Audio file

Final_Dental_Feb_Podcast.mp3

Transcript

00:00:02 Casey Ellis

Welcome to the Pre-Professional Playbook Podcast, where preparation and hard work come together.

00:00:07 Casey Ellis

This podcast explores pathways in the health and law professions to help you format your future.

00:00:12 Casey Ellis

I'm your host, Casey Ellis, an advisor in the University of Georgia's Pre-Professional Advising Office.

00:00:17 Casey Ellis

Whether you're just starting out, considering a career shift, or just wanting to know more, this episode is your guide to navigating the various educational and professional options available.

00:00:27 Casey Ellis

We are jumping into the dental profession

00:00:29 Casey Ellis

covering all the bases from general practice to niche specialties so you're ready to hit a home run with a career in dentistry.

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Dentists play a vital role in evaluating and promoting the overall health of their patients and call the plays to prevent diseases before they start.

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Whether it's addressing cavities, placing implants, or performing extractions, they are ready to handle a wide range of procedures with precision and care.

00:00:51 Casey Ellis

Dentists are versatile, playing both offense and defense when it comes to oral health.

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While many envision dentist in private practice, the profession offers a wide range of career settings.

00:01:01 Casey Ellis

Dentists may work for large corporations providing care to employees, serve in the federal government through the Veterans Administration or the Armed Services, or pursue roles as educators, researchers, and public health policymakers.

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Many dentists choose to be self-employed, running their own private practice and taking on the dual role of clinician and entrepreneur.

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These practices are typically owned by individuals or small groups, allowing dentists to set their own schedules, choose their patient base, and shape the culture of their workplace.

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According to a 2017 American Dental Association survey, about 51% of practicing dentists operate as solo practitioners or are part of a small group practice.

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Other dentists work as employees within larger dental corporations.

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this model, the dentist focuses primarily on patient care, while the corporation manages business operations, marketing, and administration.

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This setup generally offers fewer business responsibilities, more predictable work hours, and a steady paycheck, making it an appealing option for those who prefer clinical work without the pressures of ownership.

00:02:02 Casey Ellis

Working in academia and research allows dental professionals to train the next generation and explore new approaches to practice.

00:02:09 Casey Ellis

This could mean working for a university or a specialized center such as the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.

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These positions may be in the public or private sector.

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As a dentist, you have the opportunity to provide oral healthcare in places of the world where it's rare or non-existent.

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Dentists working in international healthcare provide these services in developing countries, often through agencies such as the World Health Organization or other global public health agencies.

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If you're passionate about making change on a bigger scale, working in public policy might be your play.

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Instead of focusing on individual patients, you'll help shape oral health on a community, state, or even national level.

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Think roles with your state's department of health or organizations like the American Dental Association.

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This can be a good opportunity for people who want to change from direct patient care.

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You can serve the country through dentistry in more ways than one.

00:03:00 Casey Ellis

You could dive into research with a federal agency, serve as a military dentist caring for service members and their families, or join the U.S.

00:03:07 Casey Ellis

Public Health Service to bring dental care to underserved populations across the country.

00:03:11 Casey Ellis

Whatever option one may choose, you can be sure you will make a big impact.

00:03:16 Casey Ellis

General dentists offer a wide range of dental services, including preventative, restorative, and cosmetic treatments.

00:03:22 Casey Ellis

They perform procedures like teeth cleanings and whitenings, fillings, extractions, and root canals.

00:03:27 Casey Ellis

They also offer services like dental implants, crowns, bridges, dentures, and orthodontics such as braces and aligners.

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General dentists can provide treatments for gum disease and temporomandibular joint or TMJ disorders.

00:03:40 Casey Ellis

You will enter dental school to become a general dentist and if you are interested in going on to a specialty dental profession, you will build credentials while in dental school to be a competitive applicant to a specialist program.

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There are 12 dental specialties recognized by the American Dental Association.

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First up to the plate are dental anesthesiologists.

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Dental anesthesiologists are the MVPs of comfort and safety in the dental world.

00:04:03 Casey Ellis

With advanced, hospital-based training, they specialize in providing sedation and anesthesia for patients undergoing everything from routine procedures to complex surgeries.

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Whether it's caring for medically complex patients, individuals with special needs, those facing major oral surgeries, or anyone with severe dental anxiety, they're the ones making sure every patient gets through the treatment safely and stress-free.

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Dental public health professionals develop policies and programs such as healthcare reform that affects the community at large.

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You can think of dental public health specialists developing strategies for an entire league or community and not just their team.

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Many public health dentists work in research, academia, and even the government such as the CDC or the World Health Organization.

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Endodontists are what most people think of when they think of root canals.

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However, their expertise goes beyond that.

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They are responsible for performing root surgeries and managing alarming tooth injuries.

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You can thank endodontists that fewer people today have to wear fake teeth or may be missing teeth.

00:05:02 Casey Ellis

Oral and maxillofacial pathology specialists study and research the causes, processes, and effects of diseases that start in the mouth or jaw.

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In simple terms, this means they focus on analyzing tissue samples and providing diagnoses.

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They might examine a biopsy of a lesion or tumor or work with autoimmune conditions that affect the mouth.

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They are often working in partnership with dentists, surgeons, and even oncologists.

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Oral and maxillofacial radiologists use imaging techniques like X-rays and CT scans to diagnose and manage a wide range of conditions, including tooth decay, gum disease, impactions, cysts, tumors, and other abnormalities.

00:05:40 Casey Ellis

They also play a crucial role in evaluating jaw structure for implants, braces, and other dental procedures.

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Oral medicine is one of the newest recognized dental specialties.

00:05:49 Casey Ellis

It focuses on caring for medically complex patients and diagnosing and managing diseases or conditions that affect the mouth, jaw, and face.

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Oral medicine specialists play a critical role for patients with cancer, autoimmune disorders, or chronic illnesses, ensuring oral health is a part of the overall health picture.

00:06:07 Casey Ellis

Oral facial pain is one of the newest advanced dental education disciplines.

00:06:11 Casey Ellis

This specialty helps diagnose and manage pain disorders that affect the jaw, mouth, face, head, and neck.

00:06:17 Casey Ellis

Examples of this include TMJ disorders, neuropathic disorders, headache, sleep disorders, and more to help patients find relief and have a better quality of life.

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Most teenagers and children who have had braces are familiar with what orthodontists do, but the practice of orthodontics and dental facial orthopedics extends beyond correcting irregular dental development to include treating and preventing problems caused by missing teeth and other abnormalities.

00:06:42 Casey Ellis

They offer their patients a return to normal oral functioning and appearance.

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Periodontal diseases are the most common cause of tooth loss in the United States.

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Periodontists treat the gums, tissues, and bones that support teeth.

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They also place and repair dental implants.

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Periodontists manage everything from gingivitis to advanced periodontal diseases through deep cleanings, medications, or even surgeries such as grafts.

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They can perform cosmetic gum procedures to improve the confidence and health of their patients.

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Pediatric dentists get in the game early to make sure tiny teeth develop strong and healthy.

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They provide primary care and specialty treatment for infants, children, adolescents, and individuals with special healthcare needs.

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Pediatric dentists have a preventative and educational focus and are trained to treat children with physical, developmental, or behavioral conditions that need extra care.

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They monitor oral development and can even address issues like thumb sucking, tongue thrusting, and early orthodontic needs.

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Prosthodontics is about restoring smiles and function.

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If you love precision and enjoy putting things back together, this specialty will give you the opportunity to help people achieve better oral function through replacing missing teeth and helping patients chew, smile, and speak with confidence.

00:07:53 Casey Ellis

Many students are looking for a major that will help them stand out on their application.

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The best way to stand out and perform well is to enjoy your major.

00:08:01 Casey Ellis

There is no best major for pre-dental students, although some, like life sciences, require courses that more closely align with dental school prerequisites.

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Students who are pursuing non-science majors like business or the arts will often minor in life science to help them in scheduling the science prerequisites.

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Most dental schools prefer or require that you finish your bachelor's degree.

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Almost all dental schools require one year of general biology with lab, Biology 1107 and 1108, one year of general chemistry with lab, Chem 1211 and 1212, one year of organic chemistry with lab, Chem 2211 and 2212, one year of physics with lab, you can either do

00:08:39 Casey Ellis

Physics 1111 and Physics 1112 or Physics 1211 and Physics 1212.

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Some dental schools require additional courses such as English composition and additional upper level biology courses, some which include lab, such as anatomy and physiology, microbiology, and biochemistry.

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Many schools strongly encourage applicants to take courses in the arts and social sciences.

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These courses point to your manual dexterity and understanding of people and culture.

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It takes more than just good grades to be accepted into dental school.

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Extracurriculars show that you are networking with other dental students, so it is important to be active in at least one pre-dental organization.

00:09:16 Casey Ellis

Dentistry is a lifelong profession full of networking at the local, state, and federal level.

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That being said, it is good to show interest in other areas that reflect your personality and interest.

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Don't be a one-trick player.

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Of course, the first thing most students think about is shadowing, and shadowing certainly is important.

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Shadowing is where you will see why dentistry is right for you.

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It is typically an informal arrangement in which you observe a dentist in their daily work.

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You will observe types of procedures, equipment used, and patient interactions.

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Your relationship with the dentist goes beyond getting a letter of recommendation.

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This is your opportunity to ask questions and gain mentorship and guidance.

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You can meet the requirements of most dental schools by completing 100 to 150 hours of shadowing, ideally divided among three different general dentistry practices.

00:10:02 Casey Ellis

However,

00:10:02 Casey Ellis

Applicants to the Dental College of Georgia, the state's only dental school, should plan for a more extensive level of preparation, aiming for roughly 300 hours of combined dental shadowing and experience.

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Some of these hours may be completed with various dental specialists, but the majority should be spent with a general dentist.

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With 1,500 pre-dental students at UGA, cold calling Athens-area dental offices looking for shadowing opportunities may prove unproductive.

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We advise that you start with your own network at home.

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Once you have gained shadowing experience, you may find other practices more open to letting you shadow or to offering you a job.

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If you get a job or internship with a dental office, or if you volunteer to serve in a dental clinic or on a dental mission trip, you will categorize these hours as dental experience on the application.

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So think of dental shadowing as an informal arrangement to observe a dentist and dental experience as more of a commitment between you and the dental provider where you will perform assigned duties.

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If you do work for a dentist that you previously shadowed, you will divide those hours among the two categories of dental shadowing and dental experience on your application.

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So it is important to keep record of dates and hours so that you are able to accurately enter these experiences into the application.

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Dentistry is a relationship-building profession, and your ability to network with dentists and specialists to open doors for more shadowing and dental experience is going to help you with your application to dental school as well as in your future profession.

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In the state of Georgia and many other states, you can work as an uncertified dental assistant and perform helpful, non-invasive duties under the supervision of a dentist.

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For this reason, many students who build a relationship with a dentist through shadowing one summer will in subsequent summers work for them as dental assistants, sterilization technicians, or an administrative support.

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When you work or volunteer in dentistry, you will categorize those experiences under the heading of dental experience on the application.

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Dentistry, like all health professions, is a service profession.

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Dental schools want to see that you love serving others.

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You can show this by volunteering with two or three organizations that you are passionate about.

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At least one of these experiences should be helping people who are different from you, whether by age, socioeconomic status, culturally, etc.

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Try and work with people of all ages because in the field of dentistry you will serve patients from all ages and walks of life.

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You may submit up to 4 letters of recommendation with your application, which are stored in a central location accessible to all the dental schools you apply to.

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Each dental school sets its own requirements for the types of letters it accepts, so it's important to review the guidelines for every school on your list and choose the combination of letters that best meets their criteria.

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UGA does not provide a committee letter.

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If a dental school indicates that a committee letter is their preference, they will provide an alternative that you should follow.

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For example, the Dental College of Georgia requires 4 letters of recommendation, one from an academic professional, such as a science instructor, advisor, or department chair, one from a dentist you have shadowed, and two personal letters, which may come from faculty, supervisors, or others who know you well enough to speak positively on your behalf.

00:13:04 Casey Ellis

The dental admission test, known as the DAT, is a computer-based test and should be taken when you have completed advised courses of biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, math, and physiology.

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The DAT is offered multiple times a year, and a good goal is to take the DAT before or just after the application opens.

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The current cost of taking the DAT is $560.

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You will apply to a majority of schools using the ADEA Access application.

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It opens the second Tuesday in May, and you can submit the first Tuesday in June.

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Decision day is around December 15th.

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For the 2025-2026 application cycle, students pay $264 for the first school and $115 for each additional school.

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Overall employment of dentists is projected to grow 5% from 2023 to 2033, about as fast as the average for all occupations.

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The median pay in 2025 was $180K.

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About 4,900 openings for dentists are projected each year on average over the decade.

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Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

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Understanding the basic playbook of dentistry is your first step toward dental school and beyond.

00:14:18 Casey Ellis

Dentistry is an exciting and evolving field on the forefront of new techniques and technologies.

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This career puts you on the front lines of healthcare, playing a major role in preventing and treating conditions that impact overall well-being.

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It is full of both challenging and rewarding opportunities to make a difference.

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Thank you for tuning in to the Pre-Professional Playbook podcast.

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If you have any questions or want more resources, you can always reach out to the Pre-Professional Advising Office.

00:14:43 Casey Ellis

We're here to help you stay in the game.

00:14:45 Casey Ellis

Subscribe so you never miss the next play.

00:14:48 Casey Ellis

And until then, keep training hard, stay focused, and get ready to score big in your future.