**FAQs**

**Frequently Asked Questions for the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Dental Medicine’s Advanced Standing Program (2015)**

**1. Where do I send my application?**

To make the process streamlined and standard we participate in the CAPPID centralized application program through ADEA.

**2. Why should we submit E.C.E. evaluations of our transcripts? I have already had my transcripts evaluated by another service.**

We need to have a standardized process for admissions purposes, and for future school accreditations. The evaluation services look at transcripts differently. Same transcript evaluated by different services may have different outcomes.

**3. On your website it says,” E.C.E. evaluation of 3 and above is recommended,” is 3 your cutoff? if I have less than 3 can I still apply?**

In the light of NDBE results being Pass/Fail, we use this as a measure of your performance at your previous dental school. We do realize each university's grading policies are different. To keep the process fair, we have decided to encourage applicants with 3.0 and above. While we look at E.C.E. evaluation carefully, it alone does not play a role in selection process. We look at all components of the application package very carefully.

**4. Is it true what I have heard that you only look at the scores and not read all transcripts and other submitted material?**

Every component of the application is carefully read and evaluated on its own merits. Every score sheet and transcript is evaluated by the committee. We know that scores sometimes do not tell the "whole story".

 **5. What is an interview like? I know of schools that do not have interviews, so why do you want us to spend money on travel and housing?**

Over many years we have learned that an interview is essential both for the candidate and for the school. The interview is not just for us but also for you. You will get a chance to see what our school is like and what the program is all about. We try to make the interview day worth your time and money whether you will get accepted or not.

The interview is an all-day event. All interviewees meet with the program director and staff for a small breakfast and short briefing about the day's program. The director will give a presentation on the program, the school, and the University. Current advanced standing students will take you on a 30-minute tour of the school; this is followed by a short writing skill test. (Because you are foreign trained students, we want to see your writing style, which is an important component for your dental education.) Each candidate will meet with a faculty member for a brief interview; this is mostly to get know you as a person and assess your ability to fit into our school. Around noontime lunch is served in the conference room, accompanied by current advanced standing students, allowing you the time to ask the students any questions you like. (Both vegetarian and meat choices are always available.)This is your time to talk directly and privately to the current advanced standing students. After lunch we will have the 2 1/2 hour bench test (FAQ #44). Dr. Potluri, the director, and one of the current advanced standing students are usually around all day to answer any specific questions.

The day starts at 8:30 in the morning and ends between 4 and 5 pm. Depending on traffic, the drive to and from the Pittsburgh International Airport could take one hour or more, so please plan your flights accordingly.

**6. I sat for/took the NDB I more than five years ago. Do I need to retake that examination?**

As of January 2010 it is not possible to retake the National Dental Boards if you have received a passing grade in an earlier test. Also the grade is only Pass or Fail. The use of a numerical grade has been dropped.

**7. What is the school's TOEFL institution code?**

You can find the code number on the website in the application criteria section. The University Of Pittsburgh's School Of Dentistry's TOEFL Institution Code is **2927**. The Department code or Profession code is **38** for dentistry. The department code is the same for all schools.

**8. I have left a phone message and nobody is returning my call. Why is that?**

Before you call us with a question, please review our website. The answers to most of your questions are on the website. Also, we encourage all applicants who want additional information to use e-mail. Our email address is listed on the website. A response usually occurs within 48 hours, with the exception of holidays and weekends, in this case our response may take longer.

One of the main reason calls are not returned is because of inadequate information. Oftentimes we are unable to hear/understand the message. If you are leaving a phone message, please speak slowly and clearly, repeating your name and phone number twice. It is also advisable that if you leave a message please follow-up with an email.

**9. What scores for NDBE Part I, II and TOEFL do I need to have to be considered for an interview?**

This program, as well as many other similar programs, is competitive. Thus, it is the applicant pool that will indicate what scores are accepted. That said, it is not only scores that count. All applications are carefully read and evaluated on their own merits. Since 2012 a numerical score for NDBE Parts I and II is not reported. We will only see a grade of "pass". Since the last application cycle, we only note that the Board exam has been taken with a grade of Pass.

The TOEFL iBT test (Internet based test with a spoken language section) is mandatory. You will need to have a minimal total score on the iBT test of 100, please note that your application will NOT be reviewed if your score is below 100. This is a University-wide policy with no exceptions.

**10. I will be in Pittsburgh next week. Can I meet with you and discuss the program?**

We do not meet with any future candidates until they are invited to interview. The director will not meet with you for what we call a "pre-interview" even if you happen to be visiting the school. However, you may visit the university campus but you will not be allowed to enter any of the clinical areas. This has to do with HIPAA regulations (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act).

**11. I have specialty training in my home country. Will that increase my chances?**

It does not automatically increase your chances but any further education may be valuable for your ranking.

**12. I have specialty training from the US. Will that increase my chances?**

Yes, it might increase your chances.

**13. Are Letters of Recommendation needed?**

Yes, we do need the most current recommendation letters, one from the Dean of your dental school, and two additional letters from clinical dentistry professors.

**14. Is it only scores that count towards an acceptance?**

TOEFL scores, previous grades (and calculated GPA), your personal statement, and experiences in your new country and home country are all important in the initial review. These documents help us determine who we will invite for an interview. Recommendation letters from your previous faculty, employers, and from dentists you have shadowed play a crucial role. We do require you to pass both parts of National boards but the emphasis is minimal since it is only reported as a "Pass." The interview is very important and is mandatory if invited. We have a bench test on the interview day (see FAQ #44) and you will be required to submit the fee for this bench test prior to the interview day.

**15. Do you have a bench test on the interview day?**

Yes, we do have a traditional bench test on the day of the interview. (See blow FAQs #44)

**16. I submitted my application a while ago and I have not heard from you. What do I do now?**

We have many applications and organizing all of the paperwork takes a considerable amount of time. Once this process is complete and we have received all the components of your application we will notify you.(processing time is reduced if all components are received in one package.) Your application will then be reviewed by the committee one week after the application deadline. Please allow us 2-3 weeks after the closure of application deadline to send out interview invitations. Interviews may be conducted as early as 3-4 weeks after the application deadline. Please allow us about 3 weeks for a response after your interview process for selection. Please see the application form and/or the website for the application dead line. Our goal is to have all responses sent out as early as possible.

**17. Do you have a rolling enrollment or do you wait until all interviews are completed and then make your decisions?**

No, we do not have rolling enrollment. We will fill all of our positions after the interview and bench testing. We may, however, accept those who agree to be placed on a wait list.

**18. What will the cost be?**

This is a short question but demands a much longer answer. All financial information that is available will be given during the interview day. However, the cost is about the same as that of similar programs across the country.

There are some details to consider. Schools report the cost in several different ways. This is because the cost is divided in tuition, school fees, university fees, and health insurance. In addition there are costs for books, transportation, and living expenses.

A school is also dependent on the legislators' budget allocation to its universities. This will have an impact on how much a university might increase the cost. We do not get this information until rather late and the University fees are not always decided until quite late.

A common way of reporting the cost is tuition plus "Instrument fee". An "Instrument fee" is rarely, if ever, defined but usually includes instrument rental, or purchase. It is very difficult to compare the education cost between schools unless all current expenses are listed. Tuition cost will be on the website once it has been determined yearly.

**Health insurance is mandatory. Living cost is an individual choice that will depend on area and size of living quarters. We realize that the cost could be prohibitive. We are doing our best to have minimal or no tuition increases. Best advice: live like a student again for the next two years!**

**19. If I have been accepted at another school but prefer the University of Pittsburgh but I have not heard from you, what do I do?**

In that special situation, we suggest that you e-mail or call us and we will give you the information we have regarding your status.

**20. My spouse is also a dentist and is applying for your program and we want to go to the same school. Can we both be accepted the same year?**

A spouse will not automatically be accepted if the other is accepted. It is a competitive program and each person will be evaluated on his/her own merits.

**21. Does the University of Pittsburgh offer any scholarships for Advanced Standing students?**

The University of Pittsburgh does not have any scholarships for advanced standing students. You might be eligible for federal student loans pending your visa status. US Citizens and Resident Aliens (permanent residents), commonly called Green Card holders, are eligible for federal student loans. Permanent residents may have to meet some additional criteria that will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the government.

**22. Can I get student loans for the Advanced Standing program?**

Yes, but only if you are eligible for federal student loans. You can apply once you have started your studies.

If you are accepted, you must pay a part of the education cost in advance to secure your seat. Also there is a summer program tuition that you need to pay by the deadline that is mentioned in your acceptance letter. Eligible students can apply for loans and be reimbursed once school has started. If you decide to accept another school's offer, the tuition deposit will not be returned to you.

**23. Why do I have to pay this money before the classes start?**

We request a tuition deposit to hold your seat. If a student drops out late in the process, we may not be able to replace that student. If we cannot replace someone who withdraws late in the process, we may face a financial deficit. It also leads to a lot more work to finalize a class. That is why you have to submit parts of the first semester’s cost over several months before classes start. We have had students forfeit several thousands of dollars when they were accepted at the school of their first choice.

**24. I have plans to take off between 2-3 weeks for personal reasons during the Summer session. Will this have any major impact on my studies at your school?**

We strongly advise that you do not make plans to take off time during the summer semester. You will have mandatory course work and attendance is required. Absence during the summer semester may jeopardize your final acceptance to the third year class. We recommend that you try to take care of any personal issues before beginning the program.

**25. I was not invited for an interview. I think I deserved one. Please tell me the reasons why I was rejected to help me prepare for the future.**

Unique educational opportunities attract many, many applicants. We regret that we cannot possibly interview each and every applicant. We focus our interviews on the strongest candidates and we base that decision on our review of the submitted applications. We look closely at each and every application and consider a combination of factors, including GPA, TOEFL scores letters of recommendation, personal statements, as well as, personal and professional experience. This thorough procedure allows for an effective admission process. We are keeping down travel and housing expenses for candidates that we deem non-competitive at this time. It is the profile of the total applicant pool that determines an individual application's competitiveness.

We do realize that this can be disappointing and a hardship. Experience tells us, however, that each year brings new opportunities. You can increase your chances in the future by taking a critical look at your application and then start working to strengthen it. Generally speaking, higher test scores increase an application's competitiveness. At this time you can only increase your TOEFL score. Our program's policy is that we do not discuss specific reasons why an individual candidate was not invited for an interview. Our criteria and a description of the process are listed on the website.

**26. I have already submitted my application. When will I hear from you?**

We have many applications and it takes some time for all the paper work to be downloaded from the CAPPID and other documentation that you send directly to be organized, we will only communicate with you once we have received all the components of the application, saying your application is complete. We review all the completed applications a week after the application deadline. If you are invited for an interview we will, whenever possible, inform you at least two weeks before the interview. Most correspondence will be via e-mail. In important situations we will courier/express mail (e.g., FedEx, UPS).

**27. Who should the checks be addressed to? You ask us to put our name on the check/money order. Why do you need that?**

All checks should be written to University of Pittsburgh. Putting your name on the check is very much in your best interest. It is common that we get checks signed by someone other than the applicant. So it is important to have the applicant's name in the MEMO line at the bottom of the check, or at the top on the left side of the check. Make sure that the applicant's name is included on the money order. Otherwise, it could be very time consuming or impossible to identify who the applicant is.

**28. Is it an advantage to submit my application early?**

It is always a good idea to submit your application early. We receive a large portion of applications during the last 10 days of the application period. Since you know how we handle the applications and admissions process, it is clear that it is better to submit earlier than later. However, if you are taking part II national boards later or retaking an exam you should wait until your application is complete.

**29. I hear that you have a waiting list after interviews and admissions have been completed. Does it ever happen that anybody from the waiting list gets accepted?**

One might think that if you are accepted, you will never give up your seat. However, life situations change and during my years as program director, we have had students accepted from the waiting list almost every year. Since there are more programs available today then 10 years ago many students will change their minds during the process when other options become available.

**30. Why do you need our visa or legal residency status information?**

Over the years we have had several applicants that have worked illegally in the US, even practiced dentistry without a license, and on an expired visa. Each visa has its limitations and regulations. If a candidate appears for an interview and is in violation of the applicable visa regulations, we are all put in a very precarious situation.

We accept applications from all legal visa status applicants, including students who are on current F-1 status.

**31. Do I need to be a US citizen or be a permanent resident (Green Card holder) to apply to your program?**

No, you do not need to have any special visa status or citizenship. Every year we have applicants with various visa situations. The University has a specialized office to address specific visa questions.

**32. If I am currently on an F-1/H-1 visa and studying/working in the US, is there something I should be aware of?**

It takes time to process a change of visa status, or transfer of a visa (F-1) from one school to another. Thus you should apply as early as possible to give yourself maximum time for the admissions process. If you are accepted, financial evidence documentation paper work will be sent to you, and you need to send the material back to the office as quickly as possible to start the process of visa requests and/or a change of status/ or school, because this process usually takes time. In some situations you may have to return to your home country and request an interview at the embassy and then apply for a student visa.

**33. I am currently studying for a Master's degree at a US college. My program does not end until mid-May. Can I still get accepted?**

The most important time is in the beginning of the program and that cannot be missed. Also, if you have started another program it is a good idea to finish it. A degree will always be more valuable than leaving a program without finishing it.

**34. Do I have any advantage as a re-applicant?**

No, you do not. We strongly urge you to take a good look at your application if you were not called for an interview, or if you did not receive an acceptance after being interviewed. You should look at your application as if you were on the admissions committee for a competitive program and you had to make the often very hard decisions. We strongly urge you to improve your application and that can be done in many ways. Ask yourself the following questions:

* Why is my application (and/or interview) not competitive?
* Is my GPA good enough? We know that you cannot change it , but you should look at other ways to make your application stronger
* Could my TOEFL score be better?
* Did I fully understand the interviewer?
* Did I answer the interviewer's questions, or did I just say what I had prepared to say?
* What have I done since I came to the U.S.?
* What will make me stand out above the others?
* Does my personal statement describe my unique traits or does it make me look like all other applicants?
* What can I do to make my application look neater and better?
* Do I have additional credentials since my last application?

It is important that an application looks neat and is well prepared. Your application is a reflection of you, the applicant, for a profession where neatness and details are important. Do not cut and paste your statement from other documents using different fonts or font sizes. When you write your statement, always use the spell check and grammar functions on your word processor. Make sure it is set for English spell check. Make sure you have the correct school in your statement. It is not uncommon that we get applications that obviously were meant for another school. That does not give a good impression. There are a few things you should not do: Do not call us or email us and request that we re-evaluate your application, do not call any of the interviewers and tell them that you are much better than they thought. Finally, do not request reasons and explanations for why you were not interviewed/accepted. Our policy is that we will not do this for anyone. Also, we will not preview any applications or CVs. And do not just show up to argue your case. Yes, that has happened more than once.

**35. I have just suggested including you and others at your school in "My Circle of Friends" or in a "Twitter" group. Wasn't that a good idea?**

No. That is not a good idea. We cannot be part of anything like that. It is inappropriate and not appreciated. Be sure to remove our email addresses, if you submit several addresses to any Internet service of this nature (Social Networking sites). Some Internet malware may also "harvest" your entire address book and then sell it.

**36. I have noticed that you have a probationary summer term, what is that? And, in spite of my initial acceptance, is there a chance I might not get into the program?**

We have a mandatory summer preparation course which starts in the beginning of May and ends in July. We then bring the candidates in to join the incoming 3rd year regular DMD class. Your formal acceptance is based upon your passing this probationary period. Saying that, we have rarely had a student who had not successfully completed the program. As long as the student adheres to the given work schedule, attendance, follows the school policies, and finishes competencies assigned by the course directors successfully , students should not have any problem getting admitted to the regular 3rd year DMD class. Failure to successfully complete the program will lead to cancellation of your acceptance and you will be considered as a new applicant for the next application cycle if you wish to apply again. A summer tuition fee of $6,000 MUST be paid in advance for this course. (Fees are subject to change yearly.)

**37. If my application is incomplete will you notify me?**

We will do our best to notify you but your application will not advance until it is complete. We request all documentation in one package. This is for you to assure that you have included everything. We will not return incomplete applications. Finally, we will try to inform you if something is missing, but it is not a guarantee. Check your submission more than once before you seal the envelope.

**38. I have taken NDB part I, I am planning to take NDB part II later, can I submit my part II scores later. Is there any documentation that is in particular that is most often missing?**

Yes you can submit part II separately if it arrives before the application deadline. If we do not have all the scores by the deadline, we will not look at the application. Part II score is mandatory for application. We also need both sides of the TOEFL form. The backside is often missing. Certificates of internships are also often missing. Some countries with a 4-year dental education have a mandatory one-year internship (houseman ship) before a final diploma will be granted. Other countries will grant a diploma even if an internship has not been completed. Applicants with a 4-year education need to show proof of completion of an internship, government service, or a GPR after graduation. NOTE: We do not accept provisional diplomas.

**39. I did not get accepted last year and I want to reapply. Do I need to submit all documentations again?**

Yes, and you have to submit the current year's application form, and the application fee. In addition to that, you must submit any additional or new documents that you have not submitted previously, such as new scores, additional work experience etc., and the application fee.

**40. I submitted my application yesterday by FedEx and I have not heard from you yet, should I call you or email you to make sure you got it?**

No, we will email you within 72 hours after receiving your application. If you have not heard from us after 3-4 days, you should contact us. Also, you have a tracking number so you can look up on the Internet exactly when it was delivered to our office. Always use the address we have listed in the application material. Some applicants have sent it to the general University Admissions or directors office ignoring what we have listed on the website. Those applications will most likely be delayed or disappear. This is a big University and dental school.

**41. I have studied in the US for more than 3 years and I have spoken English the whole time. I also "passed" the TOEFL examination before I started my studies. Do I really have to take the TOEFL iBT examination?**

Yes you do. We have learned that "just" studying in the US does not guarantee that you have a good command of the English language. The iBT test is relatively new and with a Speaking component. Also, we must have a standardized test for comparison and for accreditation purposes. The TOEFL score is part of the composite score we calculate for each applicant. Thus it is in your best interest to have a good or great score. The TOEFL examination is not an exam that you pass or fail. It is an evaluation of your command of English. Good command of the English language becomes very important when you treat and discuss issues with your patients.

**42. What does "matriculate" mean?**

The word "matriculate" may mean different things in different parts of the world. Matriculation/matriculated is used in this application indicating, "when you enrolled, or started your studies".

**44. So, what is the bench testing? Why have you included it?**

 As you know the importance of the NDB PI and II has diminished when the numerical grades were replaced with a “Pass or Fail” system. Your GPA does not always provide accurate assessment, since schools across the world may judge students very differently. Also, the transfer of grades into the GPA structure used in the United States may not always be indicative of knowledge and skills. Because our program is a 24 month program accepting candidates directly into a regular 3rd year DMD program, we believe that we need some additional parameters in our evaluation process. The additional parameters allow us to assess candidate's clinical skills and fairly compare them with the clinical skills of the 3rd year students of the regular DMD class. After the first half of the day of your interview all students will be directed towards a clinical area or simulated clinical area where you will cut:

Class II Amalgam cavity preparation on the lower bicuspid,
Class III composite cavity preparation on one of the maxillary anterior teeth, and
PFM crown prep on one of the maxillary 1st molars.

No impressions or filling is necessary; you will be allotted 2 and half hours to do the preps.

All the typodonts, phantom heads and instruments will be proved by the school.

No personal instruments are allowed to keep the testing standardized and fair.

You will have a half hour before starting the procedures, for getting familiar with the system, and arrange the instruments. Please be aware that at all times, infection control protocol has to be maintained as if you are treating a patient.

What will we assess? We will look if you are following all the infection control protocols, if you are drilling on the correct tooth, and if you understood and can follow the instructions.

Once the preparations are done, a Prosthodontics' faculty and two general dental faculties will score the preps blindly. This will take place within a two week period following the bench test. All scores are reported to the advanced standing committee, which at that time evaluates all the aspects of the application one more time along with the bench testing scores and a decision is made.