

HOW-TO GUIDE

# APPLYING TO U.S. DENTAL SCHOOLS

FOR INTERNATIONALLY  
TRAINED DENTISTS



## Advanced Standing/International Dentist Programs

The first question to ask yourself is what do you want to do? It is very important to know the reason you want to get your DDS or DMD in the United States.

### *Before Applying*

**ECE Evaluation:** [www.ece.org](http://www.ece.org) Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc. (ECE) is a private, non-profit organization that prepares evaluation reports identifying the United States equivalents of educational qualifications earned in other countries.

*Tip:* Request Course by Course evaluation type and ask for extra copies if you are applying to different schools. Each copy requested at a later date has a fee.

**National Board of Dental Examination (NBDE):** Read the NBDE Guide at [www.ada.org/en/jcnde/examinations/national-board-dental-examination-part-i#](http://www.ada.org/en/jcnde/examinations/national-board-dental-examination-part-i#)

*Note:* The NBDE is being phased out. The first administration of the Integrated National Board of Dental Examination (INBDE) will occur in August of 2020, with NBDE Part I phasing out July 31, 2020 and Part II on July 31, 2022. More information available here: <https://www.ada.org/en/jcnde/inbde>

*Tip:* Find previous NBDE exams available for purchase at <https://www.asdanet.org/utility-navigation/shop-asda/Buy-NBDE-Reprints>).

**Dentpin:** Applications for the NBDE examination programs are processed through the ADA's Department of Testing Services. The first step in the application process is confirmation or assignment of your DENTPIN unique personal identifier at this website: [www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dentpin](http://www.ada.org/en/education-careers/dentpin). Apply to ADA with your Dentpin, and ECE evaluation report, for your eligibility to take exams.

**Scheduling Exams:** Go to the testing site Prometric to select the date you want to take the exam- <https://www.prometric.com/test-takers/search/ada>

*Tip:* Registration with ADA is valid for six months. Make sure to schedule your test within that time. Follow the canceling and rescheduling policy precisely. No exceptions will be granted. If you have a chronic medical condition such as diabetes or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, you may be eligible for more breaks or more time to complete the exam.

**TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language):** The English competency test administered online and offered more than 50 times a year at ETS-authorized test centers throughout the world. Schools normally look for scores 100 and above in this test.

*Tip:* TOEFL is exactly the same when you take it inside/outside the US. Examiners get the recordings online, and you never know where they are based, e.g., your evaluator might be in Singapore while you took the exam in the U.K.

**VISA:** If you reside in a country other than the United States, note that you will have to obtain a visitor's visa to take the NBDE. This test must be taken in the U.S.

## *Application Process*

**Deciding which school to apply to:** This link includes a list of dentals schools with international programs: <https://www.asdanet.org/index/dental-student-resources/tips-for-international-dental-students/advanced-standing-programs>.

Visit the website for each individual school to learn what materials they require as part of an application. The application process should be started with ample time to order score reports, and complete the CAAPID application, as well as any supplemental applications.

Most of the programs are registered with CAAPID, which is a centralized application system managed by the American Dental Education Association (ADEA). This link includes a directory of most schools that have international programs along with application requirements and deadlines for each school: [www.adea.org/dental\\_education\\_pathways/CAAPID/Pages/CAAPIDDirectory.aspx](http://www.adea.org/dental_education_pathways/CAAPID/Pages/CAAPIDDirectory.aspx)

Please be advised that there are some programs not registered with CAAPID. We recommend you visit each school's website and verify the application process. Many schools require additional papers/information in addition to those required through CAAPID.

*Tip:* Recommendation letters and dental school transcripts should not be older than six months. Some schools accept TOEFL taken within three years, others within 10. Check each school individually. Submit the application early. Early applications may have a higher chance of getting an interview.

## *Interview*

**Stay updated:** Read interview tips provided by ASDA at <https://www.asdanet.org/index/get-into-dental-school/post-application/interview-tips>.

**Interview format:** Interviews at most schools are divided into two parts: bench examination and personal interview.

### **Bench Examination:**

- *What?* It is a practical examination to test your hand skills and to grade you.
- *Why?* You will not have the same pre-clinical courses as those given to domestic students.
- *What do I have to do?* You will need to check each school for different bench exam requirements. Most schools will send you a detailed explanation of their bench exam and their criteria of grading.
- *When?* Some schools have it the same day of the personal interview, others have it on a different day.
- *How much?* Costs vary.

- *Does that mean I won't need to bring anything like my hand pieces and burs?* You may be asked to bring your tools with you. Some schools can provide burs or hand pieces. You will need to check with the school, and they will let you know. However, be prepared with the hand pieces and burs that you are used to. Nobody wants to try something new in a stressful interview like that. BE PREPARED!
- *Okay, how do I get prepared?* Practice, practice, practice. Quality, not quantity. Find out in advance the criteria that will be used to grade you. A few places in the U.S. give practical courses to prepare internationally trained dentists for the bench examination.
- *What places should I choose to get my bench exam training?* Read the reviews and the opinions of people who took these courses.

**Personal Interview:** Prepare and rehearse. Do a mock interview with friends. Be confident. Even though you have been a dentist for a while, show that you can still be a student, that you want to learn and can accept criticism. Show that you are appreciative of your school and professors. Go online, check out the commonly asked questions and prepare yourself. Read about the school you are interviewing at. You will be asked if you have questions for the interviewers. Prepare questions. Some schools do additional activities during the interviews, such as exams, wax-ups, partial denture design and endo. Check each school individually so you know what to expect at the interview.

### *After Acceptance*

Go to your country's U.S. embassy website or to the website of the U.S. embassy where you will have your visa interview. Read about the student visa and the papers they require. The following requirements are common among different embassies and recommendations based on personal experiences, so please be advised they may vary between embassies.

**Student Visa:** Apply for a student visa as soon as the school issues you a Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant [F-1] Student Status) <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html>. You must have a copy of the I-20 when you make an appointment with the embassy. The first step is to pay your Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee to U.S. Homeland Security. You will need this receipt when you go for your visa interview. In your interview, be prepared to share how you will be managing finances and living expenses for school.

Be prepared to answer the following questions. Be honest and provide concise answers.

1. Why did you choose to get your education in the U.S.? Why do you want to attend this school? Show that you understand what education you are going to get, the advantages of being a U.S.-trained dentist and the great school where you were accepted.
2. Show me the funding—this might be the most important question during the entire interview. You have to show that you have the money to cover the costs of the program. Real estate, investments and stocks are irrelevant. If your parents or a family member are sponsoring you, they will need to sign a letter of sponsorship with their current balance and the amount they are willing to sponsor you with.
3. What are your plans after you graduate? Be prepared to answer this question.

**After your interview:** A thank-you note for the interviewing Faculty or the Admissions Committee is good. Refrain from asking questions or inquiring about results.

**Loans:** If you are planning to take loans, private loans are an option. A co-signer who is an American citizen (permanent citizen or green card holder) is typically required. If you have a green card or citizenship, you will be eligible for federal loans and financial aid. You can't arrive in the United States earlier than 30 days before the start date of your program.

**Relocation:** The school's international student office should be able to help you find the best location to live that is easily accessible to the school. If your school offers university housing, this is usually a reliable and reasonably priced option. Apply as early as possible for university apartments.

**Social Security Number:** If you hold a job on campus, you may be eligible for a social security number. Talk to your course director to see if there are any on-campus jobs. If you are on an F-1 visa, you can only work on campus. Some volunteering jobs may make you eligible for a SSN. Check with the international student coordinator at your school.

**Things to remember while in school:**

1. If you want to leave the country, remember to have an updated I-20 issued not more than six months before. You are required to have a signature of the university international affairs office before you leave the country.
2. Check with your student coordinator every 3-6 months to make sure your SEVIS information is updated with Homeland Security.
3. If you have requested a change of status from the United States, you might have to go to the U.S. embassy to get your visa stamped.
4. If you want to apply for residency, start planning as soon as you start the program. Join different interest-based associations/clubs and get involved in different activities. Connect with teachers and develop good relationships with them – they can be the ones to write you strong reference letters. Apply early and keep in touch with the schools.

## *After Graduating*

**Getting the official right to work:** Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of F-1 immigration status that permits up to 12 months of off-campus employment for the purpose of gaining practical experience in the student's chosen field. Graduation from a DDS/DMD program is eligible for 12 months of OPT period. Make sure to apply 3-4 months before you graduate because it takes about three months to process the application after you submit it. Students may remain lawfully in the U.S. while the OPT application is still pending (even if beyond the end of the 60-day grace period). Students should not travel out of the U.S. following completion of studies until the OPT application is approved.

Contact the international student office at your school to help with your application, as they understand all the requirements and know of recent changes in rules and regulations. It is extremely important to be precise with this application. If you are not accepted, your visa could end up being out of status. If you do not apply for OPT or decide to drop out of the program, you have 30 days to leave the country.

Finding a job allows you to apply for an H1B (work permit visa). Dentists fall in EB2 category for H1. If you are unable to obtain one, two options to consider are:

- Enrolling in a program until you apply next cycle
- Working for a nonprofit institution

Both you and your employer apply for a green card to become a U.S. permanent resident. It usually takes 5-7 years once you have gone through the primary stage. The time it takes for a green card to be processed depends on your country of birth/origin.

**Choosing a career path after graduation:** You have multiple possibilities for your career. Each one of them has pros and cons, and you should research which one fits you best. Consider one of the following:

1. Continue your education with a general or specialized residency program.
2. Join a corporation, private or group practice as an employee or independent contractor.
3. Work for a public or nonprofit clinic.
4. Apply to work in U.S. military branches: Army, Air Force, Navy or Marine Corps.
5. Buy an existing practice or open a new one.

**Resources:** Below is a list of resources that you may find helpful in navigating the process to become a U.S. licensed dentist:

- ASDA's tips for getting licensed in the U.S.
- <https://www.asdanet.org/index/dental-student-resources/tips-for-international-dental-students>
- ADEA foreign-educated dentists  
[www.adea.org/GoDental/Non-traditional Applicants/Foreign-educated dentists.aspx](http://www.adea.org/GoDental/Non-traditional_Applicants/Foreign-educated_dentists.aspx)