

DENTAL HYGIENE PROGRAM

VCU School of Dentistry
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The Dental Hygiene Program, established in 1969, offers courses leading to a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene. The program requires two years of liberal arts study, with a minimum of 60 semester hours, followed by two years of study focusing on basic and dental sciences, dental hygiene science and theory, community health, and pre-clinic and clinical experiences. The Dental Hygiene Program is accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association. Upon successful completion of the program, graduates are eligible for national, regional and state board licensing examinations.

Curriculum notes

- As part of students' course of study and community education, travel to off-campus sites is expected. Students will be required to provide their own transportation to agencies used for clinical and community health rotation experiences.
- Licensing/certification: It is important for every student to understand that, while certain curricula are designed for the purpose of achieving registration or certification by an outside agency, completion of such an academic program in no way assures the student of successful registration or certification. No employee, agent or representative of this university is authorized or empowered to provide such assurances either directly or by implication.
- Individuals who have a felony or misdemeanor conviction may not be eligible for licensure in Virginia. The Virginia Board of Dentistry makes this decision. For questions regarding this issue, call the Virginia Board of Dentistry at (804) 662-9906.
- Criminal background checks are required prior to matriculation (<http://www.dentistry.vcu.edu/programs/dentalhygiene/background/>).

Policy on blood-borne and infectious diseases

By the nature of the profession, oral health care providers are routinely exposed to blood and body fluids during the treatment of patients in a clinical environment. In accordance with Section 32.1-45.1 of the Code of Virginia, the School of Dentistry requires that if a health care provider is exposed to body fluids in a manner that may transmit blood-borne or infectious disease, both the health care provider and the patient will be tested for disease.

Mission, philosophy and program goals

Mission

VCU's Dental Hygiene Program is committed to academic excellence while promoting accessibility and equity in an inclusive learning environment. The program considers each learner's unique potential as future clinicians and their impact on humanity through meaningful service. The program will offer exceptional scholarly opportunities empowering students to become ethically competent oral health

professionals devoted to scientific inquiry, lifelong learning and cross-cultural knowledge. The vision of VCU's Dental Hygiene Program is to create influential oral health care stewards utilizing emerging technologies, while advocating to eradicate oral health disparities.

Goals

In pursuit of this vision, the program holds the following goals:

Education

- Develop dental hygiene graduates with the knowledge, skills and attributes to deliver optimal dental hygiene therapies
- Provide students with an interdisciplinary, evidence-based curriculum reflective of current health care modalities
- Educate a diverse population of learners in an inclusive and equitable atmosphere fostering peer-led and self-directed learning, critical thinking and assessment

Patient care

- Prepare competent dental hygiene graduates to provide patient-centered, comprehensive, evidence-based dental hygiene therapies in an ethical and professional manner
- Provide clinical education based on a prevention model designed to promote optimal oral and systemic health with an aim to eradicate oral health disparities

Service

- Prepare dental hygiene graduates to respond to the evolving oral health care needs of a diverse society in an inclusive manner by demonstrating a commitment to community engagement
- Provide students with service-learning opportunities in the community that promote the mission of the school, university and profession

Professionalism

- Provide students with the skills to advance the foundation and practice of dental hygiene through a commitment to scientific inquiry and lifelong learning
- Prepare dental hygiene graduates to assume leadership roles in professional organizations
- Gain societal trust by modeling professional behaviors consistent with ethical and legal expectations of the dental hygiene profession

Admission requirements

Two years of liberal arts study with a minimum of 60 semester hours of transferable quality academic course credits are required. For more information on the following prerequisites, please visit the Dental Hygiene Program website (<http://www.dentistry.vcu.edu/programs/dentalhygiene/admission/>).

Course	Title	Hours
Prerequisite courses		
English		6

General biology with laboratory	3-5
College chemistry with laboratory	3-5
Anatomy and physiology with laboratory	5-8
Microbiology with laboratory	3-5
Humanities	3
Introductory sociology	3
Introductory psychology	3
Speech	3
Statistics	3
Visual or performing arts	3

The remainder of the 60 required credits can be chosen from any of the following areas of study: science, math, computer usage, first aid and CPR, and humanities. Science electives are strongly recommended.

For a list of prerequisite courses that can be taken in the Virginia Community College System or through Richard Bland College, refer to the VCU Transfer Center website (<https://transfer.vcu.edu/prospective/pathways/>).

Additional prerequisites are as follows:

- **GPA** – A minimum overall grade point average of 3.0 and a math/science GPA of 3.0 will make the applicant competitive. A holistic application review is employed. Applicants must demonstrate the ability to succeed in advanced science courses. In recent years the average overall GPA of admitted applicants is 3.7 and the average math/science GPA for admitted applicants is 3.6.
- **Shadowing** – Shadowing a dental hygienist is required; any individual applying after Feb. 1, 2025, must shadow a dental hygienist for a **minimum of 8 hours**; if a prospective student would like to shadow more, that is their prerogative. In addition, the committee will assess an applicant's ability to work in teams, resiliency, willingness to accept responsibility and maturity. Please review the dental hygiene program application review rubric posted under the program information section of the DHCAS application, which describes how the Dental Hygiene Admissions Committee evaluates each applicant.
- **English proficiency** – To successfully complete the dental hygiene curriculum, students are required to communicate clearly (in English) with faculty, students, staff and patients. To assure such competence, the Dental Hygiene Program requires any applicant whose native language is not English and who has been educated primarily outside of the United States to submit official Test of English as a Foreign Language or International English Language Testing System scores. Applicants are required to submit an official score with the application packet. The test must have been taken within the past two years. The Dental Hygiene Program does not conditionally admit applicants who have not met the requirement for proof of English proficiency.

Applicants may be exempt from this requirement if:

- They have successfully completed 26 or more transferable semester credits at a two- or four-year postsecondary institution in the United States and have completed the full freshman English (non-ESL) requirement at that school with a minimum grade of C
- or

- They have successfully completed 60 or more transferable semester credits at a two- or four-year postsecondary institution in the United States.

No student will be considered for admission until proof of English proficiency is determined.

TOEFL: VCU's Dental Hygiene Program minimum TOEFL score requirements is 550 (paper), 213 (computer) or 79-80 (internet-based). For more information about TOEFL testing, go to: www.ets.org (<http://www.ets.org/>)

IELTS: VCU's Dental Hygiene Program minimum IELTS score requirement is 6.0.

- **Deadline** – Complete the online application through the American Dental Education Association Dental Hygiene Centralized Application Service. All application materials must be received by the ADEA DHCAS by **Feb. 1**.
- **Notice of intent to change prerequisites** - Beginning with the entering class of fall 2027, prerequisite changes will apply. The visual or performing arts three credit hours prerequisite requirement will be removed. A new prerequisite for three credit hours of college level nutrition will be added. Those applying for admission to enter in fall 2026 or prior must fulfill the currently posted prerequisites.

Any application that does not meet the above stipulations will not be processed.

For additional information on prerequisites or the application or admissions process, please visit the program's website for prospective students (<http://www.dentistry.vcu.edu/programs/dentalhygiene/>).

Academic progress committee guidelines

The faculty of the VCU School of Dentistry has the responsibility for evaluating the student's academic progress. It is incumbent on the course directors or their designees to specify, at the time a course first convenes, the criteria to be used in student assessment and the standards by which the students will be judged.

Guidelines that govern the actions of the academic progress committee and the academic activities of the students are distributed to all students at the beginning of their studies. The guidelines are available upon request from the Office of Academics in the School of Dentistry.

Financial assistance

A brief description of financial aid based on demonstrated need is contained in the Financial aid (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-study/financial-aid/>) section of this bulletin. Scholarships and loans are available from various sources. Information on financial assistance is also available upon request from the Office of Financial Affairs, School of Dentistry, Virginia Commonwealth University, Box 980566, Richmond, VA 23298-0566.

Criminal background checks

As an applicant to the Dental Hygiene Program at Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dentistry, all accepted candidates, prior to matriculation, will be required to submit to a criminal background check. A final decision about matriculation will be made after a review of the applicant's CBC.

The rationale for performing CBCs:

- To foster patient safety and well-being
- To bolster the continuing trust of the public in the dental hygiene profession
- To ascertain the ability of accepted applicants and enrolled dental hygiene students to eventually become licensed as dental hygienists
- To minimize the liability of dental schools and their affiliated clinical facilities

The CBC will not be a component of the application, interview or selection process but will be a mandatory component of the prematriculation process. The final decision regarding matriculation of an applicant will be based on the self-reported information in the candidate's application and information in the CBC report. Factors involved in the final decision may include, but are not limited to:

- The nature, circumstances and frequency of any reported offense(s)
- Length of time since the offense(s)
- Available information that addresses efforts at rehabilitation
- The accuracy of the information provided by the applicant

The information obtained through a CBC will not become part of a student's academic file and will remain confidential unless the findings result in an institutional action by the School of Dentistry.

Only candidates offered class positions and alternate-list candidates will be asked to provide a CBC prior to matriculation.

Candidates will be responsible for the cost of the CBC.

Preparatory study for dental hygiene

University Academic Advising provides programs in preparation for admission into health sciences programs. For detailed information on the pre-health major in dental hygiene (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/college-humanities-sciences/prehealth-majors/dental-hygiene/>), see the UAA section of this bulletin.

Students who complete the requirements for the below will receive a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene.

- Dental Hygiene, Bachelor of Science (<https://bulletin.vcu.edu/undergraduate/dentistry/dental-hygiene-program/dental-hygiene-bs/>)