



**School of Dentistry
Faculty of Health Sciences**

Bachelor of Science in Dentistry – Honours

Information Booklet 2008-2009

Full-time study
Half-time study
Concurrent study with BDS

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Why do an honours degree in dentistry?

The BScDent(Hons) degree offers an opportunity to explore in some depth a specific aspect of dentistry, or a discipline related to dentistry, that particularly interests you. It is a research-based degree, so the main component of the program is a research project, leading to the production of a research report or thesis. Honours programs in dentistry require a high level of commitment and a mature approach to learning. There is guidance and support from the supervisor(s), but the onus is on the student to be organised and self-directed in their studies. Before long, the student becomes 'the expert' in the chosen field of study, and tremendous satisfaction can be derived from finding out what is currently known in the area and what can be done to advance knowledge.

There are various reasons why people choose to enrol in an honours degree in dentistry. For some, it's because they have enjoyed their exposure to research either as an undergraduate student or during a summer vacation project. For others, the honours degree may be used as a stepping-stone to a PhD, or to improve their opportunities of acceptance into specialist programs (eg. Clinical Doctorates or Masters degree). Some do an honours degree because they want to focus on answering a particular question in dental science that has not previously been answered. Whatever the reason, it's essential to think carefully before making a decision and to discuss plans with others.

- ***What will I get out of it?***

This is definitely a case of 'the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it'. Nearly everyone who has done an honours degree enjoys the experience. They enjoy the relative freedom to pursue an area of interest to them and to engage in discussions about research and current knowledge in the field with other research students and staff. The specific research skills learned during the year are important for those intending to go on to further postgraduate studies, but the generic skills acquired, including critical thinking, problem-solving and communication in oral and written forms, are invaluable whatever path is subsequently taken. An honours degree provides an opportunity to taste what real university life is all about – an exciting environment where knowledge is not only stored and synthesised, but also created.

- ***Will it improve my chances in the future?***

The answer to this question is most definitely 'yes'.

For students who decide to take a year off from the BDS at the end of third or fourth year to study for honours, the change of focus provides an ideal opportunity to reassess priorities and to re-evaluate goals. It also provides an opportunity to consolidate clinical skills (as BDS students usually continue to have a couple of clinical sessions each week throughout their honours year). It allows students to expand their knowledge and skills, so they can get even more out of the BDS program. The program also enables students to revisit basic and applied areas in dentistry and to build detailed knowledge and understanding in a specific discipline or area of particular interest. This can be a tremendously satisfying and rewarding experience.

For graduates from a science or appropriate arts background, or for Bachelor of Health Science graduates, an honours degree in dentistry can provide a mechanism for preparing to apply for entry into a professional degree course, or to find employment.

Honours graduates tend to develop a maturity of thought and a willingness to question conventional dogma and paradigms, and they often become leaders in their chosen field. For those wanting to proceed to a postgraduate degree leading to specialist registration, a good

result in honours dentistry is a definite advantage, particularly for very competitive programs such as orthodontics and oral and maxillofacial surgery. Honours graduates also develop skills that are useful for research components of postgraduate degree.

Although most graduates from the School of Dentistry seem to gain employment without too much difficulty, an additional qualification in the form of an honours degree is a definite advantage, providing evidence that the BOH or BDS graduate has gained further skills in a range of specific and general areas.

What do some honours students think about the BScDent(Hons) program?

Antonio (a BHSc graduate)

Honour's has been an enjoyable and knowledgeable experience. It has changed my views and thoughts on education and the importance of continual self-improvement. It has helped me realise that education is a continuous process throughout life.

Damien (a BDS graduate)

I chose to undertake an honours degree in dentistry after graduating to gain both research and teaching experience, which is invaluable if considering a PhD, or specialist training such as orthodontics or oral surgery.

How can I find out what's involved?

A good place to begin finding information is by speaking to potential supervisors and current honours students. It is best to start thinking about the honours program as early as possible (eg in the year preceding your enrolment in the program). This will give plenty of time to organise a program, including a research project. If ethical approval needs to be obtained for a proposed research, it is also necessary to formulate a research protocol with the supervisor and submit it to the University's Ethics Committee as early as possible.

What are the prerequisites?

You must have completed a Bachelors degree, or at least three years of the BDS program. You must demonstrate to your potential supervisor an interest in research and an aptitude for it. You need to have a good university academic record, but that does not mean that you will be accepted only if you have gained distinctions and credits. However, a good academic record would be expected in those subjects relevant to the proposed research topic. A decision on your overall suitability for an honours course rests initially with your potential supervisor(s), then acceptance is approved officially by the School of Dentistry's Advisory Board once a satisfactory program has been submitted. In general, individuals who are intelligent, interested in research, innovative and self-motivated are most likely to succeed in a BScDent(Hons) program.

What options are there?

There are now several pathways available to gain a BScDent(Hons) degree.

- **Full-time (one year)**

The traditional pathway for students to complete an honours degree has been to enrol after successfully completing the third year of the BDS degree or after completing a BOH, BHSc or BA. There are pros and cons in this pathway, although the advantages seem to heavily outweigh the disadvantages. The main disadvantages are that one's peers move on to the next year, and that graduation from the BDS is delayed by a year; this may have associated

financial implications. Although these may be important considerations for some, for others the change in environment and the opportunity to take a step aside from the BDS are seen as advantages. The experiences and skills gained during the honours year, and the opportunity to use them on returning to the BDS, are seen by most as major benefits. And, of course, there is the additional qualification – a BScDent(Hons)!

For graduates, an honours year provides an opportunity to consolidate knowledge and skills prior to working in practice or perhaps before commencing a postgraduate program leading to a research degree (eg PhD) or, for BDS students, a qualification recognisable for specialist registration (eg DCLinDent).

- ***Part-time (two years)***

Some graduates prefer to enrol in the BScDent(Hons) degree half-time so that they can continue to be employed during their candidature. In fact, certain types of research projects are more suited to a two-year time frame. There is flexibility in arranging timetables, which can be tailored to suit the individual.

- ***Concurrent BScDent(Hons)/BDS***

The Dental School has recently introduced a new option for the BScDent(Hons) degree that enables the program to be undertaken concurrently with the BDS program by taking advantage of summer vacations and other times. The advantage of this model is that it is possible to complete the BScDent(Hons) at around the same time as the BDS, without having to spend an additional year of study. Although enrolment is not possible until the end of third year, students who are accepted into this program have an opportunity to plan a research report, carry out a literature review, and complete one or possibly two essays during their first three years in the BDS. By taking advantage of the times available during the long summer vacations at the end of third, fourth and fifth year, they can then complete the other requirements for the honours degree.

Students with outstanding academic records who want to complete an honours degree concurrently with their BDS studies may also choose this pathway. Obviously, potential supervisor(s) need to be sure that the added demands placed on students will not adversely affect their performance in the BDS.

By having an opportunity to 'test the water' for a year or two prior to formally enrolling in the BScDent(Hons) at the end of third year, students can adjust their honours commitment, depending on how they feel they are coping with the BDS.

What's involved in a typical program?

The BScDent(Hons) programs has four major components:

1. Research project and thesis

The research project and thesis is the major component of the BScDent(Hons) program, and provides candidates with an opportunity to explore an area of dental research or research in a related area in some depth. Candidates are expected to read widely around the chosen topic and to critically evaluate the existing literature, identifying areas that require further clarification. With support from the supervisor(s) candidates are expected to formulate some aims and specific hypotheses that will underpin their research project, and to then develop appropriate methods to test the hypotheses. This will generally require acquisition of proficiency in the use of various pieces of equipment and specific techniques. Results need to be analysed and interpreted. The research report or thesis needs to be prepared with considerable care and attention to detail, in the same way that researchers prepare

manuscripts that are submitted to peer-reviewed journals. The report may take the form of a thesis, or the supervisor may prefer that the report is prepared in the form of a manuscript to be submitted to a scientific journal. The report will usually consist of sections including an abstract, introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion and conclusion. There will also be a list of references, relevant tables and figures and, perhaps, some appendices.

2. Two essays

Candidates are expected to prepare two essays as part of their BScDent(Hons). The topics are chosen in consultation with the supervisor(s). They are usually on topics relevant to the research project. They provide the opportunity to read the existing literature and develop a feel for what is known and where there seem to be gaps in knowledge.

3. Two seminars

BScDent(Hons) candidates are expected to present at least two seminars relating to their studies. The first seminar is usually on one of the essay topics, while the second relates to the research project. In some circumstances, a *viva voce* examination that takes the form of a thesis defence may be held at the end of the program.

4. Additional activities

Honours students are encouraged to attend courses in research and seminars that are offered within the dental school. Information about courses and seminars can be obtained from the honours co-ordinator.

5. Other optional components of the BScDent(Hons) program

For dental students who decide to enrol in a full-time BScDent(Hons) degree after third or fourth year, or immediately after graduation from the BDS or BOH, a program is usually devised that enables a continuation of clinical work. This enables candidates to consolidate their clinical skills and may enable them to extend their experience in a chosen discipline. Commonly, two sessions of clinical practice are programmed; however, this may be varied depending on the wishes of the applicant and on the nature of the research being undertaken.

Grading and weightings of components

The possible grades at the end of a BScDent(Hons) course are:

- First Class
- Second Class Division A (2A)
- Second Class Division B (2B)
- Third Class
- Fail

All candidates who are accepted for an honours degree in dentistry are expected to be capable of achieving at least a Second Class Division A (2A) result. To obtain a 2A result a candidate would need to perform at a consistently high standard throughout the program. A 2B result would be awarded to a student who performed well but showed some weaknesses in certain areas. A First class result is reserved for exceptional students who fulfil all the criteria expected for a 2A result and in addition display a high degree of initiative and originality, and show excellent skills in critical thinking and communication.

A typical breakdown of the relative weightings of the different components of a BScDent(Hons) degree is:

- Research report 50%

- Essays 25%
- Seminars 15%
- Structured program 10%

What types of research projects are offered?

A variety of dental projects are available for potential honours candidates, reflecting the research interests of academic staff in the School of Dentistry. Looking at the research posters that are displayed throughout the school can give a feel for the different types of research that are being carried out. Projects may address basic issues in dental science, be more applied, or be clinical in nature.

Apart from undertaking research projects with staff in the School of Dentistry, projects can be jointly supervised by Dental School staff and staff from other university departments or affiliated institutions (eg Anatomical Sciences or the Women's and Children's Hospital). The research aspects of jointly supervised programs may be undertaken in one or more laboratories.

Deciding on a research project

When you are deciding about a possible research project, pick two or three research areas that you find most interesting, then make an appointment to see the relevant supervisor(s) to find out more about them. All of the supervisors are happy to be contacted, and you are not expected to have a detailed knowledge of the projects when you meet with them. They will often be able to supply some reprints or references to articles that you can read to find out more about topic(s) of interest. You may have thought of a possible project that is not listed in this booklet – raise this with a potential supervisor; it might be a really good idea!

Give yourself plenty of time to discuss possible projects and to think about what you really want to do. Often your thoughts will develop over time, and your final decision for a project might be quite different from your initial choice. This evolution of an idea is an important part of the process of choosing an appropriate research project, as it allows time for you to clarify issues about the feasibility of the proposal, taking into account your own interests and expertise, as well as resource and time constraints. It is important to be pragmatic in your final decision, bearing in mind that you will have a deadline by which to complete the work. There is also only a relatively small amount of maintenance money available in the Dental School to support honours programs (eg for consumables or small items of equipment), so expensive projects are better saved until later – maybe for a PhD! Your potential supervisor can discuss these issues with you.

In making your decision you should consider the following:

- What are the facilities for the proposed research like?
- Are the potential supervisors considered to be international or national experts in the area?
- Are the potential supervisors approachable?
- Are the other staff in the area supportive?
- Do the potential supervisors have a good record of supervision (eg successful completion of honours degrees by previously enrolled students)?
- Is the project feasible in terms of time?
- Do I have the necessary background knowledge?
- Do I have the required skills (eg computing, use of statistical packages)?

- Will there be other postgraduate students in the lab?
- Can I devote the time needed to complete the project in the proposed time frame?

Guidelines for preparing research proposal

1. Title of research project (80 character limit)
2. Name of proposed supervisor(s)
3. Background (half-page maximum)
 - provide background information to the research question that you plan to investigate, citing relevant literature as needed (Why are you interested in this topic? Why is the question important? Why is research needed on this topic? What is known already?)
4. Aims and hypotheses (half-page)
 - state an overall goal of the project
 - list up to five specific aims
 - if relevant, state one hypothesis for each aim
5. Preliminary studies (half-page maximum)
 - briefly describe any research that has already been done by your proposed supervisor's team that relates to your planned project
 - if your planned project is to be part of a larger study or set of studies, explain
 - who is doing or will be doing those studies, and when
 - how your planned project differs from those other studies
6. Research plan (2 pages maximum)
 - study design
 - source of subjects and/or research material – including number of people/teeth/animal specimens
 - measurements and variables (what, how, when)
 - treatments/interventions/manipulations (what, how, when)
 - plan for statistical analysis to answer each specific aim
 - justification of sample size
 - timetable for project
7. Hoped-for outcomes (half-page maximum)
 - what new knowledge will be created if your project goes according to plan

How do I apply?

Those interested in undertaking the honours degree of Bachelor of Science in Dentistry should first contact the Graduate School Coordinator who will recommend potential supervisors to discuss potential research topics. Once an agreement has been reached with a supervisor, the applicant should lodge a formal application, available on the School of Dentistry website, to the School of Dentistry Office.

A formal offer to undertake the honours program will then be considered by the School of Dentistry.

Applications close on 31 October. Offers are made before the end of the academic year and enrolment is usually in mid-January.

What costs are involved?

Please check this link to the University's website for up-to-date information on fees and charges <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/faq/faq.pl?section=student>>.