

What are the best things about attending Harvard School of Dental Medicine?

HSDM's mission is to integrate Dental Medicine with systemic health. They are dedicated to removing the barrier between Dentistry and Medicine and to training dentists to respond to health disparities and treat medically complex patients. The curriculum is an excellent example of this commitment.

The first year (D1), HSDM students are enrolled at Harvard Medical School. We are in the same classes, with the same professors and take the same exams. There is no distinction between the dental students and medical students. In fact, unless you make a point of telling the faculty, they don't know who is a dental or medical student. In the past HSDM students have spent their first two years at the Medical school to complete the pre-clerkship didactic portion of Medical school. Several years ago, however the Medical school revamped their curriculum and compressed all of the didactic pre-clerkship training into one year. So now HSDM students spend one year at the Medical School and then return to the Dental School for years 2-4. With that change they also changed the teaching style. Students from both the Dental and Medical School are split into four learning societies of about 50 students each. Class occurs in these societies each day in a flipped classroom style. Within each society students are broken up into teams of 4 and sit together at small tables during class. Class is Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 8 am to 12:30. During that time faculty present cases which we work through together in small and large groups. The day before class we are given several hours of well-prepared material to review and study in preparation for class. These materials include short videos or readings written by faculty that specifically cover the topics in question. Things easily mastered on one's own are given in this prep-material and class time is devoted to working through and struggling with more complex and in-depth concepts. This style of preparation and collaborative learning has been excellent and extremely well executed. I feel that my learning and retention have been enhanced by this model. Wednesdays follow a separate curriculum where Medical and Dental students have a hands-on experience learning about how Medicine is practiced. Each student is assigned a hospital site which include Massachusetts General Hospital, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Cambridge Health Alliance. In the beginning of the year, students learn the physical exam and how to take a full medical history. Students then spend the remainder of the year practicing history taking and giving physical exams in the hospital.

HSDM also has a strong commitment to research and each student must complete a scholarly project before graduating. Projects are diverse and range from global health to basic science research. The school provides a lot of support to students in helping them find mentors and in selecting and carrying out projects. Students who don't wish

to be heavily involved in research generally find the project very doable while students with research interests can carry their research as far as they would like. Dental students don't have to necessarily do their research at the Dental School but can find investigators at the Harvard teaching hospitals or other graduate schools.

By the nature of the unique training offered at HSDM, many students choose to specialize. Those who specialize do very well in their placement into top programs and residencies. While HSDM students specialize in every field, Oral Surgery is always well represented. HSDM helps students pursue specialties but that is not its teaching focus. HSDM is focused on training students to be experts in oral health and prepared to integrate oral and systemic health. HSDM trains awesome general dentists.

I think an important reason HSDM students match so well to specialties, especially to Oral Surgery, is the option to rearrange the timing of certain components of the curriculum during years 3-4 and to use elective time to prepare students for their desired specialty. For example, students who are interested in Oral Surgery may use their elective time to go on externships at programs that interest them. While students at other dental school might struggle to get 2 weeks of externships, HSDM students interested in our surgery usually have about 10 weeks.

There are many benefits to being at HSDM and apart of the larger Harvard society. One that is especially cool is that students may take leave and study at other graduate programs before completing their DMD. Students have studied in the Chan School of Public Health, Harvard Business School, Harvard Law School and taken a dedicated research year. You can really make your education what you are looking for at Harvard.

Boston is an amazing city!

What are other factors to consider?

Cost of attendance and debt is a factor to consider at any dental school and HSDM is no different. Cost of attendance is high at HSDM. Boston is an expensive city to live in. Off campus housing especially can be somewhat tricky to find and expensive to rent. HSDM has a graduate dormitory with the Medical school where primarily first and second year dental and medical students live that is right across the street from the school. Living off campus is very doable however, and there is good transportation to the dental school from many Boston neighborhoods. At the end of the day dental school is an investment and each dental student has to weigh career goals and opportunities. For me, HSDM is absolutely worth the investment.

Because of the structure of the curriculum, there is little dental training the first year. Second year is dedicated in large part to covering the didactic portion of dentistry, preparing for the boards and some beginning clinical skills. Some are nervous that they won't develop the hand skills and clinical skills as well because of this structure. I can't comment on this yet, but I have heard from 4th year students that they feel very prepared clinically and that in externships where they work with students from other dental schools they feel just as proficient if not more so.

Fit is an important factor in attending HSDM. It's important that prospective students consider how they fit the mission of HSDM and how the mission of HSDM aligns with their career goals and interests. If there is not a good fit, a student may feel frustrated by the focus and structure of the curriculum. On the other hand, with good fit, a student will feel as I do, that this program is exactly tailored to what I am seeking to become.