



## CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Planning for Dental School

## 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 issues
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

The Center for Career & Professional Development 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 interest 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 153,500 jobs in 2016. While most (over 80%) practice general dentistry, the profession also offers nine dental specialties, including orthodontics, endodontics, and periodontics. 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% belonged to a partnership. The median annual wage of dentists was \$156,240 in May 2018.

Earnings vary based on number of 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 to become a private-practice dentist.

## How Do I Become a Dentist?

There are currently more than 65 accredited dental schools nationwide, including three in Texas (Texas A&M College of Dentistry in Dallas, UT School of Dentistry in Houston, and UT Dental School in San Antonio). Dental school is usually a four-year professional curriculum, and completion of a Bachelor's degree is highly recommended. Students may also elect to pursue additional coursework 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/Maxillofacial Radiology, Oral Pathology, Pediatric Dentistry, Periodontics, and Prosthodontics.

To enter dental school, students should:

- Complete the recommended courses listed on the back of this page as part of their chosen degree plan.
- Work or volunteer for a dentist.
- Take the **Dental Admissions Test (DAT)** ([www.ada.org/dat.aspx](http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx)) about 17 months prior to when you plan to enter school. The DAT is a 5-hour, multiple-choice exam that includes four sections: natural sciences (biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry), reading comprehension, quantitative reasoning, and perceptual ability. DAT practice tests are available in the DAT registration book. Test preparation resources are available from a variety of vendors, such as Kaplan and the Princeton Review. The DAT is administered at Prometric testing sites across the country. **Never take the DAT for practice!**
- Complete the applications to their chosen schools.

## Texas Dental Schools

- UTHealth Houston School of Dentistry, <https://dentistry.uth.edu>
- Texas A&M College of Dentistry in Dallas, <https://dentistry.tamhsc.edu/>
- UTHealth San Antonio School of Dentistry, [www.uthscsa.edu/academics/dental](http://www.uthscsa.edu/academics/dental)

In Texas, students apply to dental school through the **Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service** ([www.tmdsas.com/dental/homepage.html](http://www.tmdsas.com/dental/homepage.html)).

## Selection Criteria

- **ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE:** Overall academic performance (including transfer hours) is considered, with science courses weighted heavily. While the minimum GPA to apply varies by school, the average GPA of applicants admitted to Texas dental schools in 2017 was 3.68.
- **TEST SCORES:** Students should achieve competitive scores on the DAT. The average score for the 2017 entering class in Texas for the perceptual ability section was 20.2, while the average for the academic sections was 20.9.
- **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.

## Prerequisites

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

- 14 semester hours (12 lecture, 2 lab) of Biology
- 8 semester hours (6 lecture, 2 lab) of General (Inorganic) Chemistry
- 8 semester hours (6 lecture, 2 lab) of Organic Chemistry
- 3 semester hours of Biochemistry (in addition to the Biology requirement)
- 8 semester hours (6 lecture, 2 lab) of Physics (at SU, calculus is a pre-requisite for taking physics)
- 6 semester hours of college English
- 3 semester hours of Statistics

## NOTES

- Each required course must be completed with a grade of "C" or better.
- Some dental schools require or suggest additional courses in business, psychology, or additional sciences. UTHealth

Houston requires microbiology as part of the Biology requirements.

- Students planning to apply to dental school after obtaining their prerequisites at Southwestern should contact their chosen school for a Course Equivalency sheet to determine which courses are acceptable.
- AP credit is accepted only if the school granting the credit lists the specific course(s) and number of credits granted per course on an official transcript. Lump sum credit is not accepted.

## Timeline

**FIRST AND SOPHOMORE YEARS:** Complete prerequisites, join health/science student groups, begin building relationships with professors, and volunteer with dentists. Introduce yourself to SU's faculty pre-health advisor, Dr. Maria Cuevas ([cuevasm@southwestern.edu](mailto:cuevasm@southwestern.edu)).

**JUNIOR OR SENIOR YEAR:** Students should follow the schedule below starting in the fall of their junior year for admission at the earliest opportunity (i.e. in the fall term immediately after graduating from SU. Students can also choose to apply in any subsequent annual cycle.

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

## Pre-Dental Resources

- American Dental Association: [www.ada.org/education.aspx](http://www.ada.org/education.aspx)
- Official DAT Website: [www.ada.org/dat.aspx](http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx)
- Occupational Outlook Handbook: Dentistry [www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dentists.htm](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 is where you start! [www.tmdsas.com](http://www.tmdsas.com)
- SU Center for Career & Professional Development website: [www.southwestern.edu/careers](http://www.southwestern.edu/careers)
- Dr. Maria Cuevas, SU Faculty Pre-Health Advisor