Apply Early, Wisely & Well

This section has been designed to assist in the lengthy and complex process of applying to medical school. In the following pages three important principles will be stressed. They are 1.) Apply early, 2.) apply wisely, and 3.) apply well. Adherence to these three principles will increase chances for success.

In general, medical schools seek the following characteristics in applicants:

- Strong academic records as shown by science, non-science, and overall grade point averages along with scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
- Firm and clear motivation for a career in medicine as shown by activities and interests
- Personal qualities consistent with the demands and obligations of being a physician

These characteristics are evaluated from transcripts; MCAT score reports; letters of evaluation normally written by those who have taught the applicant; material contained in the application including information on educational, health care related, extracurricular and community activities; and written personal statements and responses to essay questions and personal interviews.

Important Application Resources

Medical School Admissions Requirements: United States and Canada (MSAR) database is published online by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and is the single best resource available to the pre-medical student interested in MD schools. Students can use the MSAR to confirm school-specific requirements. To view the MSAR database online you need to purchase access to it from AAMC for $15. See the AAMC website for details.

AMCAS, the American Medical College Application Service (the centralized web-based application service used by a majority of US MD schools) includes essential information including a worksheet to print out now and review months before preparing your actual application online. See www.aamc.org

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine has links to osteopathic (DO) schools and information on ACOMAS the DO centralized application service at www.aacom.org.

The Application Process

The actual process of applying to medical school begins some 14-15 months prior to entrance. Many students apply at the end of the junior year in order to enter medical school the fall after they receive their bachelor’s degree. Many apply at the end of the senior year or after one or more years following graduation giving them time out of school before beginning their medical studies. The schools do not mind if there is a break before entrance; the key issue is that when candidates apply they are ready and most qualified.

Steps for Applying to Medical School at a Glance

- Submission of a centralized application (for the vast majority of schools) which includes a list of health related, extracurricular and community activities, a written personal statement, a record of academic course work, letters of evaluation and a list of schools to which application is being made.
- Secondary applications which normally ask for an additional fee and additional written material.
- Interviews are conducted at medical schools to help determine candidates’ knowledge, maturity, preparation and aptitude for individual programs.
- By May 15th of the year of anticipated entrance, applicants are expected to accept one medical school offer.
Application Services
Most US medical schools a centralized application services. 132 schools offering the MD degree use The American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS). The remaining medical schools have their own separate applications or in the case of some Texas schools, have their own mini centralized service. DO schools use the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS).

AMCAS is only available as a web-based application at www.aamc.org.

AACOMAS provides the DO central application service at www.aacom.org.

AMCAS provides a Fee Assistance Program (FAP) for MCAT examinees and AMCAS applicants who would be unable to apply without it. Information is available at www.aamc.org. In order to receive FAP credit, applicants must have a FAP approval for the calendar year in which they submit their MCAT registration or AMCAS application. It is essential to apply for a fee waiver early so that an answer will be received prior to submission of an AMCAS application or registering for the MCAT. With a fee waiver it is possible to apply to 14 schools without an AMCAS fee.

Applying Early
Application deadlines typically vary by medical school. But generally fall between Oct 1 and Dec 15. The AMCAS application typically opens early in May, meaning that AMCAS begins accepting transcripts and letters of recommendations from applicants but applicants can’t submit the application yet. The first day AMCAS applications can be submitted is June 1. It generally is considered wise to submit the application by the middle of June. There is no need to send it June 1, but normally it will be helpful to have it in shortly thereafter.

Most schools use a system of rolling admissions under which applications are processed and reviewed as they become complete. The early completion of an application is considered an advantage to an applicant. Transcripts get lost, forms are mishandled, and servers lose power; things happen. The applicant suffers while delays take place. Thus the corollary to APPLY EARLY is the strong suggestion to monitor your application status throughout the application process.

By mid-June Spring Semester grades should be available allowing for a complete application. Spring grades do not need to be included in the AMCAS application. However, most Cal students do include their spring grades.

The Initial Application
AMCAS & AACOMAS

The initial application contains questions that ask for biographical information on the applicant, educational history, extracurricular activities, community service, and work experience. Applicants will be asked for their entire college academic record, some sort of personal statement and an indication of which schools they wish to apply to through the service. These factors will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

It is important to carefully read and follow instructions and ask for assistance if uncertain what to do. The Career Center pre-med counselors can be of assistance, and AMCAS, and AACOMAS, offers assistance both by telephone and via e-mail. An application should be submitted which reflects a serious candidate. It should look good, be accurate and complete and be well thought out.

On the AMCAS application students are given the opportunity to list up to 15 experiences (work, volunteer, extracurricular, research etc.) that played significant roles in their preparation for medical school. The important thing to remember when listing experiences is to mind quality over quantity. Sufficient detail should be provided in the experience descriptions so that the reader will appreciate the significance of the entries. While an admissions reader will know the meaning of Phi Beta Kappa, other awards or honors may only be known locally unless adequate explanation is offered.

Similarly, when listing post-secondary experiences include paid or volunteer experiences or internships and include action words early in the description of duties, as one might use in an extended resume. For example, just listing “lab helper” or “hospital volunteer” provides the reader little appreciation of what the person did. On the other hand, stating “Research Assistant, conducted independent research and presented results at end of summer seminar” is considerably more helpful. Being direct in your explanation of the experience is key to increasing insight into you by the admissions person. Lastly, applicants will be able to select up to 3 “most meaningful” experiences (out of the 15) so that they can expand upon why these experiences were more pivotal than the others.

Several questions routinely arise when filling out the Academic Record section of the AMCAS application. AMCAS uses the term credit hours. Credit hours
mean units in Berkeley terms. A 4-unit Cal course is a 4-credit hour AMCAS course. Confusion sometimes exists over how to designate courses that are entered on the academic record. In other words, which category should a course be labeled when completing the academic record on the AMCAS. The rule to follow is to use the content of the class and not the department name. Thus, a course in biological psychology could well be considered as Biology whereas a course in social psychology would be called “Other.” Consider which category the professor might use to describe the class in question.

There are really only two hard parts to the AMCAS application. Filling in the academic record is time consuming and calls for attention to detail; it isn’t hard. The challenging parts are the one page Personal Statement, and the Designation Form on which the schools where the application is to be sent are listed.

**The Personal Statement**

For many, one of the major challenges in applying to medical school is writing the personal statement on the AMCAS application. Non-AMCAS schools and DO schools also require a personal statement or series of essays and it’s slightly shorter than the AMCAS statement.

Applicants often ask about what question they are to address in the statement. Some answers are “Why do you want to be a doctor?” “How do you know?” “What experiences have you had that affirm medicine is the best field for you?” From these broad questions one may next ask about what schools are looking for in applicants. UCSF’s general but wonderful statement that “Successful applicants tend to have strong academic records; firm and clear motivation for medicine, which is manifested in their work experience, activities, or interests; and outstanding personal qualities” provides some guidance. What does this statement mean? The schools want good students—grades and scores. However, there is more to strong academic records than numbers. Intellectual abilities shown through research and other academic interests are examples. Firm and clear motivation means “a helping, caring person who knows what he or she is getting into from having explored the field.” The helping and caring can be shown in any number of ways and not just through medically related work. But, the schools want to know that applicants have explored their intended field. Outstanding personal qualities include the traits we look for in physicians such as stability, maturity, leadership, honesty, integrity, etc. The schools seek interesting and accomplished people whether they are athletes, musicians, leaders, poets, or artists and many others good at something worthwhile.

Keeping in mind what the schools are looking for, what is it that the applicant wants the school to know about him or her? What has the applicant done to fit the broad general framework of what the schools seek in candidates? The applicant should make notes and start to refine them. What is the evidence that the candidate is, for example, a helping and caring person? Note the word evidence. In the statement the applicant should write about what has been done in a manner which allows the reader to draw a conclusion about him or her. One would not want to say, “My volunteer work shows I am helping and caring.” The hope is that the experience will be described in such a way that the reader can draw that conclusion based upon the evidence which has been presented. It is not good to tell the reader what the evidence means. The goal is to show and not tell. Saying that the experience made you realize something is fine, but the applicant should not say what the evidence tells the admissions committee. The reader should draw the conclusion based upon the clear description of the situation which has been provided.

While an applicant could discuss only one topic in the personal statement, many applicants write about 3 or 4 topics. Too many topics will turn the statement into a list. Clearly then, the topics which are chosen to write about are very important and deserve considerable thought.

Here are some common problems we have noticed in a large number of statements:

- Often, applicants spend too many words and lines writing a lengthy introduction that may reveal little about them. Get right to the task of revealing you.
- A common approach is to describe an early interest in medicine resulting from an illness to a family member in which we learn all about the medical condition and how the applicant at age 6 felt helpless and determined to be a physician. The reader often learns little about the applicant using this approach. Rather than focus on the childhood event as a deciding factor, share what you’ve done that has helped you affirm that the field of medicine is right for you.
- Many start their statements with a quote. The admissions readers have seen them all before and may “roll their eyes” at many of them. “I took the road less traveled,” has probably been used many times.
- Don’t be vague—“My research project was challenging and rewarding.” What does that mean?
- Speaking of research—don’t write about it as you would in an abstract or science report. The readers care about the applicant and not that a certain cell responds in a certain way when exposed to something else and that this has implications for medicine. What can the reader learn about the applicant from the research experience? That is the purpose.
- Don’t tell the reader what physicians are or should be. The readers already know and are not looking to be told by the applicant. Again, the readers want to know how the applicant matches up with what they think is important in a physician (UCSF’s statement).
- The personal statement is all about you. The statement is not an essay on medicine or the state of the world.
Preparing for & Applying to Medical School

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in a few or wide variety of fields.

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almost as soon as students arrive on campus. Yale, Tulane Case Western Reserve introduces clinical work and patients volunteer faculty to teach parts of the clinical program.

features of the school. For example, Chicago-Pritzker has practices (letter grades or P/NP) and other educational
difficult task more productive whether they are MD or DO schools.

1. Mission of the School: While most schools share the similar mission of producing graduates who will play a wide range of roles within medicine, some schools have specific objectives. For example, Stanford hopes to maximize a student's opportunities to prepare for careers in research and teaching. Loma Linda looks for people with a strong commitment to “Christian principles.” The Uniformed Services School was founded to prepare physicians for careers in the uniformed services. Drew-UCLA is designed to attract those who wish to serve under-served populations. Be certain to examine the mission of the school so that applications will not be sent to schools with incompatible goals. Examine schools' mission statements, the MSAR database online and individual school websites.

2. Academic Program: Examine the curriculum, grading practices (letter grades or P/NP) and other educational features of the school. For example, Chicago-Pritzker has a basically full-time faculty, while other schools often use volunteer faculty to teach parts of the clinical program. Case Western Reserve introduces clinical work and patients almost as soon as students arrive on campus. Yale, Tulane and other schools offer an MPH along with the medical degree. Many schools have opportunities to obtain Ph.D.'s in a few or wide variety of fields.

3. Curriculum: Some schools offer several instructional tracks from which to choose. Increasingly schools are using a problem-oriented curriculum, while others employ a “traditional” curriculum (i.e., two years of basic science and two years of clinical work), while others employ the organ system approach into which material is integrated. Consider the educational program when choosing schools. Consult the MSAR database online and each medical school's website.

4. Residency Restrictions: Many public schools sharply limit out-of-state residents however restrictions can change over time. It is important to know what percentage of out-of-state students medical schools accept. According to the MSAR online database over 70 percent of matriculants to the University of Colorado Denver are Colorado residents. LSU in New Orleans has not accepted an out-of-state student in many years. A block away, Tulane has no residency restrictions on applicants. There is a limited number of schools that accept international students. Again, carefully consider the selection factors section in MSAR online when choosing schools.

5. GPA and Test Score Selection Factors: Consult the MSAR online for information on GPA and MCAT ranges accepted by each school. For example, many Cal students want to go to a UC medical school; yet the average GPA and MCAT scores of admitted students to these schools are very high. Only very strong applicants will be accepted. Applicants should look carefully at the degree of selectivity and apply wisely. All US schools are good. Most candidates should apply to a wide range of schools. Look at all parts of the country, and don’t be “California Compulsive.” Some fail to get into medical schools because they limit their applications too narrowly.

6. Ranking: There are no authoritative ranking systems of medical schools; students should not put great faith in lists that claim to rank schools in numerical order. As noted above, schools have different missions. It helps to graduate from a school which is well known for producing well-trained physicians, especially if applying for very prestigious residencies. Yet, graduates of most medical schools are able to obtain residency positions they seek. Consider a school’s reputation, but also examine its basis and what it means. Because all US schools are good, don’t be overly concerned with status. Your “fit” at a school is the most important thing. Most people do not pick a physician based on which medical school he or she attended.

7. Cost: Many public schools are comparatively inexpensive. Private schools’ tuitions average about $43,791, with many considerably higher. Some applicants don't want to take on high debt loads; others accept large debt to be repaid over many years. Some obtain military or other scholarships. Financial information for each school is provided on the MSAR online. Attending medical school can be very expensive.

Choosing Medical Schools

Choosing schools to which to send applications is at once important and difficult. While with sufficient money and effort it is possible to apply to all the schools, such actions would be foolish and wasteful. Thus, the WISE selection of schools is very important. Consideration of the following factors should make this important and difficult task more productive whether they are MD or DO schools.

The Career Center highly suggests that you have your statement reviewed by your letter of recommendation writers and other friends, family members or peers who know your story well and possess excellent writing skills. Remember that there are many different opinions on what is a good statement just as there are on books, art, or films.

- Don't be modest or boastful - reveal yourself honestly and positively. You are your own salesperson. If the applicant doesn’t “show the schools who they are” nobody else will.
- The statement should be interesting and lively but not “Cute.” “I want them to remember me” may lead to being remembered in a less than favorable light.
- Make your ending a conclusion and not a summary.

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application is intended to add more “pieces” to the puzzle and a comprehensive picture of the applicant. The secondary beginning of a jigsaw puzzle whose completion will reveal the case of a number of secondaries, of thoughtful answers to written material in the form of easily provided information or in the form of personally written material. The secondary application to gather additional information which will help medical school applicants make more informed decisions.

The Secondary Application
Schools which use a centralized application as their initial application step commonly use some sort of secondary application to gather additional information which will enable them to narrow the applicant pool down for further consideration. Secondary applications may start to be received some 4-6 weeks after the submission of the initial application. In a few cases, requests may come sooner; in some cases they will come many weeks or months later. Each medical school does the application process on their own schedule.

Secondary applications normally contain several parts. First, usually there is a fee required when submitting the secondary. The MSAR online indicates the amount each school charges. It may be possible to obtain a fee waiver for the secondary fee particularly if an AMCAS fee waiver was granted. In other cases, a fee waiver may be granted upon request.

The second common factor is the requirement for additional written material in the form of easily provided information or in the case of a number of secondaries, of thoughtful answers to difficult questions or the writing of a revealing autobiography. The initial centralized application may be thought of as the beginning of a jigsaw puzzle whose completion will reveal a comprehensive picture of the applicant. The secondary application is intended to add more “pieces” to the puzzle and thus shed more light on the applicant’s qualifications. Here the admonition to APPLY WELL again is critical as while, as with the preliminary application, APPLYING EARLY is helpful, it is important to do a thorough and thoughtful job of completing the secondary applications. The secondary applications should be returned just as rapidly as possible consistent with doing them WELL.

Interviews
Almost all medical schools interview candidates. As noted in the timeline on page 19, interviewing begins in the early fall and will continue into spring. The heaviest interviewing time is late fall and early winter; after that, it slows down considerably as schools attempt to fill their classes by May. Interviews normally play a major role in determining who will be admitted and thus should be taken seriously. In most cases, interviews are held at the school with the candidate covering associated costs.

Medical school interviews come in many forms. Schools may interview an applicant in either an “open” or “blind” format. In an open format, the interviewer has read the applicant’s application before the interview and may even have the application available during the interview. In a “blind” format, the interviewer usually has no information on an applicant other than their name, school and maybe other very basic demographic information. They have not had the opportunity to read the personal statement or letters of recommendation.

Medical school interviews are typically comprised of one interview with a current medical student and one interview with a faculty member. There can be variations to this such as interviewing with only one faculty or two faculty members. Other schools may have a panel interviewing an applicant. Some schools have begun conducting Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI), which is a series of short structured interview stations.

The MMI involves a series of encounters meant to examine aspiring doctors’ ability to communicate, think on their feet and work in teams. Candidates rotate through several stations with one interviewer at each station and each interview lasting approximately 8 minutes. For information regarding interviews, you can look up the specific school in the MSAR online to confirm the interview format for that school.

In preparing for an interview it is important to remember what the schools are seeking in applicants and to prepare accordingly. The schools want strong students who are firmly and clearly motivated to be physicians from having explored the field, and people who possess the kinds of personal characteristics we desire in those who care for our health. Thus, the candidate preparing for an interview should thoughtfully consider how he or she meets what the...
schools are seeking and then get prepared to discuss past experiences which demonstrate what he or she has to offer that meets those expectations.

In the case of an MMI interview students may want to practice by strategizing how they would answer the types of situational questions they may face. Generally the situational questions posed in an MMI touch on the following areas: ethical decision-making, critical thinking, communication skills and societal health issues. Schools are trying to assess non-cognitive qualities including cultural sensitivity, maturity, teamwork, empathy, and communication skills. Listening carefully and understanding the question will help the interviewee answer each prompt appropriately and within the allotted time frame. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions posed in a MMI, but each applicant should consider the question from a variety of perspectives. Scheduling mock interviews with the Career Center pre-med counselors can help with preparation for the MMI as well as with traditional medical school interviews. The Career Center provides programs every Fall semester on interviewing for medical school. See the Callisto Event Calendar for dates and times. Additionally students can book mock interview appointments with the pre-med counselors through Callisto.

Honesty in the Application Process
The practice of medicine demands absolute honesty. So too does application to medical school. Usually, at the end of the application there is a place for the applicant to sign signifying that what has been submitted is complete and truthful. This is not to be taken lightly, for AMCAS and other application systems or schools investigate “irregularities”. School personnel examine transcripts and letters closely to guarantee authenticity of documents. Candidates have been and will continue to be disqualified for submitting forged letters, “forgetting” certain transcripts, making false claims, etc., and may forever lose their opportunity to enter a US medical school.

Applying for Joint Programs
A number of Berkeley applicants are interested in one of the joint programs offered in conjunction with the MD degree. These include MD/MPH (Master of Public Health), MD/PhD (for those interested in becoming physician scientists), and MD/MBA (for those interested in being trained in management as well as medicine). Other joint programs such as MD/JD (for those who want to be trained as lawyers as well as physicians) are noted in the MSAR online.

While it often is possible to enter a joint program after initial enrollment in medical school, many will want to apply for it in conjunction with the application to medical school. Normally, following receipt of the initial AMCAS application the MD schools will provide instruction on how to apply for joint degree programs.

The non-MD portion of the joint program will desire or require the qualifications, for example, research experience, appropriate for training in that field. It may be necessary to take another admissions test to enter the joint program, for example, the LSAT for the joint MD/JD program. In other cases, such as in most MD/PhD programs, it normally is not necessary to take the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). As with all admissions matters, practices vary from school to school.

Because of the substantial interest shown by Berkeley students in MD/PhD programs the following information is provided:

Those applying for MD/PhD programs should have a sincere interest in research and a career in biomedical research. They should be interested in studying mechanisms and have the patience and desire required to study fundamental problems. The purpose is not to make a better MD or to train people for clinical research; the latter can be done by an MD, often with some years of advanced training such as a fellowship. MD/PhD programs hope to train the next generation of medical school faculty and researchers in biomedicine.

Students should evaluate the type of research being carried out at specific schools and see how they “fit” into the educational and academic environments of the programs they are considering. The programs—as do other graduate departments—publish catalogs listing their faculty and research interests. Interview visits (often several visits are made to the schools under serious consideration) provide opportunities to explore and evaluate the programs in greater depth. Applicants should consider the integration of the program’s elements and the state of faculty/student relationships.
Normally, MD/PhD students are chosen without regard to the state of residency. While successful applicants have strong grades and scores, research potential and interest are critical. A student's grades and scores are weighed in light of the research background and the undergraduate school attended. The notion that only those with perfect scores and grades are chosen is false. Strong students with the desire for research should apply. Of course, some schools are more competitive than others and their “numbers” will be high. In most cases, the applicants must be accepted by both the medical school admission committee and the MD/PhD program.

If a student is uncertain about making a commitment to an MD/PhD program and a research career, it often is possible to enter the program after one or more years in the medical school. By doing research rotations, using summers to “catch up” and gain faculty endorsement, it may be possible to join the joint MD/PhD program and to receive funding at least for the graduate school years. It should be noted that many in academic medicine do not have a PhD, but received their research training through one or more fellowships following their MD.

MD/PhD programs differ in size, ranging from two students per year to classes of about 20. They also differ in the range of fields in which the PhD can be obtained as well as their organization, rigor, funding, and quality. Applicants should carefully examine how well the programs they are considering are organized and determine the levels of support and articulation between the segments of training, etc. Applicants should ask lots of questions and be very satisfied that the program is indeed the place to be for 7 – 10 years.

**Post-Baccalaureate & Other Options**

Many people desire to complete some or all of the pre-medical requirements after obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Others need to improve their credentials in order to become more competitive applicants. There are a number of ways to achieve either of these goals.

Those needing some or all of the pre-med classes—e.g., a history major who later decides to try for medicine—normally will look for a “post-baccalaureate program” (post-bac). A national list of these programs is available at www.aamc.org. Some of the “programs” are formal and structured with offices and support programs; others only provide a way to register for classes. Eligibility varies from program to program and each is organized with a specific kind of student in mind. Many programs are competitive and students will need to go through an application process to get into the program. Berkeley has a “post-bac” program, but it may also be possible to enroll in certain regular Berkeley courses through concurrent enrollment offered by University Extension providing that you only need to take one to three pre-requisites. Check to see that the courses you wish to take are available in this manner; some lower division classes (such as Chemistry and Biology) are impacted and thus may not be open. Summer Session at Berkeley offers an opportunity to complete many of the basic pre-medical requirements.

It is not recommended to take prerequisite courses at the community college level. Transferring from a two-year college to a four-year is an accepted and approved route for a pre-med undergraduate, but going back to the two-year level after getting your degree is frowned upon by many medical schools. Attend four year universities for post-bac work, even if you aren't involved in a degree program.

In this highly competitive period of medical school admissions, many will need to improve their academic records, especially in science, to become stronger applicants. Again, there are a number of ways to do this. Some schools offer programs specifically designed for traditionally underrepresented applicants. Some students will do a post-bac program to take more upper-division science courses (such as cell biology, developmental biology, genetics). For others, a graduate-level program may be more appropriate, especially if the applicant has an undergraduate degree in science. A traditional graduate program in biology or some more specialized area of biology may be very appropriate.

One thing to keep in mind when considering graduate programs to help boost your GPA is that medical school admissions committees look more favorably upon graduate programs that have courses that cover the same areas as pre-requisite courses that an applicant would need to get into medical school. For example, if a student received a low grade in organic chemistry and is considering a graduate program, then it would be beneficial to the student to consider graduate programs that incorporate elements of organic chemistry so as to prove to admissions committees that they have truly mastered the subject matter.

At some CSU campuses it may be possible to enroll as a non-degree seeking graduate student (unclassified) and take undergraduate science courses. Others will do a Masters in Public Health (MPH) degree. Others will enroll in a program at or related to one of the medical schools. In some of these latter programs the students take courses along with the first-year medical school class. If they do very well, they may get accepted to that school or elsewhere. Programs of this latter type exist at Boston University, Chicago Medical School, Georgetown, Hahnemann and Tulane.

When considering your options, the following guidelines may help. People improve their records in a number of ways; often there isn't just one way. Some formal structured programs may be good “feeders” into their own medical schools. In other cases, all that is needed is an opportunity to take classes and prove one's ability in an unstructured program. A smaller campus may provide a more hospitable
atmosphere. A large campus may offer a more extensive program of courses. Normally, most of the work should be completed at a four-year school in order to show strength in upper-division classes. Reputation of the school at which the work is taken is important. Usually, one should take as much of a full load of classes as possible (medical school is a very heavy academic program). The courses taken should be rigorous so that those evaluating the transcript will respect them. The academic work undertaken should be done very well if it is to make a difference. Address the weaknesses in your application. If grades and/or MCAT scores are the problem, do something positive about them. Normally, more volunteer experience or a job won’t overcome numbers—only better numbers will. If the science GPA is a problem, will the graduate-level program allow for taking more solid advanced-level science courses?

Realistically evaluate your situation. If grades have been a problem in the past, what are the chances they will be significantly better in the future? More than hope is necessary. Many are able to make a significant improvement in their records and reverse a slow start. Others are not. Are you prepared to work very hard, while realizing that admission is still uncertain? Remember, too, that grades and MCAT scores are not all that are considered in admissions decisions. Evidence of interest in serving others as a physician and other personal qualities are important factors in determining who is admitted.

Applying for Financial Aid
Medical education has become very expensive with the median cost of tuition at a private school now about $44,000 per year. With living expenses the total yearly cost of attending a private medical school will be well over $50,000 a year. While the cost of a UC school will be much lower, it must be remembered that many California applicants eventually attend an out-of-state private school. UC schools are very competitive and thus only very strong applicants tend to be admitted.

Undergraduates should make every effort to maintain an excellent financial credit history so that they will be able to borrow as medical students. In recent years some accepted applicants have had their acceptances revoked because it was found they were not eligible for loans because of a poor credit history. Medical school financial aid officers often recommend that undergraduates tightly control or eliminate their use of credit cards in order to reduce the temptation to spend and as a result get into debt problems which may result in a credit record which will prevent borrowing at a later date.

Undergraduates should discuss with their families how medical school would be financed. While loans and other forms of financial aid are available (see the AAMC website), the schools frequently look to the family to help with the costs of medical education. Medical students are considered graduate students and thus independent for government loans. Nonetheless, many schools will ask for financial records from parents and use the information obtained in awarding funds. Even if the medical student’s parents are no longer financially supporting the student, the medical school financial aid office often will require information about the financial status of parents and consider this when designing financial aid packages.

Many medical school graduates will have accumulated very sizable debt levels. In 2010, the median resident salary ranged from $46,717 to $52,599 (AAMC, Medical Student Education: Costs, Debt, and Loan Repayment Facts). While they will be receiving a salary of over $46,000 a year as residents and may be able to begin to repay their loans, many will have long years of paying back loans while also hoping to begin family life, buy a house, raise children, etc. A sober and realistic consideration of the financial obligations of attending medical school and then paying back loans is something each prospective medical student should undertake.

See the Financing Your Medical Education section of the AAMC website (https://www.aamc.org/students/financing/) for a discussion of financial aid for medical school including a description of the most common sources of aid. Normally, the first step is to submit a FASFA (Free Application for Student Financial Aid) available at the Financial Aid Office in Sproul Hall. This document, which may be filed after January 1, enables a determination of the applicant’s level of need in meeting medical school costs. The individual schools use the results of this determination in awarding financial aid to those they accept.

Following are some helpful financial aid websites:
- The Financial Aid Information Page www.finaid.org/
- US Department of Education www.ed.gov/offices/OSFAP/Students/
- Also see www.aamc.org and www.aacom.org
Minority Students
For many years, medical schools in the United States have been working to increase the number of physicians who come from groups that traditionally have been underrepresented in medicine. The Association of American Medical Colleges defines underrepresented groups as those traditionally underrepresented in medicine and includes African-American, Mexican-American, American Indian, Mainland Puerto Rican, and low-income individuals within this definition. The Student Life section of the MSAR online and the AAMC’s website has a Medical Minority Applicant Registry (Med-MAR) section that contains valuable information for the minority student, explains how an applicant may self identify, and provides the names of minority contact officers at each MD school. Several of the schools have major goals of providing health care to underrepresented populations. These include but are not limited to Howard, Meharry, Morehouse, Drew-UCLA, etc. See each school’s diversity section of MSAR online and the www.aamc.org website.

When applying to medical school using the AMCAS system it is possible to indicate that one desires to be considered as a disadvantaged applicant and to self describe race or ethnicity. The personal statement provides an opportunity to describe, in addition to the other factors noted above in the section on writing the statement, the applicant’s past history, challenges, and accomplishments.

In the secondary application schools may ask for additional information on disadvantages faced by applicants. Such questions should be answered thoroughly so that the schools may clearly understand the applicant’s background.

Various student clubs exist which focus on the needs and interests of minority pre-medical students. Many student groups post notices of their activities through the Career Center Health & Medicine CareerMail or through the Biology departments.

Summer enrichment programs exist at many medical schools and other graduate schools that are designed to assist minority students prepare for medical school. These programs vary in a number of ways but often include academic enrichment, clinical experiences, research opportunities, and study skills instruction. Information about these programs can be obtained via the Health & Medicine CareerMail and the MSAR online. Application deadlines for many enrichment programs often come in February and March. Letters of Recommendation are frequently required.

Foreign Medical Schools
There are very good medical schools in other countries. There also are some which knowledgeable observers describe as very inadequate. Some schools are very competitive or do not accept foreigners. Others will accept almost anyone willing to pay the tuition. Some have good records when their graduates take the exams necessary to practice in the US; others have very poor records. Be extremely cautious with foreign schools that have less than a proven record of success.

While currently there are more residency positions in the US than can be filled by graduates of US schools, it is projected that in the future the number of residency positions will decrease and become much closer to the number of graduates of US schools. If and when this occurs, American graduates of non-US schools are expected to be at a severe disadvantage.

For graduates of foreign medical schools, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) is an organization that assists in assessing whether international medical graduates are ready to enter residency or fellowship programs in the United States. See http://www.ecfmg.org/index.html for more information.