

Sample Essay 3  
Dental School Essay Written for 2010 Matriculation

Most toddlers stop thumb-sucking by the age of three. I stopped thumb-sucking at age 15, on the very day the orthodontist strapped wires across my teeth, leaving me with the shiny metallic mouth of an adolescent "brace face." I must have been an exception among my peers for I had been eagerly awaiting braces for several years, since the day I noticed that my fifth grade teacher had difficulty understanding my words. Miss Skolnik would sometimes frown in puzzlement at my speech and before long, I was attending sessions with the school speech therapist. By then years of nightly thumb-sucking had left me with a slight prognathism, misaligned teeth, and a speech impediment. I grew increasingly conscious of my teeth as the years passed: because of my prognathism I adopted a closed mouth smile; to reduce my lisp I at one point undertook the silly resolution to avoid "s" and "t" words whenever possible.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 8:00 PM

**Comment:** Excellent opening vignette. It ties her experience(s) to her interest in dental medicine.

I was thrilled then, when my parents were finally able to afford orthodontic treatment during my high school years. During that time I had been actively involved in my high school debate team and thus was all too aware of the importance of the spoken word: as a debater my speech was my weapon of choice, yet I found my impediment to be a hindrance to my self-confidence. By senior year the orthodontic treatment was completed – both my prognathism and lisp were reduced and speech became a natural task instead of an excruciatingly self-conscious process. It is this experience that now inspires me to pursue a career in dentistry: I value the importance of dental health, of its health and social impacts, and I want to provide compassionate and meaningful service to patients who may face the challenges and concerns I once faced.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 8:01 PM

**Comment:** Motivation for dentistry is clearly stated here.

My decision to pursue dentistry is the result of a long and thoughtful process. I entered Duke with the intention of becoming a physician, an intention that had developed through years watching my mom struggle against four diseases. Somewhere along the way however (probably during an Orgo test) I began to question this intention – I realized that I wanted to work in a different type of healthcare environment and that I wanted to work in a less emotionally draining field while still providing important care. My involvement as a Duke Lilly Scholar afforded me the opportunity to talk with both my mentors and my fellow students about my hesitations. Once a month for nearly two years we attended our discernment groups, to eat dinner, to discuss, to listen, but most importantly, to really stop and think about our vocational paths. At our last dinner a friend offered a parting quote: "Your vocation is where your greatest desire meets a great need."

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 8:01 PM

**Comment:** Further rationale for pursuing dentistry.

It was during the two months I spent working in a Russian hospital that I began to better understand myself and my greatest desire. I learnt that although I admire physicians the profession would not be a best fit for me, that I enjoyed developing a relationship with patients and seeing them regularly, that I liked working with my hands, and that I wanted to be of service to others. I started volunteering at the Missions of Mercy (MOM) dental clinics when I arrived back for the start of the semester. The clinics provide daylong free dental care to low-income North Carolina residents, and I was allowed to help dental students as they performed their work on hundreds of patients. My first experience with dentistry was watching and helping with a full-mouth extraction – as I passed instruments to the dentist I was amazed that this woman had driven ten miles with her grandkids to get all her teeth

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 8:02 PM

**Comment:** Career path is focused by experiences.

pulled out. I realized then that there was a great need for dental care, especially among low-income families.

Subsequently I have enrolled in an osteology and anatomy class and have discovered that I thoroughly enjoy learning about bones, and that my love for sketching is useful in visualizing bone articulation. Additionally, my interest in dental structure as well as my past with prognathism and speech impediments led me to develop an independent study project on oral and maxillofacial structure form and function in primates. It is refreshing to be able to concentrate on an area of particular academic interest – the oral structure – and more so to make a connection between the academic interest and clinical use at the volunteer clinics. I am fully confident that a career in dentistry is right for me: if my greatest desires are to provide pain relief, to develop patient relationships, to utilize creativity in working with my hands, and to provide care for others, and if there is a great need for good dental care, then dentistry is, indeed, my vocation.

Dan Scheirer 1/3/10 8:03 PM  
**Comment:** Strong conclusion, passionately stated.