A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS TO DENTAL SCHOOLS

2016-2017

1. HOW TO APPROACH THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

If you would like to be admitted to dental school, read this guide. It has been created by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center in order to help IU students avoid the common mistakes advisors at HPPLC see students making in the dental school application process. Inside you will find tips that will save you time and help make the process less confusing and stressful for you. Every year we see students who do not get admitted because they missed information they could have found here. We want you to succeed!

This guide will help you navigate the complex process of applying to dental school. Please take the time to read it thoroughly and refer back to it frequently as you proceed through the admissions process.

Your initial contact with the dental school admissions committee will be through your written application. Submitting complete, polished documents that you have spent some time preparing will reflect well on your potential as a dental student and future dentist. If you make many mistakes in the application process, or your approach is disorganized, an admissions committee may conclude that your performance as a dental student and as a dentist will be error-prone and disorganized. Your application should reflect all of the thoughtful preparation you have made for a career in dentistry so far.

Most schools operate on a rolling admissions basis, admitting many students long before the deadline to apply. Remember that just as applicants are competing to be admitted, schools are competing for the best students and do not wait on late applications to fill their classes.

In addition to reading this guide, please make sure to refer to the information available on the HPPLC website on the essential steps to take before you reach the admissions stage to prepare to be a competitive applicant. Before applying, you should assess your credentials and competitiveness for admission. Apply as the strongest applicant you can be in order to enhance your success!

2. OVERVIEW OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

You initiate the process of applying to dental school by submitting an “AADSAS” application. AADSAS is a centralized application service that is run by the American Dental Education Association. AADSAS allows students to complete one initial “primary” application that can be used to apply to multiple dental schools.

Applying to dental school is a two-step process: 1) you fill out the AADSAS electronic primary application and choose the schools you would like to receive the application; 2) next you submit supplementary materials to the dental schools.

3. THE PRIMARY APPLICATION

The 2016 AADSAS online application is scheduled to become available on June 1, 2016 and will be found at the following web address:

http://www.adea.org/dental_education_pathways/aadsas/Applicants/Pages/default.aspx
You can begin to work on the application as soon as it becomes available. It can take six to eight weeks for AADSAS to process your application and send it to the schools you select. Please start early. It often takes an applicant one to two weeks to fill out the application. Start early, and make sure to give yourself time to do a good job on the application. Ideally, you should try to submit your AADSAS application by mid-June.

You will need to have a DENTPIN®, a unique identification number, to begin your AADSAS application. If you have already registered for a DAT test, you would have received a DENTPIN when you registered for the DAT. Otherwise, when you initiate an AADSAS application you will be prompted to create a DENTPIN. If you have already created a DENTPIN you can look it up at www.ada.org/goto/dentpin.

You can log in and out of your AADSAS application and spend several weeks entering information and making sure that everything is accurate and complete. When you are satisfied with the application you submit it electronically and send it to AADSAS for processing. Once you submit the application you cannot make changes on it.

A full Instruction Booklet for the AADSAS application can be found by clicking on "ADEA AADSAS General Instruction Booklet" on the website. You may find it helpful to print out this instruction booklet so that you can refer to it while you fill out the various sections. The application is complicated but most questions can be answered by referring to the appropriate sections listed in the table of contents.

If you cannot find the answer to your question in the Instruction Book, you can call the AADSAS helpline at 617-612-2045.

Some Tips on the Various Sections of the Application:

Colleges Attended

List every college that you have attended and the dates of attendance. You will need to submit transcripts from every college you have attended to AADSAS (see the section on “Transcripts” in this document).

Coursework

In this section you type in information on every college course you have taken at Indiana University, or at any other college or university. Before filling out this section you should gather copies of all your transcripts from every university you have attended to use in filling out the application.

If you completed coursework at another university and transferred credit to IU, make sure you enter the course information as it appears on the original school’s transcript, not as it appears on your IU transcript.

Coursework from another IU campus should be listed under the section for that campus on the AADSAS application.

AADSAS requires each applicant to submit grade information in one standardized form so they can calculate each applicant’s GPA in a standardized form that can be used to compare all applicants, regardless of the grading system used at the university the applicant attended. For this reason your GPA as calculated by AADSAS may be slightly different from the GPA that appears on your IU transcript.

Some tips on how to fill in course information:

- You will choose a course classification for each course you have taken. Please consult the AADSAS Instruction Book for advice on how to classify courses.
- If you withdrew from a course after the drop deadline you are required to list it on the application. Courses listed on your transcript that appear with grades of W must be listed on the application.
- Some dental schools may be willing to count Intensive Writing courses towards their English course requirements, where applicable. If there is room in the course title field, you may want to include “Intensive Writing” after the course title to indicate these courses fulfilled intensive writing
requirements. If there is not room, you can provide this information to schools with English course requirements when you submit supplemental information to the school.

- Your transcript may show college credit that you earned through Advanced Placement or departmental exams. List these courses with the appropriate number of credit hours as they appear on your transcript, and list the “Special Classification” as “Advanced Placement” or “Departmental Exam” if applicable. You should be aware that some dental schools do not accept, or restrict the use of, Advanced Placement or credit-by-examination toward admission requirements. An exemption from a requirement is not generally considered equivalent to earning Advanced Placement credit or credit from coursework.

Activities and Experience

The AADSAS application asks you to provide information on Academic Enrichment Programs; Awards, Honors, and Scholarships; Dentistry/Shadowing Experience; Extracurricular/Volunteer/Community Service Activities; Work Experience; Research Experience; and Activities Requiring Manual Dexterity. It may be helpful for you to assemble a resume and/or list of appropriate activities before beginning to fill out these sections of the application. Some limited space is provided for you to write about each experience.

Personal Statement

An important part of your AADSAS application is your personal statement, an essay of about one page single-spaced, which should address why you would like to go to dental school to become a dentist. Your personal statement will be typed into a text box on the AADSAS application. This text box has a character limit of 4500 characters with spaces. You can draft your personal statement ahead of time in a Word document and check the character count – including spaces – in the Word document to make sure that your statement will fit within the maximum space allowed.

An effective approach that applicants often take is to write in some detail about a few experiences that got them interested in dentistry or confirmed to them that dentistry was the path they wanted to pursue. Often, applicants employ narrative techniques in their statements, through which the writer recounts an experience or event that shaped the writer, sparked an interest in dentistry, or an event that clarified that dentistry was the right choice for him or her. Using concrete, descriptive language in writing about your personal experiences can be very effective. Detailed descriptions of events and experiences tend to reveal more about the inner experience of the writer than generalizations.

Admissions committees are reading lots of essays and after a while they all sound alike. There are many commonalities in the backgrounds and experience of the students who are attracted to the dental profession. You may have had similar experiences to other students who are applying to dental school, but your unique ability to reflect on your experiences and draw insights about them can set you apart from other applicants. Often, writing in a more detailed, specific way and avoiding generalities can turn a boring statement into a more interesting one. **Do not fictionalize anything in your personal statement however!**

Keeping a journal can be very helpful for preparing for this stage. The journal can help you generate ideas so that then you can pick out the best ones to include in your personal statement. You may find that you have written some material in your journal that you can revise and incorporate into your personal statement. Your journal also may be of help later on when writing essays for supplemental applications and preparing for your interviews.

Some additional tips:

- Your personal statement should explain about why you want to become a dentist. It should not simply be a summary of your extracurricular activities or qualifications, which are already listed in the other sections of the application.
- For some help getting started, check out the HPPLC podcast episodes by going to this website [http://www.hpplc.indiana.edu/medicine/med-apply-ps.shtml](http://www.hpplc.indiana.edu/medicine/med-apply-ps.shtml), then scrolling down to where it says,
“Personal Statement and Application Essay Podcast Episodes”, and then clicking on “Quick Personal Statement Exercise” and “Turning Your Ideas into a Draft.”

- You want to demonstrate your best features to an admissions committee without coming across as conceited. It may take repeated revision to strike the right balance.
- Proofread, proofread, and proofread some more. Do not rely on a spell checker alone.
- Make an appointment at HPPLC if you would like feedback on your essay. Also, remember that the essay should reflect your unique personal perspective. There is no strict formula for a good personal statement.
- You may choose to address a personal, judicial, or academic problem (such as a bad semester or a bad grade) in the personal essay. You may instead decide to address these problems in some other way, through a letter to the admissions committee, or in the interview. If you choose to address a sensitive problem in your essay do not allow the whole essay to become focused on it, to the extent that you fail to communicate about all the positive ways that you have prepared for dental school.
- It is okay to use the word “I” but beginning every sentence this way creates an impression that you are egocentric. Try to vary the structure of your sentences.
- Start early and plan to revise many versions of your essay over time. Re-read your essay each time with fresh eyes.

4. CHOOSING WHERE TO APPLY

You will select the dental schools where you would like to apply on your primary AADSAS application. You also can select additional schools later for additional fees. The processing fee for the 2016 AADSAS application is $245 for the first dental school and $98 for each additional school you select. See the AADSAS website for full information on the fees.

Please consider applying to five to ten dental schools. Unfortunately, last year there were a number of IU students who only applied to IU dental school and were disappointed. It does not make sense to work so hard up to this point to prepare for dental school and then only give yourself one chance at it – if you really, truly want to be a dentist.

There are many sources for help in deciding where to apply:

- Admissions directors or representatives (many conduct meetings through HPPLC and attend our annual Health Programs Fair)
- ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools: 2015-2016 (available in the HPPLC office)
- Individual dental school websites and publications
- Dental School Admissions Statistics (handout available from the HPPLC office)
- Friends and colleagues in dental school (realize they probably know their own school quite well, but not other schools) or dentists (however, realize that their knowledge of some admissions issues might not be up-to-date)

There are resources available in the HPPLC office to help you research the average DAT scores and average GPA’s of students accepted at each school. Admission to dental school is highly competitive.

Many publicly-supported dental schools give preference to in-state residents, so often the schools that give you residential preference in admission will afford some of the best chances for acceptance. However, admission to IU dental school is becoming increasingly competitive (some general guidelines of the credentials you would need to have a good chance for admission at IU dental school would be 3.4 cumulative GPA; 3.4 science GPA; and 18’s in all areas of the DAT).

All applicants should make sure to apply to some additional schools out of state that accept larger numbers of non-residents. University of Louisville accepts a considerable number of IU Bloomington students. There are some private schools outside of Indiana that accept larger numbers of out-of-state residents with somewhat moderate DAT score and GPA averages (some of the schools you may wish to consider are Boston, Case Western, Creighton, Marquette, Midwestern, NYU, Temple, and Tufts). The tuition rates at these private schools may be higher than in-state tuition at IU dental school, but these schools may provide additional options for admission for you if you are serious about a career in dentistry.
Do not make the mistake of taking too narrow of an approach initially by applying to only a very small number of schools. Too many applicants do this and regret it when they get further into the application process and can only apply to more schools as a late applicant.

Some additional points to consider:

- Teaching/learning style: traditional lecture, practice-based learning, or a combination? How do you learn best? Which system would fit you?
- Strength of programs of interest
- Costs and living expenses
- Class size and student-faculty ratio; consistent, significant evidence of faculty interaction and availability beyond the classroom
- Clinical facilities; organization of clinical years and patient contact
- Grading system
- Programs for underrepresented students
- Student organizations: How many are there that are of interest to you and how much are they supported by the school?
- What about specialties? If you have a strong interest in orthodontics or periodontics, how many in the class go on to these?

5. TRANSCRIPTS

You will need to request that your transcripts be sent to AADSAS from all colleges and universities you have attended (you do not need to order high school transcripts). AADSAS will not process your application until all transcripts have been received. AADSAS matches up your transcripts with your application, verifies that you have entered all the information accurately (this is called “verification”), and then sends your application to the schools you have selected.

The HPPLC Office does not process transcripts. Transcripts are handled by the registrar’s office. Transcripts must be sent directly from the schools you attended to AADSAS.

On the AADSAS application you will need to print off a Transcript Matching Form, which has all the information needed to order your transcript from each college you have attended.

You should submit one copy of this form to the IUB registrar in Student Central on Union (408 N. Union Street). For more information on ordering transcripts, please refer to the IUB registrar’s office website at http://studentcentral.indiana.edu/register/documents/transcript.shtml.

If you attended other colleges besides IU, submit one copy of the AADSAS Transcript Request form to the registrar’s office of each college attended. Find information on ordering transcripts at each college by going to the school’s website and finding information for the registrar’s office regarding procedures for ordering transcripts.

All IU courses taken at IU campuses appear on one centralized transcript, so if you have taken IU courses on other IU campuses you will not need a separate transcript from that campus. However, if you have actually taken a Purdue course at IUPUI or IPFW you will have to order a transcript from them, in addition to your IU transcript.

If, after submitting your AADSAS application, there appears to be a hold because they have not received a transcript from another IU campus, call the AADSAS helpline at 617-612-2045 to try to resolve the problem.

Your application will not be processed until AADSAS receives transcripts from all schools you have attended. Make sure that you do not have any holds on your account at IU that could prevent the Registrar’s office from mailing out your transcript. Please make allowance for processing time at the registrar’s office, for postal mail delivery of your transcripts to AADSAS, and for processing time at AADSAS once your transcripts are received.
At the end of the fall semester you can update the coursework section of your AADSAS application with your new coursework from fall using the “Academic Update” process. Details about this are available on the AADSAS website. The Academic Update period runs from November to February. You should receive an email directly from AADSAS giving you instructions on how to complete this process.

6. DAT

Your goal should be to achieve a solid score on the DAT at the latest by mid-July of the year that you plan to apply to dental school. Because there is a 90-day waiting period after taking the DAT before you are allowed to register for another test, we would recommend attempting to prepare to take the exam earlier, to allow for the possibility that you may need to retake the exam in mid-July of the year you are applying. You do not need to complete physics coursework before taking the DAT, so if you wish you may delay the physics courses until after you complete the biology and chemistry requirements.

One common strategy is to study over winter break and then take the DAT in January so there is time to study and retake it before applying during the summer. Another strategy is to take the DAT over spring break, so there still would be another opportunity to re-test during the summer you plan to apply. Another strategy is to take the exam about a year before you plan to apply. In this case, many students will take the entire summer to study and then take it in August, leaving plenty of time to retake it prior to the summer that they plan to apply.

You will use the same DENTPIN for your DAT registration and your AADSAS application, and this allows for your DAT scores to be reported to AADSAS so they can be included with your application. When you register for the DAT, you can select dental schools that you would like to receive your scores. Your DAT scores can also be reported through your AADSAS application. As long as you release your DAT scores to at least one of the schools that you select on the AADSAS application, your DAT scores will automatically be imported into your AADSAS application and all the dental schools you select on AADSAS will receive a copy of your scores. If you did not release your scores to any dental schools when you registered for the DAT exam, you should go to the DAT website and release your scores to at least one of the dental schools that you select on the AADSAS application.

For the IU dental school, scores of 18 in all areas of the DAT should give you a good chance for admission. Scores above 18 will of course improve your chances for admission even more.

7. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

After submitting your AADSAS application, you will need to submit supplemental materials that are required by each individual dental school before your application will be considered complete by each school. On the AADSAS application website, click on the “Supplemental Information” link to access instructions on the additional materials requested by each dental school. Send these materials to the dental schools as instructed.

Your dental school applications will not be complete until you submit the supplemental materials that are required. After the schools receive your AADSAS application, each school follows its own procedure. Some schools request that applicants submit supplemental materials to them at the same time they submit the AADSAS application while other schools ask that applicants wait until the school invites them to submit supplemental materials. If you have questions you should check the school’s website for additional instructions on their procedures, or call or e-mail the admissions office at the school. With the exception of recommendation letters, all other supplemental materials should be sent directly to the dental schools, not to AADSAS.

You should be aware that most schools will not review your file at all until all supplemental materials, including letters of recommendation, have been received. In essence what this means is that you have not actually applied to that school until you have completed your supplemental application, even if you selected the school months earlier on your primary application. Ideally, you should submit supplemental materials by July or early August to the dental schools.

It would be a good idea to set up a filing system once you reach the supplemental application stage, with a file folder for each school so that you can track your correspondence and contacts with them.
8. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Dental school requirements for letters of recommendation vary from school to school, but most common is a minimum of three faculty recommendations, two of which must be from science faculty. You should check the “Supplemental Information” link on the AADSAS application website for the recommendation letter requirements for each school.

The IU dental school requests three faculty evaluation letters, two of which must be from science professors. Indiana University School of Dentistry will only accept letters of evaluation through AADSAS. Please check their website for guidelines on recommendations.

Please ask professors well in advance and give them plenty of time to write letters of evaluation for you. We highly recommend that predental students establish an account with a service called Interfolio. With an Interfolio account, you can begin to accumulate letters well ahead of time so that your application will not be delayed. You can request that your recommenders send letters to your Interfolio account ahead of time, and then when you are ready to apply, you can request that Interfolio send them to AADSAS and dental schools. Please refer to the instructions on the HPPLC website on the use of Interfolio.

Some schools require that letters be sent through AADSAS while others request that they be sent directly to the school. Please check the link on the AADSAS website for “Supplemental Information” to find the instructions for each school where you have applied.

If your AADSAS application is complete, send it in, even if the letters are not ready to be sent. AADSAS does not need the recommendations to verify and process your application as long as they have received all required transcripts. Letters of evaluation can be sent after you have submitted your primary AADSAS application.

9. INTERVIEWS

Once you have submitted your supplemental applications take some time over the summer to begin to prepare for your interviews. The interview is used to assess your interpersonal and communication skills and how you would conduct yourself with patients. You should prepare carefully for this crucial component of the admissions process.

Prior to your interviews, take some time to thoroughly review your AADSAS application, personal statement, extracurricular experiences, and supplemental applications, and think about what you may wish to say about them in the interview. Practice answering potential interview questions. For many people, practicing answers aloud can allow them to make mistakes and correct them, and become smoother in their ability to respond. You should also endeavor to read about current events and major issues related to healthcare and dentistry.

Interview questions also typically delve deeply into the student’s manual dexterity skills and exposure to dentistry. Research and investigate through reading and talking with dental practitioners about dental education and current issues in the practice of dentistry.

You should also prepare some questions to ask your interviewers. What would you truly want to know about the school before you show up on the first day of class? Thinking about this will help you identify good questions to ask your interviewers. Do some research on the school to identify areas about which you’d like to know more. In fact a good general way to phrase a question in an interview is along the lines of: “I saw that your curriculum offers [this type of program, course, etc.]. Could you tell me more about that?”
Review the handout available from the HPPLC office, “Dental School Interview Questions,” and attend one of the HPPLC Interview Skills Workshops in the fall semester.

10. ACCEPTANCES

Rules have been established by the ADEA that regulate the process by which schools make offers of admission and applicants accept offers. Please read the section on “Offers of Admission” available on the AADSAS website.

11. FOR REAPPLICANTS

If you have already applied to dental school and you were not admitted, you should take some time for self-assessment. Have you fully explored the profession, so that you are clear about the special demands needed to be successful in dental school and as a dentist? If after some self-reflection you decide that you want to pursue a career in dentistry, and that you will work very hard to do what it takes to be successful, the next step is to thoroughly evaluate what went wrong in the application process the first time. You should carefully review all aspects of your candidacy, to determine any weaknesses that resulted in denial of admission. Many dental schools are willing to advise students on why their applications were rejected and recommend areas for improvement. After doing a thorough review, you need to endeavor to strengthen any aspects of your application that were weak before you reapply. Some students actually turn around and reapply with exactly the same academic record, same DAT scores, same application, even the same personal statement. If you do this, you should expect that the decision on your application will be the same as it was the first time. Do not make this mistake. You can earn a lot of respect from an admissions committee by having the maturity to recognize weaknesses and do the hard work to address them before you reapply. Please feel free to set up an appointment in the HPPLC office to discuss your strategy.

See the instructions on the AADSAS website for re-applicants on rolling over some of the information from your previous application for the next application cycle.

12. TIMELINE FOR YOUR APPLICATION YEAR

MAY
- Assemble materials in preparation for completing your application (spring transcript from IU, transcripts from all other universities attended, list of activities or resume).
- Work on writing personal statement. Keep a journal throughout the application process, and use it for ideas for your personal statement, supplemental applications, and interviews.
- Research dental schools. Consult the chart from the Official Guide to Dental Schools (a copy of this is available in the HPPLC office) which shows in-state and out-of-state acceptance rates, and the average grade point averages and average DAT scores of accepted students.

JUNE
- June 1, 2016: Begin working on the AADSAS application as soon as it becomes available.
- Request that transcripts be sent to AADSAS from every college you attended, using the AADSAS Transcript Matching Form.
- Submit your completed AADSAS application as soon as possible; by mid-June would be recommended. You should submit the application early, as soon as you feel it is complete, even if your DAT scores are not available yet or your recommendations are not ready to be sent. Your DAT scores and letters of recommendation can be sent later.
- Check the Supplemental Information link on the AADSAS website and follow the instructions for submitting supplemental materials for each school to which you have applied.
- After you submit your AADSAS application you should periodically log in to the AADSAS website and monitor the status of your application. You should call and check with AADSAS regarding any transcripts that are listed as not having been received and then check with the Registrar’s office to see if there was a problem with the order.
JULY and AUGUST

- Send recommendations as requested by the dental schools and confirm that they have received them.
- Some dental schools will send you additional supplemental applications. As you receive supplemental application materials from each dental school, you should follow their instructions and submit the supplemental applications in a timely manner. Do not wait until the deadline to submit.
- Ideally you should have submitted every requested document to every school where you are applying by early August.
- Double check on everything. Be sure that supplemental applications and recommendation packets have been received by each school. Check everything by phone or on the school website if there is one dedicated to applicants and application status.
- Research the programs and characteristics of the schools to which you have applied.
- Prepare for interviews. Continue to keep your journal, and review it for ideas to emphasize to an admissions committee. Consult the Dental School Interview Questions handout from the HPPLC office and prepare for questions you may be asked. Review questions from dental interviews at the Student Doctor website by doing the following: 1. Go to this website: http://schools.studentdoctor.net/?view=allopathic. 2. Go to “School Type,” scroll down and click on “Dental School.” 3. Click on the dental schools where you would like to have interviews. 4. Click on “Interview Feedback.”

SEPTEMBER – MARCH

- Attend one of the HPPLC Interview Skills Workshops to be held early in the fall semester.
- Update the coursework section of your AADSAS application at the end of the fall semester to reflect newly-completed coursework using the “Academic Update” process. Details about this are available on the AADSAS website. AADSAS should send instructions about this to you by email.
- Visit with the representative of any dental school to which you have applied who visits campus. Attend the Health Programs Fair on March 1, 2017, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM in the Indiana Memorial Union. Meet with representatives of any schools where your application is still under consideration, or where you may wish to apply if you end up reapplying. We recommend meeting with the representatives of all dental schools that participate in this event, and these schools would be good to include on the list of schools where you are applying, as they are particularly interested in recruiting students from our campus.
- Remain in contact with schools if you have submitted applications and have not heard back. A polite email or phone call to inquire about your status is generally acceptable.
- Do some contingency planning and prepare alternate plans with a HPPLC advisor if your admission to dental school is in doubt. Remember that there are many possibilities for a career in healthcare if that is what you desire.

13. SOME FINAL ADVICE

Always keep in mind that schools are assessing your professionalism through the manner in which you conduct yourself while applying. Make sure that your e-mail address is working and reachable at all times and respond in a timely manner and appropriately to mailings from the schools. Be mature, polite, and professional at all times with the professors writing recommendation letters for you, the staff handling your application file, and any representatives of dental schools you contact.

Please release your DAT scores and AADSAS information to Indiana University. Our office can help you better if information is released to us. The data we receive is crucial to our ability to advise students on our campus about how to prepare for admission. Our job here is to help you. Whether it is as a sounding board for choice of dental schools, feedback on your personal statement, or dealing with problems, that’s why we are here. Please check in with HPPLC as you proceed through the application process and seek advice on additional things you can do to enhance your chances of admission. We want to help you in any way we can!

GOOD LUCK!
This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.

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