

Dental School

Dentists are health care professionals who are committed to helping you maintain a healthy mouth and promoting overall health. They treat problems with teeth, gums and supporting structures. Repair work done by dentists includes repairing fractures and removing decayed areas. They also are directly involved in educating patients on proper dental hygiene techniques and the impact of dietary choices.

Dental school is a four-year program typically completed after a bachelor's degree. Approximately 80% of dental school graduates practice general dentistry. There are nine specialty areas: dental public health, endodontics, oral & maxillofacial pathology, oral & maxillofacial radiology, oral & maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics and prosthodontics. These specialty areas require residencies two and five years in length. Most dentists are self-employed in private practice, whether solo or with partners. Increasingly, new dentists are choosing to work in salaried positions in large group practices, which enables them to focus on dental care and leave the business functions to others. Other new employment opportunities include integrated primary care practice where dentists and other primary care givers work in concert to further the patient's overall health, and, multispecialty dental clinics where general dentists and specialists work in the same clinic. Other employment options for dentists include academia, research, military dentistry, public service, public policy, and global health.¹

In 2020, the median earnings of all dentists was \$164,010. Oral surgeons and orthodontists tended to make the highest wages at \$208,000, while general dentists made \$158,940. Most dentists work full-time, but often vary their hours to evenings and weekends to suit the needs of their patients. Job prospects for dentists are good, with an 8% growth in the number of dentists needed from now until 2030.²

Academics. Before attending dental school, nearly all students will have a bachelor's degree. While there is no preferred major for dental school, you must take a significant number of science courses and you must demonstrate competency in those courses. Some schools prefer applicants who have several upper-level biological science courses, while others are less particular. Choose a major that provides alternative career options and that you will enjoy. In 2021, the most popular majors were Biomedical Sciences, Biology and Nutritional Sciences.

The following courses will satisfy the prerequisites for all four Texas dental schools:

Introductory Biology (BIOL 111 & 112)
General Chemistry CHEM 119 & 120, OR CHEM 107/117 & 120)
Organic Chemistry (CHEM 227/237 & 228/238)
Physics (PHYS 201 & 202, OR PHYS 206/216 & 207/217)
Biochemistry (BICH 409, 410 or 440)
English (6 credits from the English department, not Speech)
Statistics (STAT 201, 211, 301, 302, 303, or 312 OR BMEN 350, BUSN 203 PHLT 314 & 315,
PSYC 301, or SCMT 303)
Microbiology (BIOL 351 or VTPB 405)
Anatomy & Physiology (BIOL 319 & 320, OR VIBS 305 & VTPP 423)³

Texas schools accept credit-by-exam for prerequisites. Dental schools in other states may have additional prerequisites and may not accept credit-by-exam for some prerequisite courses, so check with individual schools.

¹ American Dental Education Association, *2019-20 ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*, pp 7-9.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2021 Edition, Dentists*, on the Internet at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dentists.htm> (visited September 28, 2021).

³ UHealth Houston and Texas A&M both require microbiology. Texas A&M Dental requires A&P. These courses will also satisfy upper-level biological sciences for any dental school.

PreDental Timeline

Freshman Year

Learn to study for college courses.
Complete chemistry and biology.
Join student organizations.

Sophomore Year

Take organic chemistry.
Start gaining exposure to dentistry.
Be involved in service and activities.
Take practice DAT in January or February and plan to take the actual DAT during next 12 months.

Fall Junior Year

Continue sophomore activities.
Attend Med/Dent Portal Workshop.
Gain leadership experience.
Get to know faculty members.
Shadow in dentistry.

Spring Junior Year

Complete OPSA Portal File
Continue to shadow in dentistry.
Take the DAT if not completed.
Attend Application Workshop
Complete applications by early June

Fall Senior Year

Prepare for interviews.
Interview at dental schools.
Apply for Financial Aid.
Admissions letters start December 1st.

Exposure to the Profession. Before applying to dental school, be certain that you are suited to the profession and that you want to be a dentist. Shadowing or working in a dental setting provides this experience. Many pre-dental students start the shadowing with their personal dentist during semester breaks. The Texas A&M Pre-Dental Society has a shadow program for its members to gain experience weekly over a semester. Because most graduates practice general dentistry, you are encouraged to gain a substantial amount of general dentistry observation. Although there is no 'magic' number of hours, you should have at least 75 general dentistry observation hours before you apply. Most successful applicants have more than that. Begin shadowing no later than the summer after your first year of college.

Dental Admission Test. The DAT is given Monday through Friday in Prometric Testing Centers, including the testing center in the General Services Complex at Texas A&M. The test covers natural sciences, perceptual ability, reading comprehension and quantitative reasoning. Scores range from 1 to 30 for each section and an academic average is also calculated. Many take the exam shortly after completing Organic Chemistry II.

Service and Leadership. Dental schools look for individuals who will be service-minded leaders in their communities. Look for groups you wish to lead and serve and remember that they do not have to be dental-related. There are thousands of volunteer opportunities at Texas A&M and the Brazos Valley and you should find ones that suit your needs. Leadership begins when you sign up for a committee, run for office, or participate in workshops and conferences.

Explore Dental Education. Many students attend dental school in their state of residency because it is often less expensive and because state-supported schools are often restricted on the number of non-residents they can admit. Private schools may admit any applicant regardless of residency. Currently, there are 68 dental schools in the U.S. The four Texas Dental Schools are Texas A&M (Dallas), Texas Tech HSC El Paso, UT Health San Antonio, and UTHealth Houston

Professional School Advising offers programs, events, and workshops to enable you to meet your potential and select the best career for you.

Professional School Advising

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