

Frequently Asked Questions About Predental Studies

1. What do I choose as my major?

Dental schools do not require or prefer one major course of study over another. In fact, a large number of the students entering dental school every year do not have a science major, and studies have shown that non-science majors are as successful as science majors on the DAT. However, it is important to include not only the required courses in your major but also additional science courses that will enrich your background and preparation for the DAT and dental school courses. Two important considerations must be involved in choosing a major: 1) What do you like to learn about? 2) What will you do for a career if dental school is not in your future? Selecting a major that you enjoy will help you to earn a better academic record, and may also provide an alternate career pathway for you should that be necessary.

2. What courses are required by dental schools?

Generally, all dental schools require one year each of general biology (BIO 120 & 121), general chemistry (CHM 115 & 116), organic chemistry (CHM 241 & 242), physics (PHY 220 & 221), and composition (WRT 150 & 305 plus SWS courses). Some schools **may require** additional courses, most commonly biochemistry, which every student should complete. Other recommended courses include anatomy, genetics, histology, physiology, immunology, embryology, and microbiology.

3. What does it take to be a competitive dental school applicant?

First and foremost, an excellent academic record (3.4 and above) and strong DAT scores (20 cumulative or higher) are necessary to be a competitive dental school applicant. While students with GPA's and scores lower than these do gain acceptance to dental schools, it becomes much more difficult to gain acceptance as the GPA's and DAT scores move farther away from these averages. A strong GPA will not make up for weak DAT scores, and vice versa.

In addition, successful dental school applicants are those students who have taken the time to acquire extensive experience with and exposure to the field of dentistry. It is important to spend time observing dental practices by arranging to volunteer or work with general dentistry, orthodontists, endodontics, periodontics, and oral surgeons. Exposure to the variety of dental careers is highly desirable. Most dental schools also expect students to have actively demonstrated their interest in meeting the needs of people by extensive involvement in community service organizations such as homeless shelters, food banks, service organizations like Habitat for Humanity, etc.

Finally, being involved in the life of the university is important. Extracurricular organizations, athletics, and research are examples.

4. When do I take the DAT and apply to dental schools?

The DAT is a computer-based test that you schedule for yourself. The application process for dental school begins in June of the **year before** you intend to enter dental school. For most students this means taking the DAT at the end of their junior year and beginning the application process in June of the summer after their junior year, although individual schedules vary for a wide variety of reasons. It is clearly advantageous for a student to arrange his/her schedule in such a way as to be able to take the DAT early in the summer following their junior year, but individual schedules may enable a student to take it even earlier. There is a 90 day waiting period if a student wants to retake the DAT. Students may take the DAT up to three times and may apply to dental schools as many times as they wish.

5. How do I obtain letters of recommendation? When should I begin to ask for letters and whom should I ask to write them for me?

Letters of recommendation are a critical component of the application to dental school. Consequently, it is crucial that your letters of recommendation and evaluation are as strong as possible. It is generally recommended that applicants obtain three (3) **academic** letters, i.e., letters from professors who have taught you in a graded setting. Two of these letters should be from science professors and one from a non-science professor. In order for a professor to write a strong letter of evaluation, they must know you very well. Since some of the classes at the university are large, it is your responsibility to enable the professor to get to know you well. Interact with them during and after class; visit their office regularly for help or to introduce yourself; conduct research or special projects with them. As you take your classes, beginning with the first semester, you should be considering whether the professor might be someone with whom you can connect and whom you might want to ask for a letter of evaluation. If so, there are two options: 1) At the end of the class, ask the professor if he/she would be willing to write a strong letter of recommendation for your application to dental school. Obtain a letter request form from the preprofessional advisor and provide it to the professor. The letter will be sent to the preprofessional advisor who will keep it in a confidential file for you until the time of your application. 2) Approach the professor at the end of the class and indicate that you are hoping to ask him/her for a letter of evaluation for your dental school application in a couple of years. Ask him/her what you can do to help him/her get to know you better during the next few years and then follow through on those suggestions. When the time comes to request the letter, obtain a request form from the preprofessional advisor and provide a brief resume for the professor indicating your accomplishments, experiences, etc.

6. May other letters of recommendation and evaluation be submitted.

Yes, letters from volunteer supervisors, employers, dentists with whom you have shadowed or observed, research supervisors, and others are also very valuable additions to your application. Generally, a maximum of five (5) or six (6) letters are acceptable to most schools.