**Dental School Preparations**

**First question to ask yourself: “Are you *sure* about dentistry?”**

* This is arguably the most important part of this handout. By choosing dental school you are essentially picking your medical specialty. This is why it is incredibly important to spend ample time shadowing dental professionals and exposing yourself to the various aspects of dentistry.

Duke Pre-Dental Society

* Easiest way to assess this—good old list of Pros & Cons
* Don’t be afraid to ask dentists questions that will help you figure out whether or not dentistry is right for you:
  + What do they like/dislike about dentistry?
  + What’s their average workday like?
  + What’s their lifestyle like? Does it suit your personality?
  + What problems do they think dentistry will face in the future?
  + Is there anything they wish they would’ve realized before they went to dental school?

**Course Requirements**

* I already talked about specific course requirements in a previous meeting…
* Another point to consider—you **DO NOT** have to major in a science
  + Most people do tend to major in a science because by the time you have finished your pre-reqs you are pretty close to completing major requirements.
  + Plenty of people major in the humanities and then pursue a career in healthcare. There is *no negative connotation* to majoring in the humanities. Many schools are looking for multifaceted applicants who have backgrounds in various subjects to make the class more dynamic. Also, different majors produce students who think differently and offer various perspectives on the same problems.
  + *Note****:*** *If you* ***really*** *hate science, then healthcare might not be the right path for you…*

**Extracurriculars—Clubs, Sports, Jobs, etc.**

* This seems obvious but it is *very important* because these activities help differentiate you from everyone else. Try to focus less on joining as many clubs as possible and more on committing yourself to the ones you’re involved in. It is better to fully immerse yourself in 1 or 2 activities than to be spread thin and barely involved in 8 activities.
* Volunteering
  + It is important to realize that you **DO NOT** have to only do dental-related volunteering. While this may be ideal, there are so many more non-healthcare-related volunteer opportunities so don’t limit yourself! Find a volunteer opportunity that looks fun to you whether that means tutoring, teaching arts and crafts at the Nasher or performing chemistry demonstrations.
* Research
  + Lots of people assume that you have to do research to get into dental school but that is **NOT** true! You also don’t have to do research in a science lab—look into research in history, art, computer science, etc. if that is what you’re interested in.
* Manual Dexterity
  + Dental school is unique in that it specifically asks you to talk about activities that you are involved in that require manual dexterity. These can be traditional activities such as playing the piano or knitting, but feel free to be as creative as you want with it—one of my friends discussed how he dissected mouse muscles as part of his lab job.
* The main point of this section is this: **Do what you love, not what you think will get you in**.
  + Admissions Committees want to know about you and what your passionate about, not what you think they want to hear. It is ***painfully obvious*** when you are just checking off a requirement and when you are truly passionate about an activity you are in.
  + Everything you do during undergraduate life will prepare you for dental school in some way or another though it may not be ‘obvious’ so you might as well enjoy your time here!

**Shadowing**

* This is one of the best ways to confirm your interest in dentistry!
* Emphasis is placed on shadowing a wide range of dentists.
  + Try and shadow a number of the specialties—don’t focus solely on general dentists. That being said, many schools place an emphasis on shadowing general dentists as opposed to spending all of your time shadowing an orthodontist.
  + Feel free to shadow more than one general dentist! One of the most interesting things about the dental field is how much dental offices vary from dentist to dentist. They are truly a reflection of the dentist’s personality so even though you may think they are ‘all the same’ each shadowing experience will be very different and unique as practice dynamics, patient pools, etc. will vary.

Duke Pre-Dental Society

* There is no set number of hours you need to shadow, but I would recommend **at least 50 hours** of shadowing though this is definitely one of those cases where the more you have, the better it is for you. Do realize that the amount of time you spend shadowing reflects your dedication to your pursuit of dentistry. However, don’t feel like you need to have 300 hours of shadowing to get into dental school.
  + Some schools have specific requirements so if there is one school you are looking at in particular, make sure to check their website to see if they have any specific requirements.
* Make sure that you are getting *quality shadowing* time.
  + If you have flexibility in your schedule, ask the dentist what is the best day for you to come in. Dentists know which days will probably be the most interesting for you to come observe them. Some dentists have extra assistants on certain days or close early on others.
* Keep a record of your shadowing experiences!
  + You will need this information when you are filling out your AADSAS application. Also, it is possible that one of your interviewers will ask you to talk about your time shadowing so make sure you take note of what you saw and if anything interesting or out-of-the-ordinary happens.

Duke Pre-Dental Society