What's been your favorite part of the journey to apply to professional schools?
One of the most memorable parts of this journey for me was filling out the application. The process of recording my experiences put into focus just how much of a difference I have made in the lives of my patients and how much of difference those who continue to support me have made in my life. Completing my essays gave me a chance to really reflect on all I have accomplished and not only how far I have come as an applicant, but how much I have grown as a person.

What were some of the challenges you came across when preparing to apply to schools (or what was tougher than you thought)?
A major challenge I came across on my dental school journey was conquering the DAT. Unlike course exams which solely focus on comprehension of subject material, the DAT primary focus is both information retention and testing strategies. While I had mastered the subject matter on the exam, the difficulty for me came in formulating an effective strategy for tackling each section. An unexpected challenge that I faced during the application process was preparing for my interviews. As I soon discovered, dental school interview preparations are not an exact science. In order to be successful I had to develop my own dental school specific interview preparation techniques. In order to do this, I really relied on all the advice I had been given from the Pre-professional advising center, successful dental students, and current dentists.

How did you prepare yourself for the process of applying to schools?
Knowing that I wanted to be a dentist as an incoming student, gave me the time to check off some of the major requirements needed for my application. During my freshman and sophomore years, I volunteered and shadowed every chance I had to learn even more about the dental field. I joined various dental focused student organization to better understand the application process for dental school. I also took this time to develop strong connections with my professors for letters of recommendation I would need for my application later on. During my junior and senior years, I used my experiences in the dental field and my passion for serving others, to craft my personal statement. I also took this time to study and successfully take the DAT as well as delve into dental focused research. I found that being involved in several dental research projects, afforded me a glimpse at what the future of dentistry will look like.
Looking back, what advice would you give students who are interested in professional schools? Is there anything you wish you had known earlier?
Looking back at my journey, I think one of the simplest yet most critical pieces of advice I can offer is that students don't have to be afraid or embarrassed to ask tough questions. During your dental school journey, you will have opportunities to ask questions to dental students, dentist, and even dental school admission staff. Don't be afraid of asking questions like, “what is something you don't like about dentistry and the dental field?” or “what is your view on Medicaid.” Although it can be daunting, learning about their perspectives will help you develop your own views on these topics. This is so important as it not only gives you more insight into your career field, but it places you in the mindset of the professional you aspire to be, which is exactly what professional schools look for in applicants.

What services or organizations would you recommend pre-professional students utilize?
• I highly recommend working closely with the Pre-Professional Advising Center. They have a huge amount of experience working with students in all aspects of the application process. They really helped me prepare well for my dental school interviews.
• I would also definitely recommend the Diversity in medical Dentistry student organization and the Undergraduate Student National Dental Association. Both of these student organizations connected me with dental focused volunteering opportunities, shadowing opportunities, and dental students.
• Additionally, being a part of a mentorship program on campus such as the Jarvis Leadership Program or the Pirate Academic Success Center is a really great way of connecting with others who are pursuing the same goals.

What organizations were you involved in as an undergraduate student?
Diversity in Medical Dentistry Society
Undergraduate Student National Dental Associations
Pre-Dental Honor Society
Jarvis Leadership Program
ECU Leads
ECU Organic Chemistry Department: Undergraduate Teaching Assistant
North Carolina Dental Society
Wakes County Dental Society
Give Kids A Smile
Children’s Dental Health Awareness Program
Poe Center
Marbles Children Museum

What type of shadowing did you do?
Throughout my dental school journey, I made sure to shadow dentist in different areas across North Carolina. I found this especially beneficial as I experienced first-hand the differences in dental clinics located in rural areas versus those in more urban areas. I also shadowed a variety of dental specialties. Specifically, I shadowed oral surgeons, pediatric dentists, endodontists, and orthodontists. I found that observing multiple specialties gave me a much greater understanding of the dental field overall.

What type of volunteering did you do?
I volunteered in a variety of areas and help treat as many patients as possible through many dental volunteering programs and clinics. Some of those include the Wake Smiles Dental Clinic, North Carolina Mission of Mercy Clinics, and NC Baptist Dental Bus. I also volunteered with a number of non-health field related organizations such as the NC Museum of Natural Sciences.
and the Marbles Children’s Museum. I found tremendous pleasure through helping nurture a passion for the sciences in middle school and elementary school students.

Did you do research? If so, what was the topic?
- Over the course of my time before applying to dental school this past year I was a part of a number of research projects. During my junior year at ECU I participated in an Anthropologically driven dental research project on cementum annulation in teeth for the purpose of age estimation. Through the process of analyzing ancient teeth from Petra, our research group was able to correlate cementum ring structures located on first and second molars with certain ages, ethnicities, and even the stress levels of their owners.
- I was also part of the Zoe 2.0 research project at UNC School of Dentistry. The purpose of the ZOE 2.0 Research Project is to zero out early childhood tooth decay. This is done specifically through researching a variety of factors across all of North Carolina. These specific factors include testing fluoride levels in different water sources throughout the state, collecting saliva samples for a variety of children located in different counties, and assessing the dental health of children across North Carolina.
- One of the most insightful research projects I have been involved in is working as an intern for a Dental Material Research lab. As the lead intern, I have had the opportunity to learn about different dental materials, curing lights, and equipment designed to test dental materials. Some of the many tests I have helped run include fractured toughness, irradiance, and color stability tests. Performing these experiments has made me proficient in using dental hand pieces to shape and polish composite material. This experience has really helped me learn more about the dental field and about dental research as a whole.

What was your most rewarding experience at ECU?
A truly rewarding experiences for me while at ECU was running the Diversity in Medical Dentistry student organization. Having been a part of a variety of leadership programs, I was eager to gain a practical understanding of how to lead an organization I had a passion for. I found that learning about leadership and leading an organization are two very different things. During my 2 years growing this organization to be the largest dental student organization on campus, I learned that success in any endeavor starts by determining the problems and asking the right questions. I also discovered a great leader builds loyalty with those they serve and with the officers who help them serve. By focusing on the goals of my officers as well as my own objectives, I was able to get them more interested in all aspects of the club. Furthermore, I began pursuing ideas that the members in my club had proposed, which served to fuel their desire to be more active in club affairs.

Any other advice, recommendations, suggestions, or comments?
No matter how far your goal of going to professional school may seem, just remember whether you make it to that goal is entirely up to you. There is no challenge that you can’t overcome, no wall you can’t climb if you are both determined and passionate about your intended career.