

Preparing for Dental School: Factors Considered for Admission

Dental schools evaluate applicants in three areas: GPA, DAT scores, and other non-academic factors. Because each school places different weight on different areas, be sure to research about specific schools. To research specific schools, consult individual school websites, participate when visiting schools come to visit campus, and consult the American Dental Education Association (“ADEA”) Official Guide to Dental Schools (available at our office, for purchase online, or at BYU’s Library). Additionally, utilize the services available at the Preprofessional Advisement Center, open Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM.

Academic Factors for Dental School Admission

- **GPA:** Both your cumulative GPA and science GPA (Biology, Chemistry, Physics) are an important part of your application.
- **DAT Scores:** The Dental Admission Test, “DAT,” is a standardized test required for all students seeking admission to U.S. dental schools. It includes four sections: Survey of the Natural Sciences (Biology, Inorganic Chemistry, Organic Chemistry), Reading Comprehension, Quantitative Reasoning, and Perceptual Ability. Ideally, the DAT should be taken the year before you plan to attend dental school.
- **Workload:** It is important to take full course loads (about 14+ credit hours) each semester, while working hard to perform as well as possible. Spacing out more difficult classes while continuing to take a full course load is preferred. Consistently light loads raise questions about an applicant’s ability to handle the much heavier loads required in dental schools. Generally, work may not be a satisfying justification for taking fewer hours each semester.

Picking a Major

There is no pre-dental major. We encourage you to choose a major you are interested in and that will help you maintain a good GPA and still complete all necessary prerequisites. Factors to consider when choosing a major include your interests, how well the major fits with prerequisite requirements, and what kinds of alternatives are available if you choose not to attend dental school or are not admitted.

Non-Academic Factors for Dental School Admission

Dental schools generally encourage applicants to be well-rounded individuals that have experiences in many different areas. However, the requirements and the relative weight of these factors often vary between schools. Be sure to consult the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools (available at our office, for purchase online, or at BYU’s Library), and with individual school websites for specific requirements.

- **Shadowing:** Specific recommendations vary, but most schools recommend a total of 50-100 hours mainly with observation occurring in general dentistry.
- **Service:** Emphasis on service varies, but many schools recommend 200+ hours. Service activities should demonstrate consistent and long term commitment to helping others, but do not need to be

dental related. Community service (English classes, service projects, etc.) done on a mission counts, but time spent proselytizing does not.

- **Research:** Recommendations vary greatly, but many schools encourage research experience. Check with individual schools for specific recommendations. There are many opportunities to do research either on or off campus, depending upon your interest.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Most schools have no specific requirements but like applicants to demonstrate well-roundedness. The pre dental club has many good resources, but any kind of club, activity, or organization will work.
- **Leadership:** Most students accrue leadership experience in conjunction with research, service, extracurricular activities, and employment opportunities.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Requirements vary by school. Generally, schools require two letters from science professors and one from a dentist. Research individual schools websites for specific requirements and the handout “Letters of Recommendation Requirements” for specific requirements.

General Timeline

