



Applying to Dental School

About the Profession

Dentists diagnose and treat problems with teeth and tissues in the mouth, along with giving advice and administering care to help prevent future problems. Most dentists are general practitioners, handling a variety of dental needs. Other dentists practice in any of ten specialty areas, including orthodontists, oral and maxillofacial surgeons, pediatric dentists, periodontists, prosthodontists, endodontists, oral pathologists, oral and maxillofacial radiologists, and dental public health specialists.

Earning a doctoral degree in dentistry usually requires four academic years of study at one of the 61 dental schools across the United States. Dental schools award the degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD).

Prerequisite Courses

The requirements for admission to the schools and colleges of dentistry vary, but students wishing to study dentistry should be certain to take at least a year with lab of biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, and general physics. Other requirements include English, college mathematics, and other social science and humanities courses. Some dental schools also require biochemistry. One can use any major to apply to dental school. Be sure to consult with the pre-dental adviser at your school or an adviser at the school or college of dentistry that you plan to attend. School specific requirements are located in the ADEA Official Guide to Dental School found at <http://www.adea.org/publications/Pages/OfficialGuide.aspx>.

Suggested Penn State science courses include: general biology (BIOL 110 plus 230W or 240W; or BMB 251, BMB 442, and BIOL 322), general chemistry (CHEM 110, 111, 112, 113), organic chemistry (CHEM 210, 212, 213), and general physics (PHYS 250, 251; or PHYS 211, 212, 213, 214). Other recommended science courses could include anatomy (BIOL 129), physiology (BIOL 141/142) and biochemistry (BMB 211). In addition, many schools require general psychology (PSYCH 100).

Dental Admission Test

All applicants to dental school must take the Dental Admission Test (DAT). The DAT is a computer-based test administered by Prometric test centers in the United States and its territories. Successful participation in the DAT requires completion of at least one year of collegiate education, which should include

courses in biology, and general and organic chemistry. Advanced level biology and physics are not tested. The DAT is designed to provide dental schools with common measures for comparing the qualifications of applicants. The exam measures general academic aptitude, comprehension of scientific information, and perceptual ability. The test is offered exclusively on computer and consists of four distinct tests: survey of natural sciences, perceptual ability, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning. Information about the DAT can be found at <http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>.

Competitive Applicant

Your GPA, DAT scores, letters of recommendation, and your school interview will be the most important factors in a school's decision to admit you. Other relevant considerations may be your interpersonal skills and your record of extracurricular, community, health-related, dentistry-related or research-oriented work. Recently, dental schools are recommending and requiring a specific number of job shadowing hours as to gain substantial exposure to the field. It is recommended to Dental schools prefer a committee letter which must include at least two Penn State science faculty and one non science faculty. It is highly recommended to obtain a letter from a dentist that the applicant has shadowed. In the last several years, the average GPA has been about a 3.45 science and 3.53 overall. The average competitive DAT score has been at least a 19 for academic average, 19 for total science and 19 for perceptual ability test.

Application Process

Currently 64 U.S. dental schools and one Canadian dental school participate in the Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS). For more information about AADSAS and to access the application, visit <https://portal.aadsasweb.org/> AADSAS allows dental applicants to use a single web-based application and one set of materials to apply to multiple dental schools. Applicants who apply through AADSAS submit a completed web-based application comprised of biographical data, colleges and universities attended, academic course history, work experience, extracurricular activities, honors, and a personal essay. It is the applicant's responsibility to read and follow specific instructions for AADSAS and the requirements for dental school. The Health Pre-Professional Advising Office at Penn State will provide a committee letter that we will send to AADSAS. Details on our Health Pre-Professional Evaluation Committee interview packet and process can be found at www.science.psu.edu/premed.

Dental School—Timeline for Success

First Year

- Take entry-level courses in biology, chemistry, and math.
- Focus on adjusting to college life.
- Get involved with campus activities.
- Begin to explore dentistry; shadow a dentist; consider joining the Penn State Pre-Dental Society.

Sophomore Year

- Start taking organic chemistry and physics.
- Continue to focus on getting good grades.
- Stay involved in campus activities and pursue leadership positions within an organization.
- Continue gaining experience with a dentist.
- Meet with an adviser in the Health Pre-Professional Advising Office.

Junior/Senior Year

- Finish prerequisite courses like physics and additional life science requirements.
- Check with the schools that you are interested in to determine that you have met their guidelines for admission and what type of letters need to be included in a committee letter.
- Early in the junior year begin studying for the DAT.
- Information about Penn State's committee packet can be found online at www.science.psu.edu/premed/ or in 213 Whitmore Lab.

Junior/Senior Year *(continued)*

- Solicit faculty letters of recommendation. You need two science and one non-science faculty letters. You can also have three additional letters, one of which should be from a dentist.
- Register for the DAT www.ada.org/dat.aspx and take the exam
- Apply to dental schools through AADSAS, a centralized application service <https://portal.aadsasweb.org/> Follow the instructions very carefully.
- Call the Health Pre-Professional Advising Office at 814-865-7620 to schedule a committee interview when your biographical sketch and at least three letters are received at our office. Interviews occur between the end of May through the end of October.
- It is your responsibility to check to see if your letters and file are complete. We will NOT call you to schedule an interview.
- When you have your interview with our office you will need to bring in your AADSAS ID number, letter of evaluation matching form, and DAT scores (if you have them).
- Continue gaining any relevant experiences with a dentist and involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Communicate with the dental schools to make sure your file is complete and complete secondary applications as necessary in a timely fashion.

Helpful Web Sites

American Dental Association
www.ada.org
American Dental Education Association
www.adea.org
Official Guide to Dental Schools
<http://www.adea.org/publications/Pages/OfficialGuide.aspx>
Dental Admission Test
www.ada.org/dat.aspx
Associated American Dental Schools Application Service
<https://portal.aadsasweb.org>

Advisers are here to help! Contact:

Health Pre-Professional Advising Office
Eberly College of Science
The Pennsylvania State University
213 Whitmore Laboratory
University Park, PA 16802-6101
814-865-7620 or 814-863-3889
www.science.psu.edu/premed

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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