

THE SMAT DENTIST
presents

The Foreign-Trained Dentist's Complete U.S. Pathway Guide

Everything you need to know about INBDE, Applications,
Residency, and getting licensed in the United States

■ INBDE Prep

■ Applications

■ Residency

■ Mindset

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Welcome, Future U.S. Licensed Dentist

If you are a foreign-trained dentist dreaming of practicing in the United States, you already know the journey is not simple. It is long, expensive, emotionally draining, and full of confusing steps that nobody explains clearly.

I created The Smat Dentist because I lived this process myself. I know what it feels like to stare at a PASS program application at midnight, wonder if your study plan is enough, or question whether it is even worth it.

It is worth it. And this guide is here to make the path clearer.

■ WHAT IS INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- Step-by-step breakdown of the U.S. pathway for foreign-trained dentists
- How to prepare for the INBDE (and what resources actually work)
- Understanding the PASS program and credential evaluation
- How to apply for GPR and AEGD residency programs
- Tips for writing a standout personal statement
- How to stay motivated through the long haul

The U.S. Pathway at a Glance

The process of getting licensed as a foreign-trained dentist in the U.S. has several major milestones. Understanding the big picture first will help you plan, stay motivated, and avoid costly mistakes.

01 Credential Evaluation
Get your dental degree evaluated by an approved organization (ECFMG, ECE). This confirms your degree is equivalent to a U.S. dental degree. Start here — everything else depends on this.

02 NBDE / INBDE Exam
The INBDE (Integrated National Board Dental Examination) replaced the old two-part NBDE. It is a single comprehensive exam covering all dental science subjects. You must pass this to qualify for most programs.

03 PASS Program (Optional but Strategic)
The PASS Program allows foreign-trained dentists to complete an accelerated dental program at select U.S. dental schools. It is competitive but gives you a U.S. dental degree.

04 ADEA PASS Application
Applications are submitted through ADEA CAAPID (Centralized Application for Advanced Placement for International Dentists). Think of it like AMCAS but for dental advanced standing programs.

05 GPR / AEGD Residency
General Practice Residency (GPR) and Advanced Education in General Dentistry (AEGD) are 1-year postgraduate programs. Many states require a residency to get your license.

06 State Licensure
After completing your program or residency, you apply for your state dental license. Requirements vary by state — some require additional clinical exams (like CRDTS or WREB).

Chapter 1: INBDE Preparation

What is the INBDE?

The Integrated National Board Dental Examination (INBDE) is a single, comprehensive exam that replaced the old NBDE Part I and Part II. It covers biomedical sciences, clinical sciences, and patient management in an integrated format — meaning questions combine multiple subjects at once.

Key INBDE Facts:

Duration	9 hours total across 2 days
Questions	500 multiple-choice questions
Format	Integrated case-based and standalone questions
Passing Score	Determined by JCNDE — results given as Pass/Fail
Who needs it	Anyone applying to PASS programs, GPR/AEGD, or state licensure

Top Study Resources (Free & Paid):

Dental Decks (Paid)

The gold standard for INBDE content review. Covers all subjects with flashcard format.

First Aid for the NBDE (Paid)

Great overview of high-yield topics. Good for identifying weak areas quickly.

Anki Flashcards (Free)

Community-made decks specifically for INBDE. Search "INBDE Anki" on Reddit for top decks.

Mental Dental (YouTube) (Free)

Excellent free video lectures covering dental anatomy, pathology, pharmacology, and high-yield INBDE topics. Highly recommended for visual learners.

ADA Practice Exam (Paid)

Official practice questions from the ADA. Worth doing at least 2 weeks before your exam.

Quizlet Decks (Free)

Helpful for memorizing drug names, classifications, and microbiology facts.

Smart Study Tips:

- ✓ Start 4-6 months before your exam date, not 4-6 weeks.
- ✓ Use a spaced repetition system (Anki) for high-volume memorization topics like pharmacology and microbiology.

- ✓ Study subjects in integrated blocks, not one at a time — the INBDE tests you on connections between subjects.
- ✓ Take at least one full-length practice test under real conditions 3-4 weeks before exam day.

- ✓ Protect your sleep. Reviewing 6 hours rested beats cramming 10 hours exhausted.

Chapter 2: Applications & Programs

The PASS Program

PASS (Program for Advanced Standing Students) programs allow foreign-trained dentists to earn a U.S. dental degree in an accelerated format — typically 2-3 years instead of 4. This is the most direct route to full licensure in all 50 states.

Top PASS Programs:

School	Duration	Key Notes
NYU College of Dentistry	2 years	Largest program, very competitive
Temple University	2 years	Strong clinical training, Philadelphia
University of Southern California	2 years	Prestigious, Los Angeles location
Boston University	2 years	Strong research focus
Ohio State University	2 years	Excellent value for out-of-state
Midwestern University	2 years	Newer program, growing reputation

Writing Your Personal Statement

Your personal statement is the most human part of your application. Admissions committees read hundreds of transcripts — your statement is what makes you a person, not just a GPA.

- ✓ Open with a specific moment or patient story — not "I have always wanted to be a dentist."
- ✓ Explain WHY the U.S. specifically — what draws you here beyond opportunity?
- ✓ Acknowledge the challenge of being foreign-trained and reframe it as a strength.
- ✓ Show self-awareness: what do you still need to learn? What will this program give you?
- ✓ Keep it under 1 page single-spaced. Every sentence must earn its place.
- ✓ Have at least 3 people proofread it — including someone outside dentistry.

Chapter 3: GPR vs AEGD Residency

After completing a PASS program (or in some states, as a direct pathway), you will apply for a postgraduate residency. The two main options are GPR and AEGD.

	GPR (General Practice Residency)	AEGD (Adv. Ed. in General Dentistry)
Setting	Hospital-based	Dental school or clinic-based
Focus	Medical emergencies, complex cases, OR dentistry	Specialty dental skills, some research
Duration	1 year (some 2-year programs)	1 year
Pay	Modest stipend (\$35k-\$55k)	Similar stipend range
Best for	Those wanting hospital experience or oral surgery exposure	Those wanting broad clinical training
Competition	Highly competitive at top hospitals	Competitive but slightly more spots

How to Stand Out in Residency Applications:

- ✓ Apply broadly — aim for at least 15-20 programs to maximize your chances.
- ✓ Tailor each personal statement to the specific program — mention their unique features.
- ✓ Get strong letters of recommendation from U.S.-based dentists or professors if possible.
- ✓ Prepare thoroughly for interviews — practice common questions like "Why our program?" and "Tell me about a challenging case."
- ✓ Shadow or volunteer at a GPR or AEGD program before applying — it shows genuine interest.
- ✓ Highlight any research, community service, or leadership experience.

Chapter 4: Mindset & Motivation

Nobody talks enough about the emotional weight of this process. You left your country, your family, your patients. You are rebuilding a career from scratch in a new language, a new system, a new culture. That deserves acknowledgment.

Things to remember on the hard days:

- ✓ Your foreign training is not a weakness — it is a different and valuable kind of experience.
- ✓ Comparison to classmates or peers who started earlier is the thief of your progress.
- ✓ Small daily actions compound. Studying 2 hours today matters more than planning a perfect schedule.
- ✓ Find your community — other foreign-trained dentists who understand this journey.
- ✓ Your "why" will carry you further than your discipline on days when discipline runs out.
- ✓ Rejection from one program is not the end. Many dentists got into their ideal program on their second cycle.

You belong in this profession.

The U.S. dental pathway is hard — but so were your dental school years, your boards in your home country, and every step that brought you here.

Keep going. The Smat Dentist is here to walk this with you.

— The Smat Dentist

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