

## THE DENTAL PROFESSION

### What Is Dentistry?

Dentists maintain the health of the teeth, gums, and other hard and soft tissues of the oral cavity through the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of all oral diseases and conditions. Dentists may elect to practice general dentistry or one of eight recognized dental specialties, including dental public health, endodontics, oral pathology, oral surgery, orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics and prosthodontics. Additional training beyond the four-year dental degree in the specialty area is required to become a recognized specialist. Dentists can work in many settings, including solo or group private practice, private agencies or public institutions, administration, teaching, or research. Learn more about dentistry at the American Dental Association's website, [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org), and at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos072.htm>.

### Where Can I Get a Dental Education?

There are over 55 dental schools in the U.S. which grant the equivalent degrees of Doctor of Dental Medicine (D.M.D.) or Doctor of Dental Surgery (D.D.S.) including six California schools: UCSF, UCLA, USC, University of the Pacific, Loma Linda University, and Western University of Health Sciences. Find out about each of them by reviewing The American Dental Education Association's (ADEA) **Official Guide to Dental Schools** which contains information about specific schools and their admission procedures. Additional information can be found in *Opportunities for Minority Students in U.S. Dental Schools*. These resources are available in the Career Services Center and online at [www.adea.org](http://www.adea.org) and [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org).

## PREPARATION FOR DENTAL SCHOOL

### What Courses Do I Need to Take?

There is no required or preferred undergraduate major for pre-dental students; while a bachelor's degree may not be required for dental school, it is very strongly recommended. Most dental schools do require that you take certain prerequisite courses in biology, general and organic chemistry, and physics before starting dental school. The pass/fail grade option is not recommended (and often not allowed for required courses). Dental schools seek applicants whose undergraduate academic record demonstrates their potential for success in dental school. Major in a field which engages you, and in which you can perform well. Note that your major requirements may differ from pre-dental requirements. For specific admission requirements, check the **Official Guide to Dental Schools**, or individual schools' web sites.

UCSD courses which fulfill the requirements at most dental schools are:

- Biology** One year of general biology coursework and one quarter of lab are generally required. Biochemistry, physiology, embryology, microbiology, cell biology, immunology and genetics are suggested upper-division options to supplement BILD 1, 2, and 3. Some schools require biochemistry, and a course in human anatomy (available at community college) is often recommended. You may take your pick of labs, which, at UCSD, are all offered at the upper-division level only.
- Chemistry** One year with one quarter of lab of *both* general (inorganic) chemistry and organic chemistry is typically required. *E.g.*, CHEM 6 A,B,C and 6BL and either 140 A,B,C and 143A (lab), or 140A supplemented with the honors series (140BH, 140CH) and lab (140AH)
- Physics** Any one-year sequence including lab is often required; at UCSD the PHYS 1, 2 or 4 series will fulfill the requirement.
- Mathematics** While not often specifically required for admission to dental school, a calculus background may be a pre-requisite for chemistry and physics. Select either the MATH 10 A, B and 11 or 20 A,B,C sequence depending on your major and your math placement. Some schools also recommend a course in statistics (Psych 60, BIEB 100 or MATH 11).
- English Comp.** Two to three quarters of English composition are generally required. Completing the writing sequence at your college will generally fulfill this requirement. All students should seek opportunities to further develop writing and reading skills; additional coursework in this area can help you improve your DAT scores and can make you a stronger applicant.
- Psychology** Some schools require or recommend introductory courses in this subject.
- Fine Arts** Some schools recommend courses in sculpting, ceramics, drafting, or other applied or fine arts.
- Humanities** Some schools require and all schools recommend that you have a broad, well-rounded education complete with coursework in the social and behavioral sciences, philosophy, foreign language, history, etc.

### What Experience Do I Need to Have?

Exposure to and experience with the practice of dentistry can be helpful. UCSD's Pre-Dental Society (<http://acs.ucsd.edu/~ucsdfdc/>) sponsors dental school representative visits, lectures by dental professionals and places volunteers in the local Free Dental Clinic – an opportunity to get hands-on dental and office management experience. To find a dentist willing to speak to UCSD students about their careers, join UCSD's Health & Medical Professions Preparation Program (HMP3) which matches students with dentist mentors (<http://aep.ucsd.edu/hpp.html>). The dental schools at UCSF and UCLA offer lab techniques courses during the summer to provide practical dental experience. Check their websites for details.

## **ADMISSIONS CRITERIA**

Admissions committees want to admit students who will perform well in their school's academic program. Your current academic record and your score on the Dental Admission Test (DAT) are important criteria used as predictors of your future academic performance. To further evaluate your potential to be an effective dentist, the committees will look at your extracurricular and community activities, work experience, personal background, letters of recommendation and personal statement to determine if you have the personal characteristics that are desirable in a dentist (e.g., initiative, communication and leadership skills, maturity, integrity, etc.). Dental schools seek to admit students from diverse socioeconomic, cultural and educational backgrounds; there is no stereotypical candidate.

- **Grade Point Average (GPA) and Academic Record** – Admissions committees will look at your GPA (cumulative, science, and year-by-year) from all of the colleges and universities you've attended in assessing your ability to succeed in their schools' programs. They may also consider the difficulty of your courses, your quarterly course-load, and the difficulty of the school(s) you attended. Substantial and continuing academic improvement will work to your advantage. While "W"s are not calculated into your GPA, frequent withdrawals or a pattern of Ws may be viewed negatively. Also, although "D" or "F" grades are removed from your UCSD GPA when you retake a class, the dental school application service will include both the D or F and the retake grade when calculating your GPA.
- **Dental Admission Test (DAT)** – All U.S. dental schools require the DAT. The DAT is offered throughout the year as a computerized test. The test examines basic biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning and includes a perceptual ability test (PAT) on 2D and 3D problem-solving. DAT information is available in CSC and online at <http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>. UCSF and UCLA dental schools typically offer DAT preparation courses, as does Kaplan and The Princeton Review.
- **Reference Letters** – Dental schools typically require three letters of reference. Letters from two science faculty members are required or preferred. Many schools appreciate a letter from a dentist with whom you volunteered or worked.
- **Personal Statement** – You'll also need an essay or "personal statement". This essay both describes the process and experience by which you decided to pursue a career in dentistry and communicates information about your interests, values, skills and personal accomplishments. A handout on writing a personal statement, writing workshops and essay critique services are also available at CSC (<http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/thinking-about-grad-school/application-basics.html>).

## **THE APPLICATION PROCESS**

The dental school application process starts in the summer, one year prior to desired enrollment with deadlines typically between September and March. Many schools use rolling admissions (they review applications as they are received), so apply early in the cycle.

- **American Association of Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS)** – Most U.S. dental schools use this centralized application service. You fill out one online application and AADSAS forwards it to the schools you choose. AADSAS includes your transcripts, reference letters, personal statement and lists of work/volunteer experience. For more information check out [http://www.adea.org/dental\\_education\\_pathways/aadsas/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.adea.org/dental_education_pathways/aadsas/Pages/default.aspx).
- **Secondary Applications** – In addition to the AADSAS application, most schools require you to submit supplementary application materials. This secondary application may consist of additional essays, letters of recommendation not sent through AADSAS, and/or an application fee. Some schools require secondaries at the same time as AADSAS, others will contact you to request these additional materials at a later date. You'll find specifics on the AADSAS website or on individual schools' sites.
- **Interviews** – The majority of dental schools invite competitive applicants to interview. The interview allows schools to assess your communication skills and gives you a chance to tour the campus, meet with currently enrolled students, and learn about the school, financial aid and housing. Interviews are scheduled primarily in fall and winter. Preparation checklists and information on other CSC interview services, including UCSD students' interview feedback, is available at <http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/thinking-about-grad-school/application-basics.html#interviewing>.

## **CHOOSING DENTAL SCHOOLS – What Should I Look For in a Dental School?**

There are many factors to consider. First, realistically assess your chances of admission and accurately "target" schools based on the average GPA and DAT information available in the *Official Guide to Dental Schools* and on the schools' websites. Competition for admission to dental schools is high, especially in California. Admission to schools outside California can be less competitive, but keep in mind that some – especially public – schools may restrict admission to residents of their own states. See the table below for the ratio of applicants to enrollees nationally and at the five California schools for the fall 2006 entering class.

	<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Enrollees (%)</b>	<b>Mean GPA (cum./sci.)</b>	<b>Mean DAT (Acad. Ave.)</b>	<b>Mean PAT</b>
<b>Nationally</b>	10,731	4,558 (42.5%)	--	--	--
<b>Loma Linda</b>	2,007	95 (4.7%)	3.27 / 3.24	20	19.7
<b>UCLA</b>	1,743	88 (5.0%)	3.65 / 3.6	22	20
<b>UCSF</b>	1,943	80 (4.1%)	3.61 / 3.57	20.6	19.2
<b>Univ. of Pacific</b>	2,944	140 (4.8%)	3.37 / 3.29	20.5	19.7
<b>USC</b>	2,680	144 (5.4%)	3.47 / 3.37	20	19

Next, research individual schools to find dental programs with classes, clinical offerings, research experiences and other programs of interest to you. Consider factors like student services at the schools, housing availability, cost of living, geography, and the availability of recreational activities. You'll potentially be at this school for four years of your life, so make sure you'll like it there!

## **OTHER RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS INTERESTED IN DENTISTRY**

CSC presents a professional school fair each fall where you can meet informally with representatives from dental, medical and other health professional schools to learn about their programs. Other CSC services include individual advising appointments, workshops and information sessions, printed reference materials (including the *Official Guide to Dental Schools*), links to relevant websites from our website <http://career.ucsd.edu>, a personal statement critique, and DAT registration information. Stop by our office or call 858.534.4939 to set up an appointment with an advisor. Good luck!