



Guide to Applying to U.S. Dental Schools for International Trained Dentists



Advanced Standing/International Dentist Programs Complete Guide to Applying to U.S schools for International Trained Dentists

The first question to ask yourself is what do you want to do? Are you applying to an International Dentist Program (IDP) to get a license and practice in the U.S.? Do you want to get the best education you can get? Or are you trying to find a way to touch the American soil? There is no right or wrong answer, but it is very important to know the reason you want to get your DDS or DMD.

Before Applying

ECE Evaluation: <https://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 attached to it.

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

Tip: Don't take the exam without reviewing Dental Decks (or similar) and ASDA released exams (available at www.asdanet.org/store/nbde.aspx). Do as many exams as you can—I did all starting from 1979 till 2005.

Dentpin:

Applications for the NBDE examination programs are processed through the American Dental Association's Department of Testing Services. The first step in the application process is confirmation or assignment of your DENTPIN unique personal identifier a 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 a Prometric website to select the date you want to take the exam.

Tip: Registration with ADA is valid for 6 months, so make sure to schedule your test within that time. Also, follow the canceling and re-scheduling policy precisely; no exceptions will be granted. If you have a chronic condition such as diabetes or ADHD, you may be eligible for more breaks or more time to complete the exam.

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language): It is 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: Try to take this exam in your country rather than in the U.S. The examiners compare you with the other examinees, so it makes difference.

VISA: If you are residing in country other than United States, please note that you will have to obtain a visitor's visa to take the NBDE because this test has to be taken in the United States.

Application Process

Deciding which school to apply: We recommend that you apply to as many schools as possible. It is understandable that everybody wants to get their first choice, however, no matter what school you attend, you will be a U.S. trained DDS/DMD. Remember, every year you postpone, you are losing a year of income.

Most of the programs are registered with CAAPID, which is a centralized application system managed by ADEA. This link is to 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

Please be advised that there are some programs that are not registered with CAAPID, so we recommend that you go to each school's website and check the application process for each. Many schools require additional papers/information other than those required through CAAPID.

Tip: It is advisable that recommendation letter and dental school transcripts are not older than 6 months. Some schools accept TOEFL taken within 3 years, others within 10. Bottom line is that you have to check each school individually.

Interview

Stay updated: Visit StudentDoctorNetwork (SDN) and other forums to ask other students about the admissions process and tips on interviewing, etc. Read interview tips provided by ASDA at www.ASDAnet.org/predental/interview-tips.aspx.

Tip: Read from SDN to get an idea of what's happening, but understand that this information isn't official so verify with other sources.

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

Bench Examination:

- *What?* It is a practical examination most of schools have to test your hand skills and to grade you.
- *Why?* You will not have the same pre-clinical extensive courses as those given to domestic students, which means that they want to make sure that everybody in the dental school is on the same page and they want to evaluate you.
- *What do I have to do?* The least you will be required to do is a classic Class 2, amalgam or composite prep. However, you will need to check each school for different bench exam requirements. Don't panic, each school will send you a detailed explanation of their bench exam, what you will be asked to do and their criteria of grading.

- *When?* Some schools have it the same day of the personal interview, others have it a different day.
- *How much?* Cost varies from one school to another, but you may not want to turn down an interview because it is “too expensive” unless you are 100% sure that you got in somewhere else or you will never go to that school. Remember, each year you postpone, you lose the income of that year. Education is the best investment you can make.
- *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 if you were invited for an interview. However, be prepared with the hand pieces and burs that you are used to and mastered. 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. Get the criteria that they will use to grade you and be as meticulous as you have ever been! 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. It is expensive, but it is the best investment you will ever make.

Personal Interview:

Prepare and rehearse! Do a mock interview with friends you trust. Be confident, but not too confident. Even though you have been a dentist for a while, show that you can still be a student, want to learn and can accept criticism. Show that you are grateful to your school and professors. Go online, check out the commonly asked questions and prepare yourself. Read about the school you are interviewing at—it shows interest. You will be asked if you have questions for the interviewers. Prepare smart questions so it demonstrates that you did your homework. 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 that they might vary between embassies.

Student Visa: Apply for student visa as soon as the school issues you a Form I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant [F-1] Student Status). You must have a copy of the I-20 when you make an appointment with the embassy. The first step is to pay your SEVEIS 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, as that is a very important question they usually ask.

For the Visa interview, be prepared to answer the following questions. Be honest and provide clear answers.

1. Why did you choose to get your education in the U.S.? Or why do you want to attend this school? In your answer, show that you understand what education you are going to get, the advantages of being a U.S. trained dentist and the great school you got accepted in.
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 is 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. Stating that you will get a loan will hurt you and can, in fact, cause you to be rejected.
3. What are your plans after you graduate? Be prepared to answer this question.

Loans: If you are planning to take loans, private loans are a great option. A co-signer who is an American citizen (permanent citizen or green card holder) is 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. More information on loans and scholarships for international students is available at www.edupass.org/finaid.

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. Websites like Craigslist and Padmapper can be helpful in finding rental apartments. If your school offers university housing, this is usually a reliable and reasonably priced option. Apply as early as possible for university apartments, as they fill up.

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. Remember, if you are on a F-1 Visa, you can only work on campus. Some volunteering jobs may make you eligible to get 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 6 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 so you don't get out of status.
3. If you have requested a change of Visa status from the United States, you might have to go to the U.S. embassy to get your Visa stamped.

After Graduating

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 3 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). 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 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, you 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 gives allows you to apply for an H1B (work permit visa). Dentists fall in EB2 category for H1. Typically it is not a problem getting a Visa, but it can happen. If you are unable to obtain a Visa, two options to consider are:

1. enrolling in a program until you apply next cycle
2. 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 primary stage. The time it takes for a green card to be processed depends on your country of birth/origin.

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.
www.ASDAnet.org/tips-for-international-dental-students
- ADA state licensure for international dentists
www.ada.org/en/education-careers/licensure/state-licensure-for-the-international-dentists
**ASDA members receive a 25% discount on this guide*
- Boston University's International Students and Scholar Office
www.bu.edu/isso/students/current/f1/employment/off-campus/optional.html
- ADEA foreign-educated dentists
www.adea.org/GoDental/Non-traditional_Applicants/Foreign-educated_dentists.aspx