

Preparing for Dental School

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Dentistry is a highly respected and rewarding health profession. It affords you the opportunity to improve the lives of people, while maintaining your autonomy in an individual professional practice. More than three-fourths of dentists are in general practice, while the remainder practice in a specialty, such as orthodontics, endodontics or oral surgery.

Dentistry is also a demanding profession that requires rigorous training, great care and dedication. The first step on this career path is gaining admission to a dental school. This is a challenging process, since you will be competing with many other highly-motivated students for a limited number of dental school openings. You need to make up your mind now that this goal is your top priority and to sustain that commitment through the next four years.

It is imperative to find out all that you can about your chosen profession. The Preprofessional Advisory Committee is prepared to assist you with that, through workshops and individual advisement. There is also a wealth of information available in print and on the internet. Many information sources are listed in the third part of this document. I recommend beginning with "Barron's guide to medical & dental schools" and Rogers' "How to get into the right dental school." In addition, direct experience in a clinic or dental office is an indispensable way to learn first-hand what dentists do.

This introductory guide is divided into three parts. The first part describes the things you will be judged on by dental school admissions offices and the best ways to prepare yourself in those areas. The second part is a timeline that will help you to plan your preparations. Finally, there is a list of information sources, both in print and on the internet.

I Admission Criteria

There are six main areas in which dental school admissions committees evaluate applicants. This section describes those areas and recommends ways to prepare yourself. The areas are:

Academic achievement in college	Knowledge and commitment to dentistry
DAT scores	Personal attributes
Letters of recommendation	Dental school interview

Academic achievement in college

Dental schools look for a high grade point average in college coursework in general and in science courses in particular. In recent years, the mean overall GPA for successful applicants has been in the B+ range (3.3 - 3.4). Schools do not require students to major in a particular discipline and accept applicants from a broad spectrum of majors. About two-thirds of dental students majored in the natural sciences in college, although such a major is not necessary either for admission to or for success in dental school. Humanities and social science majors have been equally successful on both counts.

Applicants are generally required to have taken the eight science and two English courses listed in Table 1. Several additional science, math or non-science courses are frequently recommended and occasionally required. The nature of these courses varies widely; common examples are listed in Table 2. Most successful applicants have taken additional advanced science courses in order to be better prepared for the DAT exam and for their dental studies.

Research experience in the sciences will enhance your application. Many students choose to carry out a laboratory research project during their undergraduate program. There are opportunities for student research available at both D'Youville and nearby Roswell Park Memorial Institute.

The Bachelor of Science in Biology at D'Youville is designed to meet the above needs fully. Another major will also serve, if care is taken to include all of the courses listed in Table 1, preferably with the addition of several advanced math, biology and/or chemistry courses.

Table 1. Courses generally required for admission to dental schools.

2	General chemistry, including lab	2	General physics, including lab
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| 2 | Organic chemistry, including lab | 2 | English |
| 2 | General biology or zoology, including lab | | |

Table 2. Other courses frequently recommended by dental schools.

Most dental schools recommend that applicants take several additional courses, such as the following. (Culled from Admission Requirements of United States and Canadian Dental Schools)

Mathematics (such as calculus)	Psychology (sometimes required)
Physiology	Microbiology or immunology
Biochemistry	Quantitative analysis
Genetics	Social sciences and humanities
Developmental biology or histology	
Cell and molecular biology	

DAT Scores

All U.S. dental schools require that applicants take the Dental Admission Test (DAT). This test is day-long multiple choice test taken on a computer. It is composed of four parts: natural sciences (biology and chemistry), perceptual ability (2- and 3-dimensional problem solving), reading comprehension (in natural and basic sciences) and quantitative reasoning. The average scores of successful applicants in recent years have generally been 18-19 for the academic sections and 16-18 for perceptual ability.

The DAT is administered at testing centers all around the country and can be taken almost any day of the year. You should plan to take it in the spring or early summer of your junior year. This will insure that the scores get to the dental school in a timely fashion. It would also give you time to repeat the test if you should be unhappy with your scores. You must apply to the Dental Admission Testing Program of the American Dental Association to take the test. Application packets are available from Dr. Dowds in HSB 417, or can be obtained by going to the following web site: www.ada.org/prof/ed/forms/test-app.html, or by calling (800)-621-8099.

To do well on this test, it is essential that you have a strong command of the fundamentals of biology, inorganic and organic chemistry, and basic mathematics. Your undergraduate biology, chemistry and math courses are designed to help you gain the knowledge you need. However, you should also plan to do an intensive review in your junior year to refresh your memory and correct any weaknesses. At the same time, you can practice for the perceptual ability section. This section has six kinds of spatial perception tasks that you need to become adept at solving. As a part of this review, you should get comfortable with taking the test on a computer. The MCAT, DAT, GRE Review Course offered at D'Youville provides a convenient and inexpensive way to carry out this review, with the guidance of the

D'Youville faculty. Another alternative is to enroll in a commercial test preparation course, such as those offered by Kaplan and Princeton Review.

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are generally required from faculty members and others knowledgeable of your academic promise, character and commitment to dentistry. The dental schools want to get a portrait of you that goes deeper than just transcripts and test scores. The Preprofessional Advisory Committee at D'Youville has a policy of drafting a consensus letter that includes input from all members of the committee. Such consensus letters better reflect the combined judgment of the department and often carry more weight with admissions committees.

Knowledge and commitment to health care / Clinical experience

Dental schools encourage applicants to get dental experience in clinical settings. This kind of experience is valuable because it allows you to see for yourself what a dental career entails. The work may be volunteer or paid. Many pre-dental students make arrangements to “shadow” a practicing dentist they know. The Dental School at the University at Buffalo is also willing to assist students in obtaining dental experience there.

Personal Attributes

Personal attributes and accomplishments are of interest to dental admission committees. Certainly maturity and strong moral character are important to them. In addition, if you possess some distinctive abilities or accomplishments, they may help you to stand out from others with equal academic qualifications. Make an effort to highlight any special attributes or experiences in your application essay and interviews. You may also wish to highlight community service you have done. State of residence, age, gender, and minority status may also influence the admission committee's decision.

Dental School Interview

If a dental school selects your application for further consideration, you will be invited to go there for an interview. The interview is an opportunity for the admission committee to meet you face to face and probe your ideas and attitudes. For you, it is an opportunity to present yourself in a positive light. It is wise to prepare for your interviews so that you can present a lively, coherent and

compelling discussion of your interests and views about dentistry. A mock interview with your advisor can help you to focus your preparations.

II Suggested Timeline

This timeline is presented as a model schedule designed to help you plan your undergraduate years. It should not be seen as a rigid schedule and may be modified to meet your special needs and circumstances.

Freshman Year

- > Make a tentative plan for your coursework over the next four years using the model schema and the advice of your advisor.
- > Develop good study habits and work hard at your courses to lay the foundation for a strong undergraduate academic record.
- > Improve your understanding of current events and general knowledge by getting into the habit of reading newspapers, news magazines and books on a regular basis.
- > Obtain several of the suggested reference works and begin to acquaint yourself with the process of applying to dental schools.

Sophomore Year

- > Familiarize yourself with the Dental Admissions Test (DAT). An application and information packet is available from Dr. Dowds, or by calling (800)-621-8099, or from www.ada.org/prof/ed/forms/test-app.html.
- > Familiarize yourself with the AADSAS application procedure. AADSAS is the American Association of Dental Schools Application Service. It provides a standardized application form that is then reproduced and sent to the dental schools of your choice. The application process is described at www.adea.org.
- > Begin to investigate which dental schools you will apply to. Refer to Admission Requirements of United States and Canadian Dental Schools.
- > Seek out volunteer or paid work in a dental setting.
- > Begin an intensive review for the DAT in the summer following your sophomore year or in your junior year.

Junior Year

- > Begin or continue your intensive review for the DAT. Since the DAT is administered only by computer, you should practice taking it on a computer.
- > Request letters of recommendation.
- > Decide what dental schools you will apply to. Consider applying to 4, 5 or more schools.
- > Obtain an application for the DAT early in the spring semester and register to take the test some time during the spring or early summer. It is administered at Sylvan Testing Centers on virtually every day, however, the date you are assigned is determined during the registration process. It may be as much as six weeks after the date you submit your DAT application. The nearest Sylvan Center is in Amherst.
- > In the spring or early summer, begin to fill out your application. There are two ways to do this: on a paper application form or electronically on the internet. If you want to fill out a paper application, you may download one at www.adea.org, or you may mail a request for one to AADSAS, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC, 20036-2212. If you are applying online, go to www.adea.org after May 15. When preparing your application, take particular pains with your personal essay. You may want to seek editorial help from your advisor in polishing it.
- > Submit the AADSAS application by late summer or very early fall of your senior year.
- > Fill out and submit any supplemental applications, which are sent out by dental schools after they receive your AADSAS application.

Senior Year

- > Practice for interviews with the help of your advisor.
- > Investigate financial aid possibilities.

III Sources of Information

- * Official guide to dental schools. Published annually. American Dental Education Association, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-2212 or call 202-667-9433 or visit www.adea.org. Also available from: Williams and Wilkins at 1-800-634-4365 or www.wwilkins.com/testprep

Anon. 1999. TopScore Pro for the Dental Admission Test: computerized sample tests and guide (CD-ROM). ScholarWare.com. (\$50) This provides computer-based preparation for the DAT. It includes several mock tests that resemble the actual DAT. It is time sensitive; it is guaranteed to work for at least 4 months from the purchase date.

- * Baffi-Dugan, C., ed. 2001. Medical professions admission guide: strategy for success. Fifth edition. National Assoc. of Advisors for the Health Professions. P.O. Box 1518, Champaign, IL 61824-1518 or www.naahp.org/pubs.html

Opportunities for minority students in United States dental schools, 2000-2002. Third edition. 1999. American Association of Dental Schools, 1625 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036-2212 or call 202-667-9433 or visit www.adea.org

- * Rogers, Carla S. 1997. How to get into the right dental school. VGM Career Horizons. Lincolnwood, Illinois.
- * Wischnitzer, S. 2000. Guide to medical and dental schools. Ninth edition. Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 250 Wireless Blvd., Hauppauge, N.Y. 11788. Also available at local bookstores.

* = available at the D'Youville Library

Internet Sources

American Dental Education Association
www.adea.org

American Dental Association – information on dental education
www.ada.org/tc-educ.html

American Student Dental Association
www.asdanet.org