



## **Program Overview**

### **Background:**

The School of Dental Medicine's Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD) degree will integrate comprehensive dental care training with primary care practices related to oral and systemic health. The program embraces academic success, patient care, community service, scholarly activity, and collaboration. The DMD program will utilize a recruit, educate, and return model for dental education. The SDM prioritizes recruitment within Washington State and the broader Pacific Northwest, with special emphasis on applicants from rural and underserved areas in these regions.

Didactic training will emphasize basic science foundations underlying competent clinical practice. Coursework taken with other PNWU health professional students will promote the interprofessional understanding necessary for optimal patient care. Graduates will be equipped to work in various practice settings, thereby increasing access to dental care, particularly in small, rural, and underserved areas. The program will emphasize a problem-based curriculum, team learning, small-group sessions, evidence-based care, interprofessional activities, simulation and standardized patient technology, and teledentistry.

The DMD program lasts four years and follows a semester-based calendar. Instruction will be delivered through in-person and hybrid formats. Year 1 of the curriculum is conducted at the PNWU main campus in a new, state-of-the-art education facility, emphasizing the integration of basic and clinical sciences, including enhanced simulation activities. During Years 2 to 4, students will train at one of three community-based clinics, providing care to underserved patients. Didactic instruction during this period will be delivered remotely or online, complemented by on-site simulation training. Unlike most other dental programs, patient care activities will commence in Year 2. PNWU faculty at each clinical site will oversee all training. Interprofessional activities will be a key component of Years 2 to 4. Faculty and staff have been recruited nationally, with particular focus on candidates who are available, interested, and experienced in the Pacific Northwest.

Integrating medical and dental healthcare marks a major shift in the dental field. Medical-dental integration is a care approach that "integrates and coordinates dental medicine into primary care and behavioral health to support individual and population health." This type of integrated care has shown to be cost-effective and beneficial for patients. Most providers and patients agree that medical-dental integration is an effective way to improve the health of the population.

Our success has been made possible through the support of Delta Dental of Washington, the Washington State Dental Association, and our community partners. The strategic and philanthropic partnership with Delta Dental of Washington is integral to the overall success of the SDM, medical-dental integration, and providing comprehensive healthcare to communities throughout the Northwest. Together, PNWU and Delta Dental of WA are committed to educating the future dental workforce and working collaboratively to foster necessary changes in how physicians and dentists collaborate.

The partnership between these organizations has enabled the creation of a dental school program that focuses on training future primary care dentists in a community-based clinic, providing care to underserved populations. The FQHC partners bring expertise in managing a community-based clinic, while PNWU will supply the student clinicians and supervising faculty. What is also unique about the PNWU School of Dental Medicine is that students will complete three years of clinical education, unlike their counterparts at other dental schools who typically complete two years. This extension will allow for increased patient care at the FQHC partner clinics.

To guide the development of this new, unique dental school, the SDM created a Strategic Compass (see attached document). This format and design align with the “infinite game” approach proposed by the author and speaker Simon Sinek. It enables the school to adopt an “infinite mindset” toward its future while allowing for the creation of annual actions aimed at advancing the goals outlined in the document.

The following are the SDM’s Vision, Mission, and Values:

**Vision:** Revolutionizing Community-Based Oral Health

**Mission:** Educate and train primary care dentists in a humanistic environment, emphasizing patient care, service, and research among rural and medically underserved communities throughout the Northwest

**Values:** Excellence, Culture, Compassion, Trust, Diversity, Inclusion, Collaboration, Service

The school has also developed an educational philosophy for the school, which is incorporated within the “Competencies for the New Graduate” document prepared for accreditation. This philosophy states:

*The School of Dental Medicine and the University are committed to developing a competent graduate. The development of a competent graduate primary care dentist requires the school to provide an environment that is based on humanism, compassion, empathy, and trust. We must provide an active learning environment where students engage with the content, with each other, with the other healthcare students on campus, and with their faculty. The learning must focus on the student's involvement in the process of reasoning and understanding, as well as their responsibility to engage in continued learning, self-assessment, and the pursuit of higher knowledge.*

**Accreditation:**

The new dental school has received initial accreditation from the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) and the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). We will be hosting CODA for our Year 2 site visit in April 2027.

**Fundraising:**

The SDM was established through the dedication of many partners who share the mission of recruiting from, training, and returning dentists to provide care in rural and underserved areas of our state. The university and its partners' financial support is vital when launching a new dental school. Delta Dental of Washington initially committed \$2 million to support the school's startup and added \$10 million through 2025 to fund the construction of facilities and operations.

Thanks to Senator Curtis King's efforts, with support from many other WA legislators, the SDM received \$5 million in state funding in 2023 to support the construction of our Dental Education Center on the Yakima campus. Additionally, the legislature approved \$7.4 million in construction funding for our Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) partners in Kennewick and Tacoma. The 2024 and 2025 budget cycles included appropriations for construction funding for our Yakima clinic, bringing the total state support for our program to \$22 million. Delta Dental contributed an additional \$1.5 million to support the Yakima clinic, continuing the public-private partnership model favored by the State Legislature for these projects.

In late 2024, the school received \$400K in support from the Murdock Family Trust. These funds helped purchase five virtual reality simulators for the main campus simulation lab and provided each incoming student with an articulator. The school is working to raise \$2 million in scholarship support by the summer of 2026.

**Educational Programming:**

The school's unique and groundbreaking educational model relies on having three community-based clinics to support twelve students each from the D2, D3, and D4 classes. We have signed operational agreements with our partners – Yakima Valley Farmworkers Clinic, Yakima Neighborhood Health Services, and SeaMar Community Health Centers. The three FQHC community partners have begun construction of their respective clinics, which are expected to be completed by May 2026.

**On-Campus Facilities:**

PNWU is dedicated to building the essential teaching, support, and office space for the new dental school. Work has been finished on Delta Dental Equity Hall, which houses the dental simulation and VR labs. Construction has started on the Dental and Occupational Therapy (DOT) building, which will serve as the home for the school's administration and faculty, and is scheduled for completion in October 2025.

**Faculty and Staff Hiring:**

Faculty recruitment has been very successful. We have secured commitments to fill all our full-time and part-time positions through 2026. The faculty includes a diverse group of educators in terms of experience and background. We will continue our recruitment efforts to fill remaining positions and begin recruiting for faculty who will start in 2027 early in 2026. You can see who has been hired for each location in the accompanying PPT file.

**Admissions:**

We completed our first admissions cycle in December 2024. Over 800 individuals submit applications for our program, and more than 550 of these are certified by the admissions service as complete. From these applications, we interviewed over 100 applicants for our 36 spots. We have included a summary of the Class of 2029 in the accompanying PPT file. The admissions cycle for the Class of 2030 is already underway and we have over 200 applicants thus far.