

# HOW I GOT TO DENTAL SCHOOL

UMER SYED

Umer Syed is a fourth-year student (DS4) in the pre-doc DMD program. He grew up in Arizona, but if you were to ask him what defines him, it would be his faith more than anything else. Growing up, Umer's family and community instilled the importance of service to others in him.

He knew that he wanted to pursue a career where he could genuinely make a difference in people's lives. In high school, he became the regional coordinator for a disaster relief organization, interned at various government agencies, volunteered at non-profits, and tried to explore all the different avenues where he could serve others. While volunteering at a free dental day event, he realized that dentistry was his calling. He shared, "People had lined up days in advance and had camped out in tents to receive much needed dental care. There were only a handful of dentists volunteering there, and we had to turn away most of the people. It was then that I knew I had to become a dentist."

Umer says the best thing about the OHSU School of Dentistry is the incredible community that makes up the school. He is constantly learning from his peers, instructors, staff members, and patients. Every day he feels so blessed and inspired to be surrounded by such a remarkable group of people.

Dental school has not silenced the call to serve. Outside of class, Umer volunteers locally and is a board member of the Student Patient Assistance Program (SPAP) and the Muslim Community at OHSU. He is also writing a book, working a part-time job, and completing coursework in another degree program. Work-life balance is the most challenging part of Umer's Dental School experience, but he is happy and feels fortunate to have the energy and ability to challenge himself.



Pictured above: DS4, Umer Syed, at his elder sister's wedding in traditional Pakistani wedding clothes

Now in his fourth year of dental school, Umer has learned a thing or two. He has three pieces of advice for people who are considering becoming a dentist:

- 1. Stay humble and stay hungry.** The first part of being a student is having the humility to understand that you simply don't know. The second part is to have the desire and hunger to learn more.
- 2. Find mentors who have done what you would like to do and ask them for guidance.**
- 3. Look at schooling as an opportunity and not as a burden.** The word school was derived from the Greek word, "scholē," meaning leisure. The ability to access a doctorate-level education is available to less than one percent of human beings. Building the right mindset is critical to success in life and especially as a student.

Umer feels so fortunate to be able to pursue his dental education at OHSU." I thank God and every single person that has been involved in my educational journey at every level." Always the one to pay it forward, Umer encourages DS1s or DS2s to reach out to him if they need advice or someone to talk to. Umer's email [umer@ohsu.edu](mailto:umer@ohsu.edu).