

Dental School

Dentists are health care professionals who focus on helping you maintain a healthy mouth. 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. The majority of dentists work in general dentistry, approximately 80%. 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 lasting between two and five years. Most dentists are self-employed in a private practice, whether alone 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 2018, the average earnings of dentists was \$156,240. Oral surgeons and orthodontists tended to make the highest wages at \$208,000, while general dentists made \$151,850. 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 a 19% growth in the number of dentists needed due to the large number of dentists expected to retire between 2016 and 2026.²

Academics. Before attending dental school, the vast majority will have already earned a bachelor's degree. While there is no preferred major for dental school, you must take a significant number of sciences 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 is one that you will enjoy. In 2017, the most popular majors were Biomedical Sciences, Biology and Nutritional Sciences.

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

Introductory Biology (BIOL 111 & 112)
General Chemistry (CHEM 101/111 & 102/112 OR CHEM 119 & 120)
Organic Chemistry (CHEM 227/237 & 228/238)
Physics (PHYS 201 & 202)
Biochemistry (BICH 410)
English (6 credits from the English department, not Speech)
Statistics (STAT 201, 211, 301, 302 or 303, or PSYC 301, or SCMT 303)
Microbiology (BIOL 351 or VTPB 405)
Anatomy & Physiology (BIOL 319&320, OR VIBS 305 & VTPP 423)³

2018 Texas Aggie Dental Stats

**3.5 science gpa
+ 20 DAT**

= 87% admitted!

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*, 2018 Edition, Dentists, on the Internet at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dentists.htm> (visited May 07, 2019).

³ UT Health and Texas A&M Dental both require microbiology. Texas A&M Dental requires A&P. These courses will 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 at end of year and
plan to take the actual DAT during
next 12 months.

Fall Junior Year

Continue sophomore activities.
Attend Medical/Dental File Workshop.
Gain leadership experience.
Get to know faculty members.

Spring Junior Year

Complete OPSA Med/Dent File
Take the DAT
Attend Application Workshop
Complete applications by 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, you should be certain that you are suited to the profession and that you want to be a dentist. You can obtain your experiences through shadowing or working in a dental office. Many pre-dental students start the process with their personal dentist during semester breaks. The Pre-Dental Society has a shadow program for its members to gain experience weekly over a semester. Because the vast majority of dental school 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 50 general dentistry observation hours before you apply.

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.

Service and Leadership. Dental schools look for individuals who will be service-minded leaders in their communities. They look for service and leadership in all applicants. Explore and 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 you should find ones that suit your needs. On leadership, get started by signing up for a committee, running for office, or participating in workshops.

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 66 dental schools in the U.S. The three Texas Dental Schools are Texas A&M University College of Dentistry (Dallas), the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, and the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. A fourth dental school will open at Texas Tech HSC in El Paso in 2021.

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



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