

THE DENTAL PROFESSION

Dentistry is devoted to maintaining the health and appearance of teeth, gums, and other hard and soft tissues of the mouth. Dentistry is a profession that is dedicated to the highest standards of health through the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of all oral diseases and conditions. Early detection of oral cancer and systemic conditions that manifest themselves through the mouth are necessary for the maintenance of general health. The first occupation that typically comes to mind when one thinks of this branch of medicine is dentist, though some Nebraska Wesleyan students have also pursued careers in dental hygiene.

Dentist

Dentists are health professionals who diagnose and treat problems with their patients' teeth and mouth tissue. They may be general practitioners or specialize in an area of dentistry like orthodontics, periodontics, endodontics, or pediatric dentistry. All practicing general dentists have earned either a Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) degree, as well as a state license. To become a specialist, dentists must pursue additional education through a residency program following completion of their DDS or DMD degree.

Dental Hygienist

Dental hygienists, generally working under the supervision of a dentist, provide preventative dental care. They typically spend a lot of time with patients, performing cleanings, examining their mouth and teeth, and teaching them good oral hygiene practices. Their duties vary according to the rules of the state in which they practice. This occupation requires an associate degree from a dental hygiene educational program, as well as a state license.

UNDERGRADUATE PREPARATION

A bachelor's degree is strongly recommended or required by many dentistry programs. Typically, any major is acceptable. The most common undergraduate majors among dental students include biology, chemistry, and biochemistry and molecular biology. In selecting a college major, consider how you will complete the pre-requisite courses for your desired dentistry program, in addition to the graduation requirements of Nebraska Wesleyan.

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED COURSES

Although there is no required undergraduate major for entering the field of dentistry, each institution will have a required list of pre-requisite coursework that must be completed. Some programs accept AP/CLEP/other transfer credits, while other programs do not. To the right is a general list of courses and credits needed for dental school from the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). Students should contact their desired graduate school directly for specific pre-requisite requirements, transfer equivalencies, or other questions.

Courses	Credits
English	6
Chemistry	16
Biology	8
Physics	8-10

BEYOND ACADEMICS

Pre-Dentistry students are encouraged to participate in experiences such as leadership activities, volunteer opportunities, research, and shadowing of professionals, which will help prepare them for a dentistry program and the dental profession. Activities beyond the classroom play a significant role in a student's application to a professional program. Such experiences demonstrate a commitment to and knowledge of the profession. In particular, shadowing dentists will help students learn more about the daily activities of the dental profession.

At Nebraska Wesleyan, student organizations that may be interesting or useful to students looking into dentistry include the American Chemical Society, Biology Club, and Pre-Health Club. Also, consider Beta Beta Beta (Biology Honorary).

DENTAL EDUCATION

There are over 65 accredited dentistry schools in the United States that offer either Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) degrees. Schools in Nebraska offering such programs include Creighton University and UNMC. The total number of credit hours required for degree completion may vary from school to school. Some institutions offer joint degrees, post-doctoral residencies, and fellowships. Practical experience is important; as such, dental programs have dedicated time spent on clinical education and other training opportunities, rather than focusing solely on classroom and lab study.

APPLICATION & ADMISSION

1. Most dental schools, including UNMC and Creighton University, participate in the [American Association of Dental Schools Application Service \(AADSAS\)](#). Through this standardized application, students can apply to multiple schools with one application. Applicants select the specific schools they would like to apply to and send the application directly through the site. This web-based application includes the applicant's personal statement, course summary, and listing of extracurricular activities. The AADSAS is usually available until May each application cycle, but it is best to submit applications well before stated deadlines.
2. The [Dental Admissions Test \(DAT\)](#) is required. It is each applicant's responsibility to provide official DAT score reports to each school to which they plan to apply. Consider taking a free practice test of the DAT through the [NWU Library Mometrix database](#).
3. Note that many schools require letters of recommendation, a personal statement, and interviews for admission. Some schools that accept applications through AADSAS may also require a supplemental or secondary application. Check the school website for all application requirements.

Regional School	Credit Requirement	Avg. DAT Score	Avg. GPA	Length of Program	Degree Offered
UNMC	90 hours	20.2	3.67	4 years	DDS
Creighton University	64 hours	19.4	3.56	4 years	DDS
University of Iowa	90 hours	20.3	3.74	4 years	DDS

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Dental Association \(ADA\)](#)

[American Dental Education Association \(ADEA\)](#)

Current students can use the [Career Assistance Network](#) to connect with NWU alumni in the dental profession.

