

# Planning for Dental School



## Career Services

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### Why choose a career in dentistry?

Do you really want to be a dentist? The American Dental Association offers **10 great reasons to be a dentist**:

1. Service to Others: Help people maintain and improve their oral health, quality of life and appearance
2. Balanced Lifestyle: Dentistry offers flexibility to balance professional and personal life
3. Empower Your Patients: Give patients smiles they are proud to wear
4. Technology and Research: Be involved with the scientific advancement of dentistry
5. Be a Leader: Earn respect from your family, friends and community
6. Prevention/Education: Be an educator on the importance of oral health
7. Detect Disease: Treat oral health and detect disease – including cancer and cardiovascular
8. Be Creative: Use your artistic and scientific talents
9. Success Potential: With the aging population and increase in access to care, the demand and need for dentistry is on the rise
10. Self-Employment: Own a dental practice and be your own boss

Career Services and SU natural science faculty can advise you about the process for applying to dental school, but only you can decide if that's what you really want to do. One way to explore your interests is to volunteer at a dentist's office locally or in your hometown. Another way is to read information about dental schools and dentistry as a career. Be sure to join student or professional organizations related to dentistry.

### What is dentistry like?

In addition to providing primary dental care, dentists teach in dental schools, conduct research, serve in government organizations, and educate their patients and the community about oral and overall health. Dentists held about 151,500 jobs in 2014. While most dentists (about 80%) practice general dentistry, the profession also offers nine dental specialties, including orthodontics, endodontics, and periodontics. About 28% of dentists were self-employed and not incorporated. Very few salaried dentists worked in hospitals and offices of physicians. Almost all dentists work in private practice. According to the American Dental Association, about three out of four dentists in private practice are solo proprietors, and almost 15 percent belonged to a partnership. The median annual wage of dentists was \$158,310 in May 2015. Earnings vary according to number years in practice, location, hours worked, and specialty.

Self-employed dentists in private practice tend to earn more than salaried dentists. Dentists who are salaried often receive benefits paid by their employer, with health insurance and malpractice insurance being among the most common. However, like other business owners, self-employed dentists must provide their own health insurance, life insurance, retirement plans, and other benefits. Taking undergraduate business courses can help prepare you become a private-practice dentist.

### How do I become a dentist?

There are currently more than 60 dental schools nationwide, including three in Texas (Texas A&M Health Science Center/ Baylor College of Dentistry, UT School of Dentistry at Houston, UT Dental School in San Antonio). Dental school is usually a four-year professional curriculum. Students must have completed at least 60 hours of undergraduate/pre-professional courses prior to admission. However, completion of a Bachelor's degree is highly recommended. Students may also elect to pursue additional course work in one of the nine dental specialties, although application to these specific programs is often necessary. These students must complete an additional two years of school with the exception of Oral Surgeons, who need an additional four-to-six years. The remaining eight specialties include Dental Public Health, Endodontics, Orthodontics, Oral/Maxiofacial Radiology, Oral Pathology, Pediatric Dentistry, Periodontics, and Prosthodontics.

To enter dental school, students should:

1. Complete the recommended courses listed on the back of this page as part of the chosen degree plan.
2. Work or volunteer for a dentist.
3. Register for and take the **Dental Admissions Test (DAT)** (<http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>). Take the DAT 17 months prior to when you plan to enter school. The DAT is a 4.5 hour exam that includes four sections: natural sciences (biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry), reading comprehension, quantitative reasoning, and a perceptual ability section. DAT practice tests are available in the DAT registration book. Test preparation resources are available from a variety of vendors, such as Kaplan and Princeton Review. The DAT is administered at Prometric testing sites across the country. **Never take the DAT for practice!**
4. Complete the applications to their chosen schools.

In Texas, students apply to dental school through the **Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service** (<http://www.utsystem.edu/tmdsas/dental/homepage.html>).

## Texas Dental Schools

University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston  
Dental Branch, <https://dentistry.uth.edu>

Baylor College of Dentistry: A Member of the Texas A&M  
University Health Science Center, [www.tambcd.edu/](http://www.tambcd.edu/)

University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio  
Dental School,  
<http://www.uthscsa.edu/academics/dental>

## Selection Criteria

- **Academic Performance:** Overall academic performance is considered (including transfer hours) with science courses weighted heavily. While the minimum grade point average to apply is 2.00 for all course work, the average GPA of applicants admitted to Texas dental schools for 2015 was 3.63.
- **Test scores:** Students should achieve competitive scores on the DAT. The average score for the 2015 entering class in Texas for the perceptual ability section was 20.2, while the average for the academic sections was 20.4.
- **Semester Course Load:** Withdrawals, frequent drops and low course loads may cause concern for admissions committees.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Students must submit four letters of recommendation, one of which must be from a dentist, that address their motivation, leadership potential, dedication, and integrity.
- **Interview:** Competitive applicants undergo two or three 30-minute interviews in which personal traits such as maturity and interpersonal ability are evaluated.
- **Writing Skills:** Dental schools require that students write a biographical sketch or personal essay to assess clarity of communication skills.

## Timeline

**First and Sophomore Years:** Complete prerequisites (see below), join health/science student groups, begin building relationships with professors and volunteer with dentists. Introduce yourself to SU's primary pre-dental advisor, Dr. Kerry Bruns ([brunsk@southwestern.edu](mailto:brunsk@southwestern.edu)).

**Junior and Senior Years:** Students should follow the schedule below starting in the fall of their junior year.

December	Begin preparing for DAT
February/March	Register for DAT
March/April	Take DAT
May – July	Apply to dental schools
May – December	Interviews
December 1	First acceptance letters out

## Prerequisites

Students wishing to enter dental school may select any major as long as the required courses are taken. A minimum of 90 hours is required by most schools, but a majority of accepted applicants have a Bachelor's degree. The required courses for Texas dental schools are as follows:

Courses	Hours
Biology (with labs)	
General	8
Advanced	8
Chemistry (with labs)	
General	8
Organic	8
Biochemistry	3
English	6
Physics (with labs)	8

### Notes:

- Some dental schools require or suggest additional courses in business, psychology, or additional sciences.
- Students planning to apply after obtaining their prerequisites at Southwestern University should contact their chosen school for a Course Equivalency sheet to determine which courses are acceptable.

## Other Pre-Dental Resources

- American Dental Association:  
<http://www.ada.org/education.aspx>
- Official DAT Website: <http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx>
- Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook's dentistry entry:  
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dentists.htm>
- Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service - If you're applying to medical or dental school in Texas, this page is where you start!:  
<https://www.tmdsas.com/>
- SU Career Services website:  
[www.southwestern.edu/careers](http://www.southwestern.edu/careers)