

# ORAL AND MAXILLOFACIAL RESIDENCY

*Notes from the OMFS Residency Series*

*Updated March 2025 by Garam Hong and Oscar Peng (Class of 2028)*

This information is a result of the annual ADEA Residency Series, co-sponsored with the Office of Career and Professional Development and the UCSF ADEA chapter. Residents shared their thoughts about oral and maxillofacial dentistry on a panel and gave advice to dental students about the application process and residency experience.

## **Exploring OMFS**

### **Q: Why did you choose OMFS?**

**A:** Residents highlighted being drawn to the meticulous and detail-oriented nature of surgery, as well as the broad scope of OMFS, which offers a wider range of practice compared to other specialties that tend to be more focused. They also highlighted how oral surgeons are at the forefront of integrating oral and systemic health, working across fields in both medicine and dentistry to provide patient care at both the micro and macro levels.

### **Q: How do you choose between different residency programs?**

**A:** A good starting point is the American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons (AAOMS) website (<https://aaoms.org>), which lists all accredited residency programs by state with brief descriptions. Residents typically choose programs based on factors like single versus dual degree, location, and scope of practice. Since OMFS residency is at least four years, it is important to choose a location you will enjoy living in for that long. Residents also advised doing thorough research to ensure the program aligns with your specific interests and career goals, as different schools specialize in different procedures. Externship experiences also played a significant role in residents' decision-making.

### **Q: How many OMFS residency programs are there?**

**A:** According to the AAOMS, as of 2025, there are 101 OMFS residency training programs in the United States, with 55 single degree programs and 46 dual degree programs. 23 of these programs offer both tracks.

### **Q: What are the key differences between single and dual degree programs?**

**A:** The dual-degree program is a 6-year track where residents earn an MD, while the single-degree program is a 4-year track. Although an MD is not required to practice in the US, it is common in many other parts of the world. The additional two years in the dual-degree program offer more extensive training and a broader didactic education. The choice between the two often depends on career goals: the single-degree program is typically favored by those planning to enter private practice, while the dual-degree program may be preferred by those aiming for a fellowship, hospital work, or academia. Finances may also play a role, as the 6-year route involves paying for additional medical school tuition. According to the AAOMS, 52% of residents are in single-degree programs, while 48% are in dual-degree programs for the 2024–2025 school year, reflecting a relatively even split.

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### **Q: What were the key factors that led you to choose UCSF?**

**A:** UCSF's OMFS program is a 6-year, well-rounded program that offers comprehensive training in a wide range of procedures, particularly excelling in dentoalveolar surgery, orthognathic surgery, and trauma of the face and neck. Residents highlighted that externship and non-categorical internship experiences at UCSF played a significant role in their decisions, with the program standing out for its supportive, close-knit resident culture.

### **Q: What is a non-categorical OMFS internship?**

**A:** A non-categorical OMFS internship is a one-year position offered by some schools between dental school and OMFS residency. It is designed for individuals who want to gain additional education and clinical experience beyond what is covered in dental school. Interns in these positions typically work at the same level as first-year residents, helping them prepare for their OMFS residency application or re-application.

### **Q: How can interested dental students learn more about OMFS?**

**A:** Residents recommended shadowing in the OMFS clinic, emphasizing how fortunate UCSF is to have such a strong OMFS program. While the one-week rotation during the D2 year offers a brief introduction, it may not provide enough insight to decide if the specialty is right for you. Additionally, one resident suggested reaching out to faculty about ongoing research projects as a great way to get involved in the department.

## **Preparing the Residency Application**

### **Q: How many programs should you apply to?**

Dental students typically apply to around 20 programs.

### **Q: What constitutes a competitive application for OMFS residency?**

**A:** Residents emphasized that the most important factor for securing an interview is a strong CBSE score, particularly for students from pass/no-pass, non-ranked schools like UCSF. Completing at least 3–4 externships, particularly at programs of interest, is crucial. Strong letters of recommendation from oral surgery faculty are also key, so it is important to establish meaningful connections early on. If possible, aim for excellent letters from program directors and research PIs; applicants typically need at least three letters of recommendation, with some programs accepting more. However, residents emphasized quality over quantity, noting that it is much more beneficial to get a letter from someone who knows you well, rather than from a "big name" who may not be familiar with your work or abilities.

### **Q: What is the Comprehensive Basic Sciences Examination (CBSE)?**

**A:** The CBSE is a standardized exam offered by the National Board of Medical Examiners that reflects the content of the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1, taken by medical students at the end of their M2 year. The CBSE is required for students applying to OMFS residencies. The exam consists of 200 multiple-choice questions and lasts 5 hours and 15 minutes, with a 15-minute optional break. It is offered twice a year, once in the winter and once in the summer.

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A competitive score is generally above 70, with highly competitive applicants scoring 75 or higher. While a high score does not guarantee a match, it significantly increases the likelihood of securing interview requests and matching. Students typically take the CBSE 2–3 times, usually during their D2 and D3 years, with a maximum of six attempts allowed.

### **Q: Beyond standardized test scores, what can applicants do to make their application stand out?**

**A:** Residents stressed the importance of a clear theme in your application—whether it is research, service, leadership, or another area of strength. Avoid a “cookie-cutter” approach; instead, highlight one or two standout areas that reflect your genuine interests and strengths. While a well-rounded application is important, depth and excellence in specific areas can set you apart. Leadership in organizations and research, though not inherently required, can strengthen your application and provide valuable talking points during interviews. Overall, showing initiative and expressing a clear and authentic interest in OMFS will make you a more compelling candidate.

### **Q: How many externships is recommended and does location matter?**

**A:** Residents recommended completing at least 3–4 externships, each typically lasting 1-2 weeks. Saving your top-choice program for later in your rotation schedule allows you to apply the experience and confidence gained from earlier externships, which can help you make a stronger impression. Some applicants even return for a second externship at a program to reinforce their interest and strengthen their connection with faculty and residents.

Location matters significantly, as programs often have a strong bias toward applicants who have externed with them. Choosing the right programs and performing well during your externship is essential. Additionally, externing at programs across the country signals flexibility and a willingness to relocate, which can positively influence your application. For example, externing only in California does not demonstrate to a school on the East Coast that you are open to moving, which could be disadvantageous.

### **Q: What are some tips for making the most of externships?**

**A:** Residents emphasized the importance of being prepared by researching the program, faculty, residents, and training focus beforehand. Bringing basic supplies like a notepad and pen and engaging with residents about upcoming cases demonstrates initiative and helps you stay informed. The chief resident noted that maintaining a humble attitude is essential—do not try to show off or pretend to know more than you do (they will see right through it!). Being helpful when possible is encouraged, but it is equally important to recognize your limits and step back when needed. Externship interactions often leave a lasting impression on interviewers and program directors, so a positive experience can strengthen your application, while poor behavior or lack of professionalism can hurt your chances of matching. Remember, you will be watched constantly—be on your best behavior!

### **Q: How should applicants prepare for an interview?**

Panelists advised speaking with 4th year dental students about their interview experiences as well as refining interview skills by recording practice sessions, reviewing responses, and practicing with others to improve delivery and confidence. Furthermore, one resident emphasized that the interview starts the moment you walk in the door, and you will likely see the

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same students at multiple interviews. Building rapport and making friends is important, as the OMFS community is small — “they are your future colleagues, not your competition.”

### **Q: What types of interview questions should applicants expect?**

Residents estimated that about 80% of interview questions are “basic” and should be well-prepared for, such as “Why OMFS?”, “Why this school?”, and “Where do you see yourself in X years?” Applicants should also expect to explain their choice between a 4-year and a 6-year program, as this is a common question. However, some questions will be unexpected and require quick thinking. For example, one resident was asked, “What is the weirdest thing you have ever done?” while another was asked, “Who is the most evil man in the world, and why?”

### **Q: How did you “get a feel” for the individual programs?**

**A:** Residents emphasized that the overall “vibe” from the program director and current residents is often the best indicator of whether a program is the right fit for you. Externships give a more authentic view of the program’s day-to-day environment, helping applicants assess if it aligns with their goals and personality. While interviews provide a general sense of the program, panelists cautioned that directors and residents may present a polished front, making it difficult to gauge the true culture. Reaching out to dental school alumni who have matched into the program may also provide valuable, honest insights.

### **Q: What do you wish you had done differently in preparing for OMFS residency?**

**A:** Residents expressed a desire for more externships and exposure to different programs, emphasizing that word-of-mouth alone is not enough to decide where to apply. One resident advised against applying to too many programs, noting that too many interviews can lead to burnout and be very expensive. They also mentioned that applying too broadly may make an applicant seem less committed to a specific program, suggesting a more selective approach. Another resident stressed the importance of being fully committed, recommending that applicants also explore other specialties to ensure that OMFS is truly what they want to pursue.

## **Life as a Resident**

### **Q: What is your life like outside of residency?**

**A:** Residents emphasized the importance of maintaining a work-life balance, noting how easy it is to get consumed by residency. They stressed being intentional about free time to avoid burnout; even after long days or nights, it is important to choose activities that recharge you, even if you may be a little tired. Getting out of the clinic and spending time with loved ones, trying a new restaurant, or exploring the beautiful city of San Francisco may be exactly what you need. Another resident highlighted the value of hobbies—having something enjoyable outside of residency can help take your mind off stress and provide a much-needed break.

### **Q: What is your favorite and least thing about being a resident?**

**A:** Residents described residency as a rollercoaster of highs and lows—good days are incredibly rewarding, but bad days are particularly tough. However, the constant learning and growth make it worthwhile. Even after seeing the same procedure hundreds of times, there is always something new to learn. The long hours and steep learning curve can be challenging, but

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residents highlighted the importance of reflecting on their progress and making the most of limited time. One resident shared that “you are never going to win in residency—you just choose how you lose.”

### **Q: What is something you wish someone had told you during dental school?**

**A:** At the end of the day, trust your gut — there is no single “best” specialty or program, just the one that is best for you! Don’t let other peoples’ opinions sway you.

**A:** Residency is hard and long—explore all your options extensively and take advantage of all the opportunities you can. If you love what you do, it will all be worth it in the end. **A:** Develop good habits early, stay on top of deadlines, and show up for yourself and your patients. Most importantly, enjoy the journey and remember to have fun along the way!