Tips for applying to dental school

Timeline (suggested latest dates, earlier is better)

- mid June – take DAT at any Sylvan Learning Center
- beginning August – request school transcripts and letters of evaluation be sent to AADSAS
- mid August – submit AADSAS online application
- Sept 1 – “unofficial” dental school application deadline; the dental schools have official deadlines much later; however, submission by this date ensures the best chance of acceptance
- Mid Sept – retake DAT if necessary (depending on original test scores, must wait 3 months in between attempts)
- Mid Sept through Nov – supplemental applications and interviews
- Dec 1 – acceptance notification day for all dental schools; schools either call, email or send a letter

1. Dental Admissions Test (DAT)

- There is approx 2 week gap between registering for the test and scheduling a date, so plan ahead.
- Test are taken on the computer at any Sylvan Learning Center. The center in Fargo is currently located on 2710 32nd Ave South. Approx test time is 4 hours 15 minutes.
- Register for the test at http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/index.asp. This site also contains general information about the test. The cost is around $165. When you register, you select the schools you would like your test scores sent to. There is an additional cost to add schools at a later point.
- The test consists of four sections perceptual ability, math, reading comprehension, and science, which is broken down into general biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry.
- Study books with practice exams are available at local bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble. The cost is around $65.
- I think it is important to take the DAT in mid June, because if you don't do well for whatever reason you have the opportunity to retake it before the application cycle ends. You must wait 3 months in between attempts.

2. Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS)

- This is the online dental school application used by all dental schools in the nation.
- The 2005 application is available starting May 17, 2004.
- Complete the application at http://www.adea.org/AADSAS/default.htm.
- The student creates a user account name and password, so you can save a partially complete application and come back later to finish.
- The application asks the students to list academic awards, extracurricular activities, volunteer experience, work experience, exposure to the clinic setting – including lab, hospital, and dental office, research experience, and manual dexterity activities. Some of your information may overlap, it's okay.
- Because applicants must list exposure to the dental career field on their application, I think it is extremely important to take the Dental Coop class (register through the MSUM chemistry department) before you apply. The optimal time to take the class is during your Junior year. If it doesn't fit into
your schedule, arrange to do some job shadowing on your own. It is important to have some job shadowing experience.

- The application also asks for school course work. There are classes that are difficult to match exactly with the ones listed to choose from. Do your best.
- You are also required to write an essay approx 750 words about why you want to pursue dentistry as a career. (Recommend typing in a word document and pasting into application when finished. Application does not have spell check.)
- Do not wait on DAT scores to submit your application. The school can get them after your application, and you can bring the certified copy of the test scores given to you directly after you complete the exam to an interview or school visit.
- The application costs around $350, depending on the number of schools you apply to.
- Once you submit your application, it takes AADSAS approximately 2 to 3 weeks to process it. Once processed, it is sent to the selected schools and you receive a printout in the mail.
- Each school requires an additional application processing fee ranging from $45 to 55. Some schools require the fee when the AADSAS application is submitted, others require the fee only after they contact you. The AADSAS instruction booklet/guide lists the specific school requirements.

3. Transcripts and Letters of Evaluation (LOE)

- All your college transcripts should be sent to AADSAS, which will make copies of them and send them to the dental schools of your choice.
- There is a “Transcript Matching Form” available under preparing for the 2005 application cycle on the AADSAS website listed above. The schools need to send this form with the transcript to AADSAS. Toward the bottom of the form, you must sign and date.
- AADSAS will copy and send to the selected dental schools up to 3 letters of evaluation. It is suggested two letters come from science instructors. The third letter is a little more flexible as some schools suggest a previous employer or a non-science instructor.
- Again, there is a “Letter of Evaluation Matching Form” that needs to be sent with the letters to AADSAS. Be sure to give the form, which is available on the AADSAS website, to the people you have chosen to write you a letter. Toward the bottom of the form, you must sign and date.
- Your letters of evaluation should tell a story about you, each highlighting different areas. Think of the story you want them to collectively tell and ask people who best can help you relay that information.
- It is okay when asking people to write you a letter to be suggestive, ie “dental schools like applicants who ...” If you decide to ask someone other than an instructor, you may need to be more suggestive because of unfamiliarity with writing letters.
- Give the people you have chosen advanced notice, remember it may be hard to reach people over the summer. Ensure they know the deadline and send email reminders.

4. Supplemental applications

- Once the schools receive your application from AADSAS, they will send you a supplemental applications – if you are a competitive applicant. Usually, with the application the schools send you information about the school, ie brochures.
• Some of the information asked is similar to the online AADSAS application. However, most supplemental applications contain an essay question “Why do you want to go to this particular dental school?” It is not recommended to write one essay and use it for all the schools you are applying to.

• I recommend looking through the information the schools send you and their websites to get an idea of what is important to the school. Incorporate what the school values into your essay of why you want to go there. You want them to realize that you will fit in with the school’s program. For example, Marquette University recently has spent a large amount of money revamping their curriculum and constructing a state-of-the-art facility. They are also a Jesuit (Catholic) school which emphasizes the spirit of community and community involvement. Tell them how these things will improve your dental education.

• If the school asks for a photo, you can have a passport photo taken at school, Walgreen’s, or any photography business. I went to Allen Ross and it cost $10 for two photos.

• Complete and return the supplemental applications as soon as possible.

5. Interviews

• Not all schools interview applicants. Marquette University and Creighton University generally do not interview, which places a great importance on the online and supplemental application.

• University of Minnesota schedules you for an interview and informs you of the time. University of Nebraska Lincoln schedules an interview with you over the phone.

• Interviews are usually done on Mondays and Fridays. Several applicants are scheduled for interviews on the same day. Applicants are interviewed individually, then there is a group tour or presentation.

• It is important to arrive early, so make sure you have good directions. Make sure you have the number to the admission’s office with you, so you can call for directions if you do get lost.

• It is important to look professional, even conservative. Men generally wear dress slacks, button-down shirts, ties and sport coats. Women generally wear pant suits or long skirts. Open-toed shoes are not recommended since you will be walking through the clinical area.

• Before the interview, make a mental list of what you think makes you stand out as an applicant, why you should be accepted. Incorporate or highlight those points as much as possible when answering questions.

• The interviewer asks general questions about your experiences, why you want to attend their school, why do you think you should be accepted, and so on. I was asked a scenario question at the U of Minnesota. The scenario was “Monday morning you walk into the office and your staff is upset because they found out a patient is HIV positive. What do you do?” I answered the question by explaining the importance of educating my staff on a regular basis about the risks of treating patients with diseases like HIV and the importance of using universal precautions. Hopefully, that education would prevent situations such as this. If not, I would have staff members comfortable with working on HIV-positive patients assist me in that morning treatment and remind the staff about the importance of patient privacy. Then, at the next possible time, sit down with the staff and discuss the situation at length.

• At the end of my interview, I asked “how can I improve my application?” It is a chance to learn what your weaknesses are. The interviewer might point out
weaknesses that you are already working on improving. For me, my DAT scores in chemistry were low, but I explained I took general chemistry in college 10 years ago and I am currently taking a full year's worth of biochemistry to prepare myself for dental school. It was a chance for me to explain the reason and more importantly my solution.

6. Acceptance notification day – December 1
   • Dental schools must wait until December 1 to inform students of their acceptance. Schools vary on how they notify the students. U of Minnesota calls and emails the accepted students that morning. U of Nebraska Lincoln emails the accepted students that morning. Marquette University and Creighton University both send a letter in the mail to accepted students, so it takes a few days to arrive.
   • You have approx 45 days from December 1 to inform the schools whether or not you accept their invitation to attend their school. The schools require a deposit ranging from $500 to 1000 with your positive reply.
   • If the schools were unable to fill their classes with the initial acceptance letters – meaning students declined the invitation, schools accept additional students beginning in mid January until the class is full. Usually, the dental school classes are filled no later than March (barring extraordinary circumstances).

7. Dental schools
   • You will hear good and bad things about each school. It is important for you to make a list of priorities – what attributes of a dental school are most important to you.
   • Unfortunately, state residency plays a large role in dental school admissions.
   • Best chances for acceptance: University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska Lincoln, Creighton University, and Marquette University. Slight chances for acceptance: Kansas, Colorado, and Iowa. This by no way means it is impossible to get accepted elsewhere, but it is more difficult.
   • Things to consider:
     o Class size
     o Self-contained, do dental students take classes with students in other programs? U of Minnesota dental students take a few classes like biochemistry and human anatomy with the medical school students. Those classes are taught in a huge lecture hall, probably 250 plus students.
     o Condition of the school building, technology available to the students in terms of dental equipment and learning resources.
     o Location and traffic
     o Date of part I of the national board (most after 2nd year, some including the U of Nebraska Lincoln after 1st year)
     o How well do their students do on the boards, part I and II?
     o Do they have structured board review classes as part of the curriculum?
     o How much clinical experience do students get? When do students start seeing patients? I warn you just because students start seeing patients earlier, doesn’t necessarily mean they get more clinical experience – it might just be spread out.
     o Overall cost of education. Look at tuition, student fees, books, equipment, cost of living around campus, parking – Marq Univ annual parking permit fee was more than $500 in 2003.
- If you are interested, what research opportunities are there?
- Does the school have advanced training in orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics, oral surgery, etc? If you are interested in continuing your education in these areas after graduation, it is smart to attend a school that has these programs. You can get into these programs not having gone to a dental school with them, but acceptance is so much more competitive.

- If you want, you can call the schools and schedule a tour before you apply. I didn’t do this for three main reasons: I was going to apply to the four regional dental schools regardless to improve my chances of acceptance, I didn’t want to miss any more school than I needed to, and I didn’t want the additional expense. Interviews give you a great opportunity to see the school and interact with some students. For schools that don’t interview, Marq University invites all out-of-state accepted applicants to tour the school and visit with students the first Saturday in January, which falls over Christmas break and before you must let the schools know of your plans. Creighton encourages accepted applicants to arrange to tour the school before they make their decisions; however, there isn’t anything formal planned – you just call the school individually.

8. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me, Kelly Ramey, at kramey@cableone.net. I will be switching email address at the end of June because I will be moving to Nebraska for dental school, but I will keep Dr. Wise updated with my new information.