



Dental Assisting Program Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Dental Assistant?

Dental assistants are team members who serve as “generalists” in dental practices. Dental assistants must be detail oriented, adaptable, and possess excellent interpersonal and organizational skills in order to fulfill a variety of position responsibilities which may include: assisting the dentist chair side during treatment procedures, taking and developing x-rays, disinfecting and sterilizing instruments, mixing materials and taking impressions of teeth, obtaining and documenting dental histories, teaching patients about oral health, and performing office and managerial duties. Dental assistants may be exposed to infectious disease and are required to wear protective gear.

Dental assisting educational requirements, job titles and allowable functions vary from state to state. In Alabama, dental assistants may perform basic supportive procedures as specified by the state dental practice act and legally operate dental x-ray equipment under the direct supervision of a licensed dentist. There are no education or training requirements for this level of dental assisting.

Though not required in Alabama, dental assistants may become certified (CDA) through participation in voluntary credentialing examinations. Employers generally prefer a Certified Dental Assistant as the credential demonstrates knowledge acquisition, a commitment to the profession, and lifelong learning; on average, CDAs earn a higher hourly wage. The CCC dental assisting program prepares students for success on the Dental Assisting National Board, Inc. examinations that earn the CDA credential.

<http://www.danb.org/>

Most dental assistants are employed by general dental offices or specialty practices such as orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics, or oral surgery and positions exist with hospitals, school programs, and dental supply companies.

What is a Dental Hygienist?

Dental hygienists clean teeth, examine patients for oral diseases, such as gingivitis, and provide other preventative dental care including education on improving and maintaining good oral health. Dental hygienists generally must have an associate's degree in dental hygiene. Many begin their career as a dental assistant. Every state requires dental hygienists to be licensed; the requirements vary by state.

For more information about dental team careers, visit the [American Dental Association](http://www.ada.org/284.aspx) at <http://www.ada.org/284.aspx>

What physical capabilities are required of a Dental Assistant?

Students enrolled in the dental assisting program are required to successfully complete both academic and clinical requirements. The purpose of the [Eligibility Criteria](#), found on the DA webpage, is to delineate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills deemed minimally necessary for admission, progression, and graduation, and for the provision of safe and effective client care. The Alabama Community College System endorses the Americans' with Disabilities Act. If a student cannot meet the Eligibility Criteria it is their responsibility to request appropriate reasonable accommodations through the Student Disability Services Office.

When does the program begin?

A new class of twenty-four (24) DA students is enrolled once a year and begins in the summer semester. Only students who have applied to the program and have been accepted are allowed to enroll in DAT courses.

How long is the DA program?

The dental assisting coursework consists of three consecutive semesters of DAT classes which must be taken in sequence. Students may choose to complete the program with either a [certificate](#) or [associates of applied science degree](#). Because of the required general education coursework, it usually takes students a bit longer than 3 semesters to finish their certificate or degree plan.

Dental Assisting Curriculum Plan

Fall Semester	
	credit hours
DAT 100: Introduction to Dental Assisting	2
DAT 101: Preclinical Procedures I	3
DAT 102: Dental Materials	3
DAT 103: Dental Anatomy & Physiology	3
DAT 104: Basic Sciences for Dental Assisting	2
Spring Semester	
DAT 111: Clinical Practice I	5
DAT 112: Dental Radiology	3
DAT 113: Dental Health Education	2
DAT 116: Preclinical Procedures II	3
Summer Semester	
DAT 114: Dental Office Administration	4
DAT 122: Clinical Practice II	4
DAT 123: Dental Assisting Seminar	4
Dental Assisting Total =	38

Students may earn either a **certificate** or **associates of applied science degree** depending on the general education coursework completed (see below). To promote success in the program, students are encouraged to take all or most general education classes prior to application. Completion of the foundational classes helps to ensure student accomplishment in the rigorous DA program. General education courses must be completed with a grade of "C" or higher. Dental assisting (DAT) courses must be taken in the order delineated by the curriculum plan and completed with a grade of C or higher. Three semesters are required even when all general education coursework has been completed prior to enrollment in dental assisting.

General Education Requirements Dental Assisting Certificate	
	credit hours
ENG 101: English Composition I	3
MTH 100: Intermediate College Algebra or a "higher" math course	3
Total =	6

General Education Requirements Associate of Applied Science	
	credit hours
ORI 110: Freshman Seminar	1
ENG 101: English Composition I	3
MTH 100: Intermediate College Algebra or a "higher" math course	3
PSY 200: General Psychology	3
Speech elective - SPH 106 Fundamentals of Oral Communication or SPH 107 Fundamentals of Public Speaking	3
Natural sciences elective - BIO 103: Principles of Biology I, or BIO 201: Human Anatomy & Physiology I, or CHM 104: Intro. to Inorganic Chemistry	4
History or social science or behavioral science elective - PSY 210: Human Growth and Development, or SOC 200: Introduction to Sociology	3
CIS 146: Microcomputer Applications	3
Humanities elective - (Art, Music, Philosophy, Religion, Theatre, or Literature, but not a Foreign Language)	3
Total =	26

What expenses are involved in the DA program?

In addition to tuition, health students have expenses related to the requirements below, plus textbooks and laboratory supplies. Approximate costs are discussed in information sessions and program orientation.

HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENT REQUIREMENTS:

- Retain reliable transportation to and from the campus and assigned clinical education facilities
- Comply with a dress code that includes an assigned uniform
- Undergo a health examination, TB screening, and validate immunity to infectious diseases
- Submit proof of current certification in basic life support (CPR) at the healthcare provider level
- Purchase low-cost malpractice insurance through the CCC Health Sciences division
- Submit to a background check by a designated vendor
- Undergo drug and alcohol testing by a designated vendor

What are clinical practice experiences?

Students are assigned to four different dental offices for clinical practice rotations in the 3-semester program curriculum plan. Clinical practice is usually scheduled on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and/or Fridays and the hours are generally between 7:00 AM and 5:00 PM. Dental office assignments are based on the learning needs of the student, not geographic proximity to home, work or family commitments. Students must have reliable transportation, flexibility in their personal schedules, and the willingness to commute to clinical sites throughout north Alabama and southern Tennessee.

Will I be able to work and attend the dental assisting program?

The dental assisting program requires commitment. Successful students report studying approximately two hours for each contact hour of lecture classes per week. Sound study skills and time management are critical to achievement. Therefore, it is recommended that students do not work more than 20 hours per week. Classes and clinical experiences may be scheduled during the day Mondays through Fridays and student attendance is required.

The DA program application says the grading policy is different. Why is that?

The dental assisting program grading policy is more stringent than the general college grading policy. In order to pass a DAT course, the student must receive a grade of 75% or greater. Students who do not receive a minimum of 75% as a final grade in a course are not allowed to progress in the program. It is the belief of the faculty that having a strict grading policy will help to better ensure student knowledge, competency and effective and safe patient care.

How can I find out more about the CCC DA program?

Begin with the DA website and attend a program information session. If you still have unanswered questions, please contact the department by telephone or email.

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Is the DA Program accredited?

The dental assisting program has been granted the accreditation status of “approval without reporting requirements” by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), a specialized accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education.

CODA will review complaints that relate to a program’s compliance with the accreditation standards. The Commission is interested in the sustained quality and continued improvement of dental and dental-related education programs but does not intervene on behalf of individuals or act as a court of appeal for treatment received by patients or individuals in matters of admission, appointment, promotion or dismissal of faculty, staff or students. A copy of the appropriate accreditation standards and/or the Commission’s policy and procedure for submission of complaints may be obtained by contacting:

Commission on Dental Accreditation
211 East Chicago Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611-2678
800-621-8099, extension 4653

State Approval

The dental assisting program of Calhoun Community College
is operated with the approval of the Board of Dental Examiners of Alabama.



BOARD OF DENTAL EXAMINERS OF ALABAMA

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<https://www.dentalboard.org/>