

## CHAPTER 3

# DECIDING WHERE TO APPLY

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**S**electing the dental schools to which you want to apply is a very personal decision. Every applicant is looking for different characteristics in an educational experience. Your individual decision depends on many factors, such as career goals, personal interests, geographical preference, and family circumstances. For this reason, dental school rankings tend to be misleading. The education provided by U.S. and Canadian dental schools is of a high quality overall. As a more productive alternative, this chapter offers a framework to help you create your own list of dental schools tailored to your interests and needs. It covers fundamental issues that will help you decide what kind of educational experience you are looking for and begin to identify the schools most likely to offer it.

The general information in Chapter 2 provided a broad introduction to the dental school program. However, variations exist across dental schools that will be important when you make your decision about where to apply. If you have a commitment to providing community-based care, for example, you will likely prefer to attend a dental school that offers a public health focus and varied opportunities for gaining experience in community clinics. Similarly, if you are interested in ultimately focusing on oral health research, you will want to look for a dental school with a strong research focus and student research opportunities. Academic dental institutions also offer a range of curriculum options. Some schools offer innovative problem-based curricula, and some organize their curricula along more integrative rather than discipline-based lines, while others follow a more traditional discipline-based, classroom-instruction-followed-by-clinical-training structure. You should therefore consider what type of educational environment will make you feel most comfortable and best prepare you for the kind of career you will choose to follow.

The same approach holds true as you consider dental schools in different areas of the country. You may want to determine whether you are more comfortable in a particular geographical or physical location—a rural versus a big city setting, for example—or if you prefer to attend a school near where you grew up or one in a new area where you may want to remain after graduation. The composition of the student body also varies. Some schools have student bodies made up of individuals from all over the country (and some, even, from around the world); some (primarily those affiliated with state universities) give preference to students from their home states; and some have partnership agreements with states that do not have dental schools, allowing students from those states to attend for the in-state tuition fee.

The key is to define your needs and preferences and then identify dental schools that correspond to your selections. To help you do that, here are some questions that can help you think through what you are looking for in a dental school:

## Dental School Rankings

Dental school applicants should be aware that there are proprietary publications available that purport to rank dental schools according to the quality of their programs.

The American Dental Education Association (ADEA) and the American Dental Association (ADA) advise applicants to view these rankings with caution. The bases for these rankings are questionable, and even those individuals most knowledgeable about dental education would admit to the difficulty of establishing criteria for, and achieving consensus on, such rankings. The accrediting organization for all U.S. dental schools is the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). Applicants interested in the current accreditation status of any U.S. dental school should contact CODA at 800-621-8099. All schools have their relative strengths. A dental school ideally suited for one applicant might not be appropriate for another. ADEA and the ADA recommend that applicants investigate on their own the relative merits of the dental schools they wish to attend.

### *What is the focus of the dental school's training, and does it match my interests and needs?*

You might say, for example:

- I want to become a general practitioner, either in my own practice or in a group practice environment.
- I have a strong interest in scientific research regarding oral health.
- I am undecided about the type of dentistry I would like to practice, so I want to be in a school where I have a range of options from which to choose.
- My dream is to become a professor, so I'd like opportunities to prepare for an academic career while I'm in dental school. I want to prepare myself for eventual specialty training. I hope to obtain a combined degree.

### *What is the structure of the curriculum in terms of what is taught and when?*

You might say, for example:

- I would like to start getting hands-on clinical experience as soon as possible.
- I would like the opportunity to participate in research while in dental school.
- I am very interested in externships, especially the opportunity to participate in short-term service programs in other countries.
- I am devoted to helping the underserved. I want to make sure there are plenty of opportunities for community service.
- I plan to return to my home community as a general practitioner, so I want to focus on the training I need for that.
- I learn best in active learning situations. I want to find a curriculum that focuses on that style of education.

### *What academic resources are available?*

You might say, for example:

- I want to gain experience working with the most state-of-the-art technologies in dentistry.
- I am very interested in having easy access to modern clinical facilities and a large number of patients.
- I would like to get as much experience as possible working in a community setting.
- I would like to get as much experience as possible in a hospital setting.
- I want to have the opportunity to earn a Ph.D. as well as a dental degree.

### *What services are available to students?*

You might say, for example:

- I need to feel comfortable about seeking academic help if I need it.
- I would like to be active in student government.
- I want to attend a school that provides a supportive atmosphere for women and minorities.
- I want to attend a school in which the faculty and administration are sensitive to the stresses dental students experience.
- I want to be able to live on campus or to obtain inexpensive housing near campus.

### *Where is the school located?*

You might say, for example:

- My family situation requires me to attend dental school close to home.
- I prefer attending dental school in an urban setting.
- I need to attend a school where I can benefit from in-state tuition.

## STUDENT PROFILE



## RICARDO LUGO

FOURTH-YEAR DENTAL STUDENT  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY  
HOMETOWN: CHINO HILLS, CALIFORNIA

*Why dentistry?*

I first became interested in dentistry because of my orthodontist. I was interested in the work he did and decided that a career in dentistry would be worth looking into.

*What are you doing now?*

I am currently a fourth-year dental student and am spending a large portion of every day in the comprehensive care clinics. In addition to daily clinics at the dental school, I have also been traveling to clinics within the state of Michigan as part of an outreach program.

*What are your short-term and long-term goals?*

My immediate goals involve applying to general practice residency programs. I hope to be accepted into a program that allows me to improve my clinical skills while gaining experience in more complex clinical cases.

Long term, I hope to do work in the fields of education and public health. I intend on merging my interest in teaching with my desire to serve underserved communities.

*What did you do as an applicant to prepare for dental school?*

As an applicant preparing for dental school, I participated in a variety of programs to make sure dentistry was the right decision for me. I did a six-week summer program that provided exposure in clinic, research, and DAT studying. I shadowed a private-practice dentist in San Diego, California (where I did my undergraduate education), for over a year. I worked for an endodontist in my junior year of undergrad. Most important, I volunteered at a free clinic in San Diego to gain practical experience in dentistry. Through this free clinic and unique exposure to dentistry, I solidified my decision to enter the profession of dentistry.

*What did you look for when choosing a dental school?*

I searched for a well-balanced dental school that would provide me with the opportunity to pursue any path of dentistry (i.e., general practice, specialty, education, research). Out of the different aspects that make a dental school well-rounded, I looked predominately for a dental school that had a strong clinical component.

*What advice would you give applicants or those considering dental school?*

Apply early. There are thousands of outstanding applicants, and you want to make sure you are competing

with a smaller pool, typically earlier in the application cycle. If possible, have all of your materials (e.g., personal statement, letters of recommendation, DAT scores) ready before the AADSAS application opens.

*What helped make the transition to dental school easier?*

I moved to a completely new state for dental school: Ann Arbor, Michigan. I did not know anyone in Ann Arbor and was forced to form new friendships. The one thing that helped me transition was living with fellow classmates. Not only did this serve as support for classes and the simulation lab, it allowed me to live with students originally from Michigan who have become close friends and were extremely helpful in transitioning to a new city.

*Would you advise shadowing?*

I shadowed a general dentist in San Diego, California, during my junior year. At the most superficial level, I experienced typical days and weeks as a private practice dentist. Beyond that, I learned about dental procedures, working with employees, and communicating with patients.

*What is your advice on financial aid?*

I have taken advantage of scholarships and loans while in dental school. My advice for applicants is to apply to as many scholarships as possible. In addition, after receiving a letter of acceptance, talk to the school's financial aid office and ask if the school has scholarships for incoming students. Then make a budget that includes personal expenses so that you can identify areas that you can cut back on. For example, if you talk to current students at a school, you might be able to find out which classes you don't need textbooks for or buy used textbooks from current students. Over four years, small savings add up, decreasing the amount you'll have to take out in loans.

- I would like to attend a dental school in an area where hiking and outdoor recreation are easily available.

Your answers to all these questions—and others that you will think of as well—should help you conduct an initial analysis of the information you will find on individual schools in Part II of this book. You can then expand your research by asking for more information directly from each school that you consider a prospect.

To get you started, the tables in this chapter provide an at-a-glance, cumulative comparison of a number of aspects of the individual dental schools.

**Table 3-1** presents the number of applicants and enrollees at each school, broken down by gender, race, and ethnicity.

**Table 3-2** shows the number of applicants interviewed or accepted and enrollees at each school, broken down by in-state/in-province and out-of-state/out-of-province categories.

**Table 3-3** summarizes specific admissions requirements for each school.

**Table 3-4** provides characteristics of the entering class of each school.

**Table 3-5** shows the geographic break down of each school's entering class.

**Table 3-6** provides information on the combined degree programs at each school.

**Table 3-7** offers a national perspective on admissions trends.

The information in the tables is presented alphabetically by state, territory, and province. Though ADEA has made every effort to ensure that the information in the tables is correct, the Association makes no warranty, either express or implied, of its accuracy or completeness. The school-specific information was supplied to ADEA by each dental school.

For more information and detailed admissions requirements for each school, consult the individual school profiles in Part II of this book. **As you determine where you plan to send applications, you should contact those dental schools directly for the most complete information about admission requirements. The telephone numbers, addresses, and websites of each school are included in the profiles.**