



Dental Assistant Program

FAQ

What is a dental assistant and how is it different than a dental hygienist?

Dental Assistants, Median annual salary: \$41,180 (\$19.80/ hr.) *

What you'll do: Dental assistants are typically responsible for the following tasks:

- Working closely with patients before, during and after procedures
- Assisting the dentist during a variety of treatment procedures
- Taking and developing x-rays
- Preparing and sterilizing instruments and equipment
- Taking impressions of patients' teeth for study casts
- Teaching patients appropriate oral hygiene strategies
- Performing office management
- Degree you'll need to practice: Technical certificate or associates degree

Dental Hygienists, Median annual salary: \$77,090 (\$37.06/ hr.) *

What you'll do: Besides the same duties as dental assistants, a dental hygienist often performs the following tasks:

- Collecting information about the patient's oral and medical health history
- Treating patient's oral health: assisting patients with maintaining or improving their oral health and treating periodontal disease through non-surgical therapy and application of chemotherapeutics
- Charting patients' dental conditions for the dentist
- Applying fluorides and decay preventatives
- Administering local anesthetics
- Degree you'll need: An associate degree or bachelor's degree in dental hygiene

*Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics May 2020 Occupational Outlook Handbook

What are the career advantages of a dental assistant?

Variety: Dental assisting is a challenging and rewarding career, demanding versatility and a willingness to assume responsibility for many different tasks.

Flexibility: Since dental assistants are in demand, career options include both full-time and part-time positions.

Excellent working conditions: Dental offices are interesting, pleasant, and people-oriented environments in which to work.

Personal satisfaction: Dental assisting involves people contact, and with this personal interaction comes the personal satisfaction of knowing you've really helped someone by helping to provide a value

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What occupational hazards are associated with dental assisting?

Yes, there are various occupational hazards which come with being a dental assistant.

Statement from the CDC:

In dentistry, the diseases we are most concerned about are those caused by bloodborne pathogens (BBP). Examples are hepatitis B and C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Transmission may occur from a patient to a dental health care provider (DHCP), from a DHCP to a patient, or from one patient to another patient. The best way to prevent the transmission of BBP is adherence to Standard Precautions.

Occupational exposures can occur through needlesticks or cuts from other sharp instruments contaminated with an infected patient's blood (including blood contaminated saliva) or through contact of the eye, nose, mouth, or skin with a patient's blood. Health care personnel are at risk for occupational exposure to bloodborne pathogens – pathogenic microorganisms that are present in human blood and can cause disease in humans. These pathogens include, but are not limited to, hepatitis B virus (HBV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Following a specific exposure, the risk of infection varies depending on factors such as:

- The pathogen involved.
- The type and severity of exposure.
- The amount of blood involved in the exposure.
- The amount of pathogen in the patient's blood at the time of exposure.
- Although most exposures do not result in infection, the exposed person should seek care immediately by a qualified health care professional in case treatment is needed.

What is a certified dental assistant, or CDA, and why is it beneficial? (Information regarding state transferability)

Dental assistants can receive their credentials by passing an examination that evaluates their knowledge. This examination is administered by the Dental Assisting National Board's (DANB) Certified Dental Assistant (CDA) examination.

The Dental Assistant Program at WSU Tech prepares and schedules testing for the CDA exam, but it is not required to obtain a job in Kansas. In fact, Kansas has minimal legislation and regulations regarding dental assistants.

Obtaining a CDA after completion of the dental assistant program makes you more transformable from state to state. Each state has their own legislation regarding dental assisting. However, graduating from a CODA accredited dental assistant program alone, typically prepares students for transferability, but obtaining the professional credentials, CDA, prepares you even more. If you are considering moving after completion of the dental assistant program, you should contact the state dental board and inquire about their state's rules and regulations.

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How long is the dental assistant program and when does it start?

The dental assistant program at WSU Tech is 12 months and begins in the summer session; the first and second semesters begin in the pre-session period, one week prior to the start of the regular semester.

How do I apply to the dental assistant program?

The Pre-Dental Summer Session has a maximum enrollment of 24 students and is first-come, first-serve. To enroll in the summer session, students must complete the following checklist:

- Complete Next Generation ACCUPLACER and Ed Ready Placement Tests:
- with minimum scores of 237 in Reading and Writing, and 39 in Math - Ed Ready.
- Successful completion of BUS 121 Business Communications
- Completion/ submission of an 8-hour observation at a general dental office (specialties are not accepted).
- Current GPA of 2.0 or higher
- Attend information session online or at the WSU- WSU Tech South

Students who are enrolled in the Pre-Dental Summer Session will begin program admissions and official program acceptance for enrollment in the fall semester. This includes:

- Criminal Background Check: For fall enrollment and official program acceptance, applicants must pay for and pass a criminal background check. As required by WSU Tech policy, any felony and/or crimes against a person preclude admission to health programs
- Drug Screen: For fall enrollment and official program acceptant, applicants must pay for and pass a drug screen
- Health Examinations and Immunizations: Submit all required health examinations and immunizations at their own expense by designated date.
- Dental Examination: Recent dental exam must be complete within one year of program start. All treatment recommendation must be completed before enrollment in spring dental assistant program courses.
- Pass the Pre-Dental Summer Session courses with a C or better.

What is the schedule of a dental assistant student like?

First it must be understood the dental assistant program, although at a technical college, is an academic program. All programs, whether at a technical college, junior college, or university are academically challenging and require hard work. In the first semester of the program, students are on campus three and a half days. Although it is not five days a week, the program requires an ample amount of studying and online work. Additionally, the first semester is 17 credit hours and student must consider scheduling time for studying and completion of homework. Generally, it is recommended to anticipate scheduling 2-3 hours of studying per credit hour. Second semester, students are on campus two days a week and at clinicals three days a week during the first eight weeks. In the second eight weeks of the second semester, students are on campus one day a week and at clinicals four days a week.

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Pre-Dental Session: 7 credit hours x 2-3 hours of study/credit hour= 14-21 of study in additional to on campus course schedule.

First semester: 13 credit hours x 2-3 hours of study/credit hour= 26-39 of study in additional to on campus course schedule.

Second semester: 15 credit hours x 2-3 hours of study/credit hour= 30-45 of study in additional to on campus course schedule and clinical hours.

Can I work while in the dental assistant program?

Yes, many students do work while in the dental assistant program. You should expect to work in the evenings, as this program is only a daytime program.

There are no plans for an evening or online program. An online program would not be feasible, as clinicals cannot be completed online. An evening program cannot be made available because most dental offices are not open in the evenings, thus clinicals may only be completed during the day.

What additional cost should I anticipate, once accepted into the dental assistant program?

In addition to tuition and fees of the program, applicants must anticipate the cost of: physical exam, immunizations, dental exam, background check, drug screening, textbooks, laptop, and uniforms/shoes.

What is the difference between the Technical Certificate (TC) and Associates Degree (AAS)?

WSU Tech Dental Assistant Program offers a technical and associate degree. All students who complete the dental assistant program receive the technical certificate. Students may opt to complete their associate degree by completing the additional courses before dental assistant program or after. Students who complete the courses before the program will graduate with both degrees, the technical and associate.

The benefits of completing the associate degree are:

- Looks good on application for Dental Hygiene School: Many of the courses required for the associate degree are prerequisites for dental assistant programs, having completed an associate degree proves desire to excel.
- Prepares you for work outside clinical dental assisting, such as working for a Dental Supply vendor.