Yes	Nova Southeastern University	2000	Dr. Harvey Quinton
Psi Omega	Yes	University of Nevada Las Vegas	2003	Dr. Marcia M Ditmeyer
Beta Alpha	Yes	Arizona School of Dentistry & Oral Health	2007	Dr. Mike Lazarski
Beta Delta	Yes	Midwestern University	2010	Dr. Christine Halket



(Kappa chapter). Due to the closure of Northwestern University Dental School in Chicago several years ago, the University of Pittsburgh, Beta chapter, is now the oldest OKU chapter in existence. All current OKU component chapters in good standing are listed in Table 1.

The mission of OKU is reflected in the origin of its name, OKU, indicating “Conservation of Teeth and Health.” Omicron represents “odious,” or teeth, Kappa represents the first letter of Kai, the Greek word for “and,” and Upsilon represents “health,” since Upsilon is the closest Greek letter to sound like the letter “h” in English. Sigma (Greek letter for “S”) represents “conservation” and is the predominant Greek letter on the OKU logo (see top right).

Further historical information was published as “historical review of OKU” by Erling Theon (1958) and, although no longer in print, it is available on the OKU.org Web site (see tab on “history” [www.OKU.org](http://www.OKU.org)).

In 2005, a major electronic archival and database project was approved by the OKU Supreme Chapter board of directors (officers) and funded in three-year increments from the general ledger account. This project, referred to as the “OKU-information technology initiative” or “OKU-IT,” has two aims:

To develop a dynamic and historic database website of all OKU component chapters and supreme chapter members, officers, annual meeting minutes, applications for certificates, keys, necrology, and contact information (addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and officers) of current chapters. Working with a web master, the current (since 2000) Supreme Chapter Editor, Dr. James Delahanty, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Newark, has been supervising this arm of the OKU-IT initiative. Annual updates and revisions are completed by June 30 of each academic year.

To electronically scan and archive each paper document, photograph, and memorabilia of the Supreme Chapter library and files (since OKU’s inaugural meeting in 1914). This project is ongoing and requires characterization of the tens of thousands of OKU documents. This arm of the OKU-IT initiative is supervised by the current (since 1990) Supreme Chapter Executive Secretary/Treasurer, Dr. Jon B. Suzuki, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Although OKU has as its origins to honor dental students for excellence in scholarship and character, several programs have enhanced its development in maturation as a national program. In the 1980s, the “American Fund for Dental Health (AFDH)-Charles Craig Education Fellowship” was financially sponsored by OKU. This award provided tuition and living expenses for two years for graduate students of specialty training with the obligation to enter academic dentistry full-time for a minimum of five years. These recipients have continued their academic careers and have emerged to become deans, associate deans, and leaders within the profession. Although the AFDH-Charles Craig Education Fellowship Award was recently discontinued, other OKU awards emerged upon nomination, development, and approval by the board of directors (officers) of the Supreme Chapter, the governing authority of the national network of chapters. Established in 1997, and awarded annually since 1998, the Dr. Stephen H. Leeper Teaching Excellence Award has been dedicated to individuals who have demonstrated innovative teaching styles and have exhibited consistent excellence in dental education. A list of award recipients can be found in Table 2.



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In 1999 two new awards were approved by the Supreme Chapter. The Omicron Kappa Upsilon-Charles Craig Teaching Award was created to recognize dental educators who have been teaching fewer than five years and have demonstrated innovative teaching techniques in the art and science of dentistry. Faculty at the undergraduate, graduate, and residency training levels are eligible and creativity, motivation, and innovation are emphasized. Recipients with their university affiliation are listed in Table 3.

The Omicron Kappa Upsilon "Chapter Award" recognizes an OKU component chapter that has created exemplary programs promoting excellence at the local level. The award honors a dental school chapter that has created innovative programs fostering professional development in the spirit of OKU. Component chapters receiving this prestigious award are listed in Table 4. Details on academic service, scholarship, and research innovations supported by local component chapters may be found on [www.OKU.org](http://www.OKU.org) and includes projects such as sponsorships of "white coat" ceremonies, tuition scholarships, Haiti relief programs, and dental care to disadvantaged patients in the Dominican Republic.

At the 2005 annual meeting of Omicron Kappa Upsilon, the supreme chapter established the "New Educator Research Grant" with the provision that awarding of the first grant be deferred until the necessary funds (capital) are raised to finance the award. Pursuant to this motion, the board of directors has continued the task of soliciting the financial support to begin funding this new award.

The goals of the OKU new educator research grant are two-fold: first, to enable junior faculty to develop research skills with an established mentor; and, second, to provide junior faculty with

the opportunity to initiate a research project that can develop into a larger, extramurally funded study. It is expected that the recipient will present the results of his or her research at the annual business meeting of the Supreme Chapter of Omicron Kappa Upsilon during the American Dental Education Association or the International-American Association for Dental Research annual meetings following completion of the funded project.

In the past decade, OKU has partnered with its "sister" chapter, the Dental Hygiene Honor Society, Sigma Phi Alpha. Each alternate year, the two honorary organizations have organized and financially sponsored an "OKU-Sigma Phi Alpha" joint symposium at the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) annual meeting. Recent topics have included "diversity," "ethics," "mentorship," and "imaging in dentistry and medicine." National officers from OKU and Sigma Phi Alpha work together beginning one year prior to this symposium event.

In conclusion, OKU remains a premier and highly selective honorary dental organization which recognizes scholarship and character. However, the sphere of influence of OKU has recently extended beyond academics and now includes service and related activities. Characteristics such as leadership in academic dentistry, organized dentistry, and clinical practice frequently have their origins in OKU membership. The organization will continue to produce leaders who motivate dental students to achieve academic and clinical excellence. ■

**Table 2: THE OMICRON KAPPA UPSILON—STEPHEN H. LEEPER AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Instructor</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Dental School</i>
1998	Dr. Paul Desjardins	Omega Omega	University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey
1999	Dr. Frank Dowd	Epsilon	Creighton University
2000	Dr. Herbert Schillingburg Jr.	Omicron Pi	University of Oklahoma
2001	Dr. Stuart C. White	Epsilon	University of California-Los Angeles
2002	Dr. Karen Crews	Rho Sigma	University of Mississippi
2003	Dr. Thomas D. Marshall	Mu Nu	University of Texas at San Antonio
2004	Dr. Kenneth I. Knowles	Epsilon	Creighton University
2005	Dr. Martin F. Land	Nu Xi	Southern Illinois University
2006	Dr. Michael Glick	Omega Omega	University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey
2007	Dr. Donald E. Willmann	Mu Nu	University of Texas Health Science at San Antonio
2008	Dr. Stanton Harn	Alpha Alpha	University of Nebraska College of Dentistry
2009	Dr. Aldridge D. Wilder Jr.	Upsilon Upsilon	University of North Carolina
2010	Dr. Allan J. Kucine	Sigma Tau	State University of New York at Stony Brook
2011	Dr. James Summitt	Mu Nu	University of Texas at San Antonio

**Table 3: RECIPIENTS OF THE OMICRON KAPPA UPSILON—CHARLES CRAIG TEACHING AWARD**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Graduate Student</i>	<i>Dental School</i>
2000	Dr. Thomas Salinas	Louisiana State University School of Dentistry
2001	Dr. Carol Murdock	Creighton University School of Dentistry
2002	Dr. Michael Ignelzi Jr.	University of Michigan School of Dentistry
2003	Dr. R. Scott Shaddy	Creighton University School of Dentistry
2004	Dr. Karl Keiser	University of Texas, San Antonio
2005	Dr. John W. Shaner	Creighton University School of Dentistry
2006	Dr. E. Richardo Schwedhelm	University of Washington School of Dentistry
2007	Dr. Benita Sobieraj	University of Buffalo, SUNY
2008	Dr. Lucinda J. Lyon	University of the Pacific
2009	Dr. Nicole S. Kimmes	Creighton University School of Dentistry
2010	Dr. Rocio Quinonez	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
2011	Dr. Paul Luepke	Marquette University

**Table 4: OMICRON KAPPA UPSILON CHAPTER AWARD RECIPIENTS**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Dental School</i>
2001	Omega Omega	University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey
2003	Delta Delta	University of the Pacific
2004	Xi	Marquette University
2005	Omega	New York University
2006	Xi Xi	Tufts University
2007	Mu Mu	University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston
2008	Beta	University of Pittsburgh
2009	Pi Pi	Howard University
2010	Theta Theta	Indiana University
2011	Kappa Kappa	Temple University