Dentristy

(D.D.S. or D.M.D.)

Few healthcare careers have undergone as much of a revolution in the past century than the practice of Dentistry. As late as the early part of the 20th century, it was not uncommon for people to lose all their teeth by their 30’s. Increasingly, a professionalization of the practice of Dentistry and increased awareness of the benefits of good dental hygiene have taken hold registered with patients as the necessity of regular, professional hygiene, healthcare and intervention.

Entrance to one of the approximately 66 colleges of dentistry in the United States requires completion of a post-graduate professional program of study (which typically takes four years beyond undergraduate work). Currently, the number of Dental graduates entering the field is less than the number needed to replace dentists leaving the field by death or retirement. The American Association of Dental Schools estimates that by the 2025 there will be the lowest number of professionals *per capita* of the U.S. population than at any point since the early part of the 20th century. The current number of approximately 193,000 practicing dentists is on the decline; there is a need for the next generation of dental professionals.

As with other healthcare areas, good grades alone *do not* guarantee admission to a dental school; but poor grades do prevent it. Students who are truly motivated toward a career in Dentistry seek to achieve; they energize their study habits into actual performance and learning, and direct their energies toward desired outcomes. Such student do not merely talk about this career—the actively work to achieve it.

Incomes of Dentists are in the upper 5%) of all incomes in the U.S. Recent graduates’ Incomes average $186,000 for general dentistry (about 80% of practitioners) and $250,000 for specialists; 15- 20% higher for senior practitioners. Income levels are projected to increase over the coming years and considered to be *more* secure than in the past. One factor to this security being that approximately 60% of Americans now have dental insurance coverage.

**Doctor of Dental Surgery (D.D.S.) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (D.D.M.)**: The D.D.S. (Doctor of Dental Surgery) and D.M.D. (Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry or Doctor of Dental Medicine) are the same thing- the holder is a graduate of an [accredited dental school](http://www.ada.org/en/coda/find-a-program/search-dental-programs/dds-dmd-programs) having progressed through the same education. It’s up to the universities awarding the degree to determine what degree is awarded, but both degrees use the same curriculum requirements.

**Dental School costs**: Cost for attending Dental school range widely. For example, One year’s full tuition, fees and cost of living for an in-stage student in Georgia’s Dental school are about $7,000, out-of-state about $20,000. Contrast that with $64,800 (non-resident) for a public school in Texas to nearly $300,000 for the highest-priced private institutions. Nationally, debt averages approximately $250,000, but that would be substantially lower for a Georgia resident attending Georgia’s dental program.

**Dental Programs in Georgia**:

D.D.S.- None.

D.M.D.- Dental College of Georgia at Augusta University (Public; Augusta).

Generally, the states surrounding Georgia (or the Southeastern states) may enroll 4- 5 (or fewer, varying from cycle to cycle) Georgia residents.  Many Georgia students apply to these schools; therefore, competition for the limited number of seats is intense. Other private schools will not carry an affinity for candidates from any state, but the competition for seats will be national (and intense).

**Admissions**: Applicants are most likely to be admitted to medical school in their state of residence. Gaining residency in another state for the purposes of dental school admission and to receive in-state tuition can be very difficult.

In 2016, there were approximately 11,000 applicants for 5900 enrollee seats in D.D.S. and D.M.D. programs nationwide; for an acceptance rate of about 50%. Forty-six percent of applicants to Dental school and of enrollees are women. The Census Bureau estimates the percentage of underrepresented minorities in the nation’s population to be 19.4%; yet about 36% of all current dental students are from these groups.

Successful Admission to a Medical program requires demonstrated ability and experience in multiple areas. Excellence in one (e.g. grades), but the omission of another (e.g. experience) will almost certainly result in disappointment; *all* are important.

1. **Grades (and major)**: As is the case with many other healthcare professional schools, a very high G.P.A. is important, but not as vital as most believe. Admissions counselors often use the word “holistic” in how they approach the evaluation of candidates. For the Dental program at Augusta University, recent admissions number indicate that applicants averaged a GPA of 3.38; those accepted and enrolled closer to 3.55. Naturally, acceptance rates for students with lower G.P.A.s (2.8) are low; but they are not negligible. In short, strong grades are important (3.3+ GPA); stellar grades (3.8+ GPA) will not make up for deficiencies seen elsewhere in the application.

As with other healthcare professional programs, schools are looking for intelligent, motivated and compassionate students. They are looking for students with the basic background knowledge (i.e. “pre-requisites”) and are expecting to “teach the rest”. That is, the selection is major is not as important as most would assume. So long as a student has the pre-requisite courses (regardless of whether they are part of their major or not), dental programs are satisfied. In other words, a “Pre-Med” major is *not* required (and is a determent in some circles) and there are numerous stories of Philosophy, History, Chemistry, Business majors being accepted to dental schools. They merely took the additional coursework and performed the other requirements to successfully apply to a program.

**Your major at Oglethorpe**: Traditionally, students accepted to Dental school have majored in Biology or Chemistry. This is largely out of convenience-- the pre-requisites for most Medical programs are largely covered by these majors. However, OU has had students with majors in BioPsychology and Business all successfully apply, for example.

1. **Pre-requisites/ Coursework**: Academic preparation requires successful completion of several items. First and foremost is a bachelor’s degree. Dental school is a post-graduate (i.e. post- B.A. or B.S.) education.

The choice of major is not very important (see A), above). The Augusta University program requires the following:

 General (Inorganic) Chemistry- 2 semesters/1 year

 Biology- 2 semesters/1 year the introductory level

 Physics- 1 semester/½ year at the introductory level (i.e. non-Calculus)

 English- 1 year (e.g. Core 101/102)

The reality is that the more coursework preparation, the better. It is often suggested that courses in Organic Chemistry, Physiology, Cell Biology, Molecular Biology, and/or Genetics are a useful addition to the list of suggested courses.

In addition, many programs have specific and specialized pre-requisites, such as Sculpture, Public Speaking, Calculus I, Statistics, or Accounting. Whenever you are identifying a program to apply to, it is strongly suggested that you review and prepare for any and all specific program requirements.

1. **Standardized Testing**: Dental programs usually require the Dental Admissions Test (D.A.T.). The D.A.T. is a dental education admission test designed to provide dental education programs with a means to assess program applicants’ potential for success. It is administered year round.

The DAT is comprised of multiple-choice test items presented in the English language. The test is developed according to established test specifications. The DAT consists of a battery of four tests on the following: Survey of the Natural Sciences (BIO, CHM, ORG), Reading Comprehension (RC), and Quantitative Reasoning (QR) along with Perceptual Ability (PAT). The first important number is the Academic Average (AA) score, composed of the rounded average of all these subscores. The second important number is the Total Science (TS) score, a scaled score encompassing the first three subscores (BIO, CHM, ORG).

Based on the preliminary data from the ADEA (American Dental Education Association) Survey of U.S Dental School Applicants and Enrolees in 2013, the Enrolee DAT score for the Academic Average ranges from 12 – 28 and the Total Science score ranges from 12 – 30. (All scores are normalized to an average of 17.) The average DAT (AA) score for all students accepted to dental school in 2013 was 19.9 (about the 80th percentile); Augusta University averaged 19.8 in 2016.

Sitting for the D.A.T. requires preparation. Students are urged to preparatory course offered by many different organizations, including Kaplan and Princeton Review.

1. **Experience: Internship, Shadowing and/or Work**: A critical portion of the admissions process is the interview, often done on campus as part of an orientation and recruitment process. Interview conversations often center of the nature of Dentistry as a business and avocation. It is universally agreed that these critical conversations require a foundation in experience in the work environment of the Dental professional. A brief shadowing experience, a longer volunteer internship (for academic credit or not) or a longer-term paid staff position are ways for future dentists to gain invaluable experience in the working environment of modern healthcare. In addition, it serves a goal of giving the future Dental student a taste for the work environment they will experience through their professional career.
2. **Letters of Reference (LORs)**: Internships, shadowing and/or work experience also provides the opportunity for a dental practitioner to provide extensive and substantive comments of your professional initiative, demeanor and abilities in the form a “letter of reference” required for Dental school applications. The more in-depth their experience with you, the more in-depth and supportive of your desire to enter medical school will be their letter.

Typically, Dental programs solicit up to 5 letters of reference that can include course instructors (such as professors), healthcare professionals familiar with your interests and promise, work supervisors and character witnesses.

With respect to the former (Professors), students often ask Oglethorpe Professors for letters. Unlike larger Universities that formulate a consensus “Pre-Health Committee” letter, Oglethorpe University instructors write individual letters tailored for each applicant. The small class sizes and close and extensive interactions between instructors and students means letters can be honest, extensive and rich in detail and anecdotes- exactly what dental school admissions committees are looking for. Students are encourage to cultivate a positive and productive relationship with each of their instructors in anticipation of asking for an honest (and confidential) evaluation of their academic abilities and promise for success in the Dental sciences.

1. **VMCAS (http://www.aavmc.org)**: The AAVMC (American Association Veterinary Medical Colleges) Application Service (M+VMCAS) is the centralized application service for most Veterinary schools. VMCAS simplifies the applicationprocess by allowing applicants to complete one standardized application rather than fill out multiple applications. The service opens for the generation of applicant accounts and for the acceptance of data on July 1st of every application cycle. The site calculates applicant GPAs in a standardized format, organizes the acceptance and distribution of Letters of Recommendation (LORs), and the distribution of materials to programs.
2. **Post-Baccalaureate (“Post-Bac”) Programs:** A number of institutions offer, often year-long, intensive “boot camp-like” programs that help students with a commitment to admissions to Dental school but who didn’t quite make it bridge that gap and ultimately gain admissions. They often include intensive content review, coupled with targeted standardized (i.e. D.A.T.) exam test-taking skill development along with intensive career development and advising. These are tuition-charging programs, but scholarships and other forgiveness programs are often available; particularly for targeted demographic groups.

It is advisable to make an informed decision before investing yet more money in preparation and positioning for a career in Dentistry. A webpage sponsored by the ADEA provides some advice and things to look out for: https://www.adea.org/GoDental/Application\_Prep/Preparing\_for\_Dental\_School/Postbaccalaureate\_Programs

Programs near, but unfortunately not in, Georgia include:

* **Univ. of North Carolina, Greensboro (Greensboro, NC)** They describe their program as a Post-Bac Program appropriate for Pre-Dental academic record enhancers. https://biology.uncg.edu/undergraduate/post-bacc/
* **Auburn University (Auburn, AL)** www.aub.ie/ppmsnt
* **George Mason University (Manassas, VA)** They describe their Record Enhancer Program as including about 20% Pre-Dental students (out of about 100 total) who historically have had a high rate of admissions success (about 70-80%, depending on the year). Top destination schools are UMD, VCU, Howard, Tufts, and NYU. https://cos.gmu.edu/georgesquared/
* **Meredith College (Raleigh, NC)** They describe their program as a flexible career changer or enhancer program that works with students interested in med, dent, PA, and PT. https://www.meredith.edu/pre-health

**For Further Reading:**

The BEST place to start—“Explore Health Careers”: <https://explorehealthcareers.org/>

“American Veterinary Medical Assocation”: https://www.avma.org