



At their other day jobs, from left, David Croglia, '87, Paul Ziarnowski, '77, and Lisa Yerke, '06. ▲

MARK MULVILLE

PART-TIME FACULTY ARE FULL-TIME MAINSTAYS OF DENTAL EDUCATION

# Teaching what they practice

BY JIM BISCO

**T**HE TRADITION OF practicing dentists taking time to teach is as old as dentistry itself; the central role of practitioners as faculty is as old as the earliest organized dental schools. That's true at the School of Dental Medicine, as it is at dental schools across the country. The four part-time faculty profiled here are representative of practitioners who teach.

At the close of the 2009-10 academic year, the School of Dental Medicine had 75 full-time faculty, 106 part-time faculty and 104 volunteer faculty. The distinction between full- and part-time faculty as teachers is primarily time commitment, although even that can be slight: in special cases a part-time faculty member might have a .9 FTE (full-time equivalency) commitment. Most are .2 (one day) or .4 (two days), scheduling their teaching to balance the school's needs and their professional obligations.

Most part-time faculty do their teaching through clinical supervision of student dentists, but some teach entire courses, some lecture in courses and others engage in research.

Volunteer faculty have more occasional involvement with the school, primarily through service opportunities for students, such as community outreach. Unlike part-time faculty, volunteers are not on the payroll.

Part-time faculty participate in the governance of the school as full voting members of the faculty; they serve on committees (including, along with volunteers, the admissions committee—see Page 17). And they do draw a salary, although as Jude Fabiano, '77, associate dean for clinical affairs and himself a former part-time faculty member notes, the income from part-time teaching is a sacrifice.

## David Croglia

David Croglia, '87, always felt that if it weren't dentistry, he might have gone into teaching. He always had an interest in science. "My fallback was always to be a biology teacher, either at high school or college level," he says. He particularly relished his student experience as a teaching assistant for undergrads in dental school.

The UB alumnus joined the part-time faculty in 1988, a year after he graduated. He teaches restorative procedures during two clinical periods each Friday and maintains his own general practice, established more than 20 years ago.

"I've always been very grateful for how well the school prepared me to go out and start a career. Whatever success I've had in my practice goes back to the roots of UB and the dental school. There are times when I'm working on a patient, and I'll still think of something somebody said to me 25 years ago. Those kinds of things stick with you. Some of that motivation I try to carry on in my teaching."

Croglia acknowledges the collaborative environment, where ideas and cases

are discussed among fellow faculty members, some of whom were his teachers.

For the past 15 years, Croglia has developed his interest in sports dentistry, teaching a senior elective in the subject. He was also named staff dentist for UB Athletics in 1995, tending to about 400 athletes from all UB's varsity teams, from making mouth guards to providing emergency treatment. Last season he began providing dental services to the Buffalo Sabres.

Most of Croglia's work deals with standard fillings, crowns and bridges. Sometimes the treatment on the clinic

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floor crosses over and a student may work with him and a specialist faculty member. "It's dentistry that we do 90 percent of the time in practice," he relates. "Though a lot of it is pretty routine, it's refreshing working with students. It forces you to look back at things that you do on a daily basis and reinforces why you're doing certain things."

Croglia is grateful for the opportunity to give back the talent that was first developed in the dental school and the experience gained over two decades of practice.

"There's always the joke that nobody teaches for the money, and to some extent, I don't think I'm unique in that way. That's how people are at the dental school. The people here love to teach and enjoy that interaction with students and colleagues. Those are all the things that really make it worthwhile."

## Lisa Marie Yerke

Fresh from residency training, Lisa Marie Yerke, '06, became the only woman periodontist practicing in Western New York and joined the Department of Periodontics and Endodontics as a clinical assistant professor.

The enthusiastic Eggertsville native discovered during dental school that she was more interested in bacterial infections and surgery than general dentistry. She took a minor in periodontics here before going on to a specialty program at Eastman Dental Center in Rochester.

When she was invited back to the area to join a periodontal practice last year, Yerke knew that she wanted to also give back to the school that launched her interest in dentistry. Last August, she began teaching senior dental students in two clinics one day a week.

"I was very surprised how much

fun teaching is," she says. "I'm more of a doer. I'm not teaching in lectures. I'm in the clinic with the students. I still actually feel like I'm a little more of a student. I'm very empathetic with everything they're going through."

Yerke has gotten good feedback from students and faculty on her first year of teaching. She is glad to have the opportunity to return as a colleague. "It's been nice seeing all my professors here again, now almost as an equal," she modestly relates. "When I'm teaching, I think of the teachers who made the most impression on me. It's always the teachers who absolutely love what they do. They don't care if they're staying with you a half-hour into lunch. The teachers who are such perfectionists that they won't let you stop until you've done the absolute best that you can for the patient. I want to be someone who makes a difference in what students learn and care about—in what they actually do."

The new faculty member would like to encourage more students to become periodontists, especially females. "Even though I understand that not everyone in class is going to want to be a periodontist, I want them all to have an apprecia-

tion for the specialties in whatever they do,” Yerke explains. “Whether they go into orthodontics or general dentistry, they should fully understand how to diagnose, and to never feel like there’s going to be that one day where you just know it all. There’s always going to be that continual learning process, listening to new ideas, being well prepared, and loving what you do.”

### Paul Ziarnowski

“If you want to learn things, teach,” goes the philosophy of Paul Ziarnowski, ’77, who works with residents in orthodontics two days a week. “I enjoy the energy here. They keep you on your toes.”

After graduating from the dental school, the West Seneca native did a residency in California before returning to the area to start a practice and become a part-time faculty member in operative dentistry. He stopped teaching after a year because his practice got busy, but he was also feeling out of his depth in the clinic. “You’re too close to having just graduated,” he remembers. “You might know it but you don’t feel confident enough to give it back.”

Then he came back to the school, this time as a student in orthodontics. He earned his certificate in 1982 and established a rural practice in Springville. In 1995, he became the first part-time faculty member in orthodontics.

The teaching experience has been very positive, he notes, with a program that went from two to three years and a new group of residents each year. “The dynamics of the class are different with every group,” Ziarnowski explains. “The changes that have occurred in the program in the last 15 years are fantastic. The residents are exposed to a lot more than they’ve ever been. The quality of the treatments coming out of the clinic today is better than I’ve seen in the last 15 years.”

Besides his clinic duties, Ziarnowski also teaches a board journal class (“everybody’s passed their boards most



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years”) and an undergraduate orthodontic senior elective class.

He also strives to instill a perspective of practicality. “I try to tell them this is your profession but it’s not necessarily your whole life. You’ve got to take a couple of days off to flip hamburgers. Do something different—get your head out of this. I tell them when they get out of here to think about living on what you make rather than creating a lifestyle that you’ve got to support. Take the time for your family, your recreation, and to teach if you want.”

“Most people who are here part-time would probably say that they have the best of both worlds. You can still have that office experience and security, then you can come to the university and have a whole different experience, share the mistakes you’ve made and all the good things you’ve learned.”

### Michael Skrip

Michael Skrip, ’77, also had a strong desire to be an educator, whether teaching swimming lessons as a young lifeguard or tutoring in college. A year after completing his residency, he realized his dual ambition of practicing and teaching, joining the dental school in 1978.

One day each week, he oversees third-year dental students who are treating patients in restorative procedures during three-hour morning and afternoon clinic periods.

Skrip impresses upon students that as their career evolves it will be incumbent upon them to remain current, think critically, review the literature and be aware of the changes occurring in the profession.

“One of the missions of the school is lifetime learning and that is so important,” emphasizes Skrip. “I try to instill upon the students the importance of good clinical technique but also the ability to look at things critically—what you’ve done and how you can do them better the next time.”

“We as a profession have certain goals and outcomes that we have to provide for our students, but I’m also a firm believer that you have to know where the students are coming from, to know their world and understand how they look at things, to be an effective instructor.”

Skrip notes the dramatic changes in the profession over the 32 years he has practiced, including the materials used for restorative procedures and the fact that patients are holding on to their natural teeth and living much longer. As a result, their medical histories are much more complex, with significantly more utilization of medications and their impact, plus systemic diseases like diabetes and cancer.

“All of these are going to have an effect on how patients are treated and managed. That’s a big part of the dental school curriculum,” he says. Skrip welcomes the opportunities on the clinic floor to consult with other faculty on cases in which students are providing treatment.

“Every time I go to the dental school, I learn something that I can apply in my practice, and vice versa. As a faculty member, they’re asking me to apply the things I learn in clinical dentistry four days a week and bring that back to dental school. That’s one of the things part-time faculty can do. We’re able to assess what is a predictable outcome and what works or doesn’t work for our patients, and we can bring that perspective to our students.”

## Finding the next class

**R**ICHARD LYNCH, ’83, says that judging by the quality of candidates he sees applying to dental school today, he’s not sure he’d make the cut. “But I’d interview well.”

And that, in fact, is key to a successful application. Dentistry is a healing art that combines human touch with technical knowledge. So how the hundreds of supremely well-qualified candidates for admission to dental school present themselves in interviews—who they show themselves to be—is critical to sorting out who will be members of next year’s entering class.

Lynch knows the importance of the admissions interview because he’s one of a handful of community practitioners who volunteer as interviewers.

According to David Brown, ’83, clinical assistant professor of restorative dentistry and director of admissions, applying to UB has never been as competitive as it is now. In 2009, the school received a record 2,000 DDS applicants to fill only 90 spots. Brown, who screens every application himself, says that most are from high-achieving students with stellar academic achievements. Only 300 are invited to the school for interviews.

Last year Brown invited community dentists to sit on the Student Admissions Committee, which includes full-time dental school faculty, fourth-year dental students and clinical researchers. Eight community practitioners signed up.

“They help us with the workload, which is considerable, but they also bring unique outside perspectives to the mix,” Brown says of his new recruits.

Brown asked volunteers to commit to at least five of the 25 days of interviewing, scheduled from September to February during the year-long admissions cycle.

Applicants invited to an interview meet with teams of two or three committee members. On a typical interview day, three or four teams interview a total of 12 candidates in the morning; each interview lasts about half an hour. The full committee then convenes to assess and rate the interviews on a scale of 1 to 5.

“I’m looking for a potential colleague,” Lynch says, “someone who isn’t just intelligent with great skills, but who is ethical, hard-working and has good communication skills.”

Lynch, a past president of the Alumni Association who travels abroad with the Buffalo Outreach and Community Assistance (BOCA) program, also looks for the potential to create trust with a patient. “You’re inches from a patient’s face with sharp instruments, so you have to know how to make them feel comfortable,” he says.

Richard O’Connor, ’64, another admissions committee volunteer, is a former assistant clinical professor now retired from private practice. Like Lynch, he enjoys meeting the next generation of students; he asks them how they would help improve the school. He was particularly impressed with the number of international applicants from such countries as Iraq and South Korea.

Maureen Sullivan, ’87, found time for seven days of interviewing between her duties as chief of the Department of Dentistry and Maxillofacial Prosthetics at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and clinical assistant professor of restorative dentistry at UB. She wanted to hear interviewees’ personal struggles and stories of how and

why they chose dentistry and why they want to study at UB.

One candidate she remembers particularly was a former French teacher. Lynch interviewed a fishing boat captain who had decided dentistry was his true passion. “We want to know if they’re good people as well as good potential dentists,” Lynch says. “They should also be able to demonstrate an understanding of total patient care, and how they plan to



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support our profession.”

All of the volunteers say they’ll serve on the committee next year. Brown also plans to enlist their help to screen applications before interviews begin.

“It’s been great fun, and a good recruiting tool,” says Sullivan. “I’m grateful for what UB gave me. I may be busy, but it’s important to find the time to give back.”

—L.N.M.