

The Pre-Dent's Guide to Dental School Selection



Dr. Oz

Which Dental School Is Best For You? Here are 6 Factors To Take Into Consideration According to Dr. Oz

1. Geographic Location
2. Class Size
3. Residency Presence
4. Faculty Strength
5. School Strength/Reputation
6. Cost

Keep reading to learn more!

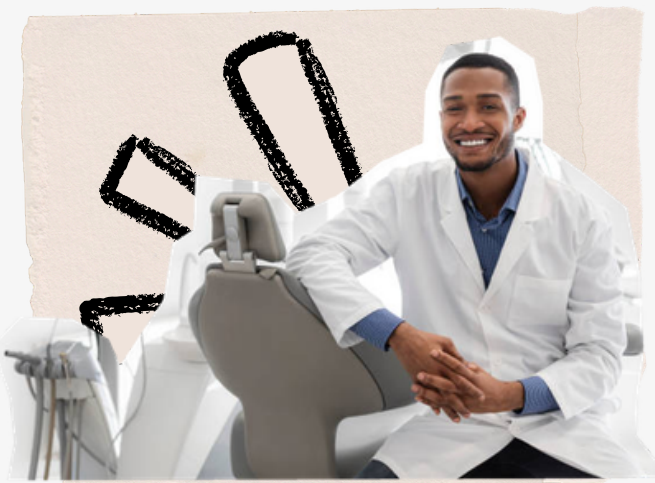
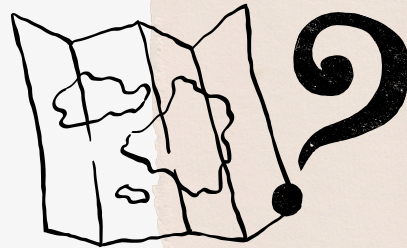
Congratulations! You've decided you want to be covered in saliva, blood, and tooth dust for the rest of your professional career. If you're not applying to dental school this upcoming cycle, then be sure to keep your grades up, stay involved, and continue to develop your professional dental experiences (if you haven't started yet, then you should literally start now). If you are applying this cycle, then I'm sure you know there is a lot to consider. Resumes, personal statements, letters of recommendation, AADSAS, and a healthy sidebar of stress. There is a simple solution to all of this – start. early. The more time you give yourself now, the more you'll thank yourself later when interviews and acceptances begin to roll out. If you like to be prepared, your time has come. If you already know what I'll be covering, then I'll leave you with a practical pearl: develop a strength training/mobility/wellness routine— clinical dentistry will take a physical and mental toll on you.

Alright so the application cycle is coming up, and I'm sure you have questions, so let's answer a big picture one: Where should you apply to school? Ultimately, the strategy you employ should be systematic and based on tangible facts. First, you will need to take a very honest look at yourself in the mirror and assess the strength of your stats (notice I say stats and not application. Stats are a component of your application. They are important, but they're not the only thing that is). How do your transcript and DAT measure up? You can use this as an initial barometer of how you compare to the averages of a school's accepted class (the schools do the same thing when looking at you). Then you need to assess your level of engagement in extracurriculars, dental experiences, and other meaningful involvements. Lastly, you need to lockdown quality letters of recommendation and craft an impactful personal statement. Now look in the mirror again— do you feel your application is competitive? If so, then perhaps you may not apply to as many schools. If you feel borderline, then perhaps you'll have to broaden your horizons. Regardless of your situation, I generally advise pre-dents to apply to more schools than they think they'll need. This is because the admissions process is both dynamic and selective. This is especially true for people applying to graduate/professional schools in the next 3+ years given the new student loan regulations! Lower cost schools are going to get even harder to get into. Before you dive off the deep end of the dental school admissions process, I highly recommend you ask yourself: "Do I believe that I like dentistry enough as a profession (not just the technical aspects of being a dentist) to commit up to ~\$500,000 and potentially make moderate-large lifestyle changes for a period of time, even after graduating from dental school?" If your answer is yes, then keep reading and I'll get into the considerations surrounding school selection. If your answer is maybe, then I would advise you to take a moment to really think about what you want out of your life and what your career path would be if you don't get into one of the "lower cost schools" (or even at all). If your answer is no, then you won't get to make your own bleaching trays.

Myth: There is one single "best dental school" for everyone. **Fact:** There is no best dental school, only one that is best for you!

1. **Geographic Location:** You're going to be spending 4 years (3 in a few cases) of your life here. Things to consider: Will you enjoy living here? Is it close to home or is it the new experience you are seeking? Do you know people in this place, or are you ok starting fresh? Is it a big city, suburban, or rural setting? Could you potentially live there after school? Is it expensive to live there? What's the job market like if you decide to stay there after school?

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2. **Class Size:** Smaller class sizes typically equate to higher quality interactions with faculty. Honestly, the number of students in a lecture hall doesn't matter as much. What matters is the student to faculty ratio in the pre-clinical and clinical settings. Ask this question to the dental students you talk to.

3. **Residency Presence:** The presence of specialty programs will have a direct impact on your clinical training experience. If the school has residencies, typically complex cases will be referred to the postgraduate clinics, and you will not treat those patients as a dental student. Additionally, if those residents are struggling to get cases themselves, then your opportunities will be further limited. While you will complete the CODA requirements, your actual experience may not be enough to give you confidence in those procedures upon graduation. On the other hand, speciality presence gives you more in depth exposure and networking opportunities. However if a school doesn't have residencies, then you as a dental student will likely get more hands on experience in terms of quantity and case complexity.





5. School Strength/Reputation: There are no official dental school rankings. Ultimately the questions you need to ask are: Does this school produce confident general dentists? If your goal is specialization, does the school have high MATCH rates? Is there an adequate patient base for all the dental students? Do you have to find your own patients? Does the school care about student success, or are they just collecting your tuition dollars? Are there resources available to students to aid in their success? Are there specific opportunities that interest you? Does being an alum of a particular school actually help your networking opportunities in a particular geographic area?



4. Faculty Strength: This is kind of a tough one to gauge because there are so many variables. It's information that you would only discover by talking to current dental students at that school (more on this later). Make sure to differentiate between didactic faculty, pre-clinical faculty, or clinical faculty. Dental schools often divide their students into different cohorts/clinics, and thus the faculty interaction also differs. Just try to get a sense if the faculty are generally well liked and care about teaching.



6. Cost: We already touched upon this, but again ask yourself: is this school worth X amount of dollars to me? If you haven't already, you should be looking into how you plan to finance dental school. Uncle Sam is only going to give you \$200,000. Depending on the school's estimated cost of attendance, this means you may be responsible for up to ~\$300K+ more. This gap is typically filled by military scholarships, family contributions, or private loans. If you're in the private loan boat, make sure you talk with experts about what your loans and terms would look like. Personally, I would go with the cheapest school you get into. Yes some dental schools may provide you with a "better experience," but at the end of the day, dental school just teaches you the basics. The real experience comes afterwards. I'm not entirely convinced that the extra hundreds of thousands of dollars is worth it — but that's your call to make.

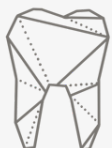
There you have it— a framework for evaluating potential schools. Now the question becomes: what do you do next? Here are your action steps moving forward: Create a spreadsheet tracker for your target schools. The ADEA website has a list of all the dental schools so this can be a good place to start. Think about the 6 aforementioned considerations we talked about. Make sure you pay attention to the what each school says about their application requirements, specific coursework, and other recommendations. Then organize all this information into your spreadsheet (I have a free one available for you, if desired). Email an admissions representative for a dental student contact to speak to. Alternatively, try to find a student via a friend, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. This is the most important step – the dental student will be a wealth of information for you. This is your primary research source as it provides you with the most current information. Students are typically chill and will be straight up with you. Make sure you have a list of questions prepared to ask them. You can also ask your classmates who have applied before you about their experiences/what they learned in their dental school discovery process. Research the school’s website, affiliate links, YouTube videos, SDN, reddit, and DentalTown etc. Keep in mind that aside from the school’s official websites and your direct conversations with dental students/admissions representatives, everything else is a “secondary source.” Not all the information available online is verified, so take it with a grain of salt. Participate in a shadowing/dental day at the school. Talk to the dental students there, ask questions, get a vibe check. This will be a unique opportunity for you to get an inside look at a particular school. Start working on your personal statement, resume, and letters of recommendation. You can’t apply to dental school if you don’t have an application – a good goal to aim for submission is mid July.

I hope this information helps. Good luck fellow Tigers. If you want the dental school tracker, or just have general questions, feel free to reach out to me.

Dr. Oz

About The Author

Dr. Oz (UOP '17, Tufts Dental '22, Chicago VA GPR '23) is currently a general dentist and has been practicing for the past 3 years in Orange County, California. He will also be starting a second residency this summer.



Questions? Reach us at:

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Thank you for reading!