

## **What are the best things about attending Columbia University's College of Dental Medicine?**

For the first 18 months, nearly all your classes are medical school classes. You are taught by medical school faculty in the same classroom as the medical students and take similar exams as the medical students. Your exams and classes are graded on a Pass/Fail basis, normally meaning that if you get over a 60 or 70% on the exam, you pass. There is not a public class rank. Many of my classmates believe the pass/fail grading scale cuts down on the stress they would otherwise feel. It also helps the class to be less competitive with one another; people freely share notes study guides. All of the lectures are recorded and attendance isn't required, so you can watch the lectures from home if you don't feel like going to class. Most students eventually stop going to class. They find study schedules that work best for them and usually end up with a decent amount of free time. Some students use this free time to practice clinical skills, others spend this time studying for residency exams (like the CBSE), and still others work on research projects. And of course some students use this time to play video games, relax and hang out with friends.

The admissions board seems to do a really good job of selecting students with compatible attitudes and personalities. The majority of students get along really well with one another.

The medical coursework is helpful (though not necessary) if you are planning on taking the CBSE and applying to oral surgery. Along that same line, attending a school with a great name and reputation can be helpful when trying to get into residencies. It isn't the most important factor on your application, but people online typically downplay the importance of school reputation. The vast majority of Columbia graduates go on to specialty programs with some students going into GPRs. This is something Columbia is proud of; it came up multiple times during my interview.

Students don't seem to have a tough time getting patients for clinic, nor do they struggle to find the variety of cases needed to fulfill their clinical requirements. Students routinely finish their clinical requirements a few weeks early, if not a few months early. The school finds and schedules your patients for you, which is also a bonus.

The facilities at Columbia are top-notch. Most of your classes are in a gorgeous, brand-new, futuristic building. The clinic was also recently redone, and it is state-of-the-art as well. As far as location, many students love living here. Depending on where you are from, you may qualify for on-campus housing. While it is expensive, the housing is really nice and quite spacious.

## **What are the worst things about attending Columbia University's College of Dental Medicine?**

First and second years are pretty far behind in clinical knowledge and abilities compared to peers at other dental schools. We are in clinic less often than they are, and

when we are in clinic, there never seem to be enough faculty. It can be frustrating to feel you have no clue what you are doing and no one to help you.

Studying for our medical school exams can be quite frustrating. We attend the medical school lectures, but for most of the classes, we don't take the same exams as the medical students. Our exams are written by a dental school faculty member who doesn't attend the lectures. Thus, we are frequently tested on material that was taught in previous year's lectures, but not our lectures. The material tested is also different than the material emphasized in class, the end-result being that almost no one from the dental school goes to class. It's a bummer to pay so much money for tuition and work so hard studying for the exams, only to see that there isn't a direct correlation between what is taught in class and what is on the exams. This and other similar situations can make the dental school feel left out quite frequently. The medical students have a bunch of extra resources and additional classes to help them better understand what is taught in lecture, but the dental students are usually not privy to those resources (we spend our time elsewhere; see below).

I mentioned above that attendance isn't mandatory for our medical school classes. However, it is mandatory for some other dental-specific classes. Sadly, these classes are probably the least helpful classes in our curriculum (note that you are only in these low-yield classes for your first year). On an average week, we spend roughly 4 or more hours in mandatory classes during which the majority of students completely zone out (they are on facebook, studying for other classes, etc.). This situation is made more frustrating by the fact that the material taught in these courses could probably be covered in about 2 hours total, yet we spend over 20 hours in each course *individually*. That time really adds up and can make it hard to get into clinic and practice hand skills or prepare for other, more demanding classes in the medical school.

### **What do students need to know/What do you wish you knew before attending Columbia University's College of Dental Medicine?**

You should definitely try and come here if you want to specialize. The name/reputation of the school helps and the fact that your classes are pass/fail gives you enough free time to bolster your residency application in other ways. However, if you want to be a general dentist, this is probably not the place for you. Administrators said this very thing during my interview day, so it isn't something the school is trying to hide. You don't get enough clinical experience here to go straight into practice after you graduate (meaning you would have to do a GPR) and you will spend loads of time learning things that will never impact your dental practice (the nitty-gritty of lower limb anatomy, renal physiology, and a whole lot more).

Take time to consider whether or not you would enjoy living in a big city like NYC. There are major pros and major cons. For example, we never run out of new, fun things to do but we also have to carry our groceries from the store to the subway and from the subway to the apartment every time we go shopping.

Based on the above, I hope you can see that you will get the most out of your time at this program if you are a self-starter and can plan your time well.