Program Structure by Semester

The Dental Hygiene Program follows a **five-semester sequence completed over two academic years**, including one required summer semester. Each semester builds on the knowledge, clinical skills, professional behaviors, and patient-care experiences developed in the previous semester. Students begin in laboratory and preclinical settings before moving into supervised patient care. Clinical responsibilities increase as students progress through Clinical Dental Hygienist I–IV. CODA defines clinical education as supervised and evaluated patient-care experiences that help students develop the competence required for entry into dental hygiene practice.

First Semester — Fall
Foundations and Preclinical Preparation | 12 credit hours

During the first semester, students build the foundation needed to begin providing patient care. Coursework introduces dental hygiene concepts, oral and facial anatomy, nutrition, dental materials, and social factors that may influence health and patient communication.
Preclinical instruction allows students to practice skills in a controlled laboratory setting before treating patients. Students begin developing:

- *Infection prevention and patient-safety practices*
- *Ergonomic positioning and instrument use*
- *Foundational dental hygiene procedures*
- *Patient assessment and documentation skills*
- *Professional communication and conduct*
- *Time management and preparation habits*
- *An understanding of oral structures, nutrition, and dental materials*

Students must demonstrate required preclinical skills before advancing into direct patient care.

Courses include:

- *Preclinical Dental Hygiene*
- *Orofacial Anatomy, Histology, and Embryology*
- *General and Dental Nutrition*
- *Dental Materials*
- *Introduction to Sociology*

Second Semester — Spring
Beginning Patient Care | 11 credit hours

Students begin providing supervised dental hygiene care to patients in Clinical Dental Hygienist I. Classroom and laboratory courses support this transition by introducing dental radiology, pharmacology, oral pathology, and the dental hygiene process of care.
Students begin applying classroom and preclinical knowledge to patient care by:

- *Reviewing medical and dental histories*
- *Collecting and documenting patient information*
- *Performing dental hygiene assessments*
- *Developing patient-centered care plans*
- *Providing preventive and therapeutic services*
- *Exposing and evaluating dental radiographs under faculty supervision*
- *Recognizing health conditions, medications, and oral findings that may affect care*

- *Educating patients about oral health and disease prevention*

Students are responsible for preparing for clinic, communicating with patients, completing clinical documentation, and meeting assigned patient-care requirements.

Courses include:

- *Pharmacology for the Dental Hygienist*
- *General and Oral Pathology*
- *Clinical Dental Hygienist I*
- *Dental Radiology*
- *Dental Hygiene Care I*

Third Semester — Summer

Continued Clinical Development | 5 credit hours

*Students complete a required **six-week summer semester**, generally held from mid-May through the end of June. The summer term includes Clinical Dental Hygienist II and continued general education coursework.*

The concentrated clinical schedule gives students additional opportunities to:

- *Strengthen foundational clinical skills*
- *Improve organization and time management*
- *Provide care to patients with different oral health needs*
- *Increase confidence and independence within the student scope of practice*
- *Improve patient communication and education*
- *Complete increasingly detailed clinical documentation*
- *Respond professionally to faculty feedback and assigned remediation*

Because the summer semester is shorter, students should expect a condensed schedule and frequent clinical participation. Attendance during the summer term is required for continued progression in the program.

Courses include:

- *Clinical Dental Hygienist II*
- *Composition I*

Fourth Semester — Second-Year Fall

Advanced Assessment and Patient Care | 11 credit hours

During the second-year fall semester, students move into more advanced patient assessment, treatment planning, periodontal care, preventive services, and clinical decision-making. Students provide care for a broader range of patients and begin managing cases with more complex oral and systemic health considerations. Instruction focuses on:

- *Periodontal assessment and disease recognition*
- *Nonsurgical periodontal therapy*
- *Individualized treatment planning*
- *Preventive strategies based on patient risk*
- *Evaluation of patient-care outcomes*
- *Management of patients with varied health histories and treatment needs*
- *Clinical judgment and problem-solving*
- *Increased efficiency while maintaining quality and patient safety*
- *Professional responsibility and accountability*

General Psychology supports students' understanding of behavior, communication, learning, and patient interaction.

Courses include:

- *Periodontology*
- *Preventive Dental Hygiene Care*
- *Dental Hygiene Care II*
- *Clinical Dental Hygienist III*
- *General Psychology*

Fifth Semester — Second-Year Spring

Entry-Level Competence and Professional Preparation | 11 credit hours

The final semester focuses on advanced patient care, community oral health, professional practice, completion of program competencies, and preparation for graduation and licensure. Students are expected to integrate knowledge and skills from all previous semesters while demonstrating increasing independence, sound clinical judgment, and consistent professional conduct.

Final-semester experiences may include:

- *Providing comprehensive dental hygiene care*
- *Managing patients with increasingly complex needs*
- *Evaluating treatment outcomes and determining continuing-care needs*
- *Completing required clinical competencies and patient experiences*
- *Participating in community oral health activities*
- *Studying ethics, professional responsibilities, and dental hygiene practice issues*
- *Strengthening communication and presentation skills*
- *Preparing for national, clinical, and state licensure requirements*
- *Planning for employment and continued professional development*

Students must successfully complete all academic, clinical, and professional requirements before graduating from the program.

Courses include:

- *Community Dentistry*
- *Dental Hygiene Practice*
- *Clinical Dental Hygienist IV*
- *Speech*
- *Introduction to Ethics*