Preparing for & Applying to Medical School

Preparing for Medical School

Introduction
This publication is intended to provide guidance in the process of preparing to enter the medical profession by obtaining the MD (allopathic) or DO (osteopathic) degree. It is designed to assist students who have made up their minds that medicine is the right career. While that decision should be based on considerable thought, self-evaluation and direct personal exploration of the field itself, no effort will be made here either to encourage or discourage the prospective applicant. It will be assumed that those intending to enter medicine will take the necessary steps to assure it is the correct decision. More will be said below about gaining medically related experience.

Preparing for medical school is not something to be taken lightly. For most, it will be demanding and difficult if one hopes to be a competitive candidate. Medical training is lengthy and challenging. The practice of medicine requires considerable effort and will have a major impact on the lifestyles of many of its practitioners. Again, a carefully considered decision is important.

In preparing for medical school it is important to remember what medical schools seek in applicants. One school puts it simply and directly: “Successful applicants tend to have strong academic records, firm and clear motivation as shown by work experience, activities and interests and outstanding personal qualities.” Using this statement as a general framework it is possible to consider medical school preparation in more specific terms.

Resources
The most valuable single source of information on preparing for allopathic medical schools is the MSAR (Medical School Admissions Requirements) database online maintained by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). Students can use the MSAR to confirm school-specific requirements. To view the MSAR online you need to purchase access to it from AAMC for a fee. See the AAMC website for details.

AAMC (http://www.aamc.org) is a key source of information about MD medical education and individual medical schools.

www.aacom.org is the key source for osteopathic medical education and individual DO medical schools.

Strong Academic Record
In this section the various factors which are associated with the strong academic record the schools seek will be described. They include course work, academic major, research, letters of evaluation, and the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).

Advanced Placement
Medical school policy on AP credit differs, even among UC schools. Most medical schools DO NOT accept AP credit to fulfill a prerequisite course for their program. Those who wish to use AP credits in satisfaction of pre-med requirements should take additional coursework in that academic field to substantiate the credits and to prepare for the MCAT and medical school. For example, a student with an AP score which satisfies the reading and composition requirement usually will be well advised to take an upper division course with substantial reading and writing, e.g., an upper division English class. Again, school policy differs, and all-inclusive statements are difficult. Course work at Berkeley likely will be more rigorous than AP courses. Consult your major or college advisor as appropriate for questions concerning AP credits and major or college degree requirements.

Non-Science Requirements and Recommendations
Non-science requirements vary greatly from school to school and year to year. It is the applicant’s responsibility to consult the MSAR online and check individual school websites to confirm school-specific requirements. The following information below should serve as a general guide for non-science requirements.
English/Reading and Composition: Normally one year is required. However, some schools do not specifically require course work in this field. Most courses that satisfy the Reading and Composition requirement at Berkeley will fulfill medical school English coursework requirements. See a list of those courses at [http://ls-advise.berkeley.edu/requirement/rccourses.html](http://ls-advise.berkeley.edu/requirement/rccourses.html) If you’re not able to enroll in a course listed on the above website choose an alternate course that has significant writing and reading in the English language. A safe bet is to choose a class in the English department or to choose a course that has the word “literature” in the title. Save your course syllabi to show medical schools if you need to prove you met their English requirements.

Foreign Language/American Cultures: A working knowledge of another language, Spanish, for example, is of great value in medicine and is strongly recommended. Coursework which increases insight into other cultures is helpful preparation for the medical school applicant.

Humanities, Social and Behavioral Sciences: Some schools require a specific number of units of non-science classes. As of 2015, there is a new Behavioral & Social Sciences section on the MCAT. Half the scores on the MCAT are reading and writing, so taking additional non-science courses will help students better prepare for the MCAT and broaden their understanding of social and behavioral patterns that are essential for a career in health and medicine. Students are advised to take the courses listed below:

- Psych 1 (for majors) OR Psych 2 (for non majors) AND Sociol 1 AND MCB C6i

Specific Science Requirements
Most schools require General & Organic Chemistry, Biology and Physics while Math, English and Biochemistry requirements vary by medical school. 2011 medical school Math, English, and Biochemistry requirements can be found on the Career Center website (https://career.berkeley.edu/Medical/MedSchoolReqs.xls) for US allopathic medical schools.

The lists show the courses that are most commonly completed by UC Berkeley students to fulfill medical school prerequisites. It is the applicant’s responsibility to consult the MSAR online and check individual school websites to confirm school-specific requirements because they can vary from year to year. All of the prerequisite courses should be completed for a letter grade–do not take any of them P/NP. If you transferred to UC Berkeley from a community college, Assist.org can help you determine if the courses you took are equivalent to the courses listed below. If you choose to take courses other than those indicated below, keep your syllabi–you may need to send your syllabi to medical schools after you apply to make your case that the course(s) you completed fulfill their requirements. Each school is the final judge of its requirements.

Chemistry: Most medical schools require two semesters of general chemistry with lab, and 2 semesters of organic chemistry with lab. At Berkeley, several alternatives are available to satisfy the chemistry requirements. The most common chemistry sequences that students use to fulfill requirements are below:
- Chem 1A/1AL, 3A/3AL, 3B/3BL, MCB 102 OR
- Chem 1A/1AL, 3A/3AL, 3B/3BL, MCB 100A/Chem C130 OR
- Chem 1A/1AL, 3A/3AL, 3B/3BLT, Chem 135 OR
- Chem 4A, 4B, 112A, 112B OR
- Chem 4A, 4B, 3A/L, 3B/L OR
- Chem 1A/1AL, 1B, 112A, 112B

While the Chem 1A/1AL, 3A/3AL, 3B/3BL, MCB 102 sequence is unique compared to other universities, it has been in place since 1991 and is accepted by the vast majority of medical schools. Most medical schools understand our sequence is unique and feel that the chemistry sequence adequately teaches concepts you will need to be successful in medical school. At least four semesters of chemistry (which may include biochemistry) must be completed. Most pre-meds begin general chemistry early in their Berkeley careers – often the first semester. Check with your academic advisor for chemistry courses to satisfy your major, if any. A few topics which may be on the MCAT have been included in Chemistry 1B, and may not be included in 3A, 3B. Some self-study of these topics may be necessary to fully prepare for the MCAT (see The Official Guide to the MCAT Exam available from the AAMC at www.aamc.org).

Some schools require biochemistry, and some of them will allow students to use MCB102, MCB 100A/Chem C130 to count as both biochemistry and organic chemistry. If you plan to apply to a school requiring biochemistry, take a fifth semester of chemistry to ensure you fulfill requirements.

Physics: Most schools require two semesters of physics with lab. Introductory calculus is the prerequisite to physics at Berkeley. Several alternatives are available to satisfy the physics requirements. The most common physics sequences that students use to fulfill requirements are below:
- Physics 8A, 8B OR
- Physics 7A, 7B OR
- Physics 7A, 8B
**Biology:** Most schools require two semesters of biology; a few require more (for example, UC Irvine requires one and a half years). Most medical schools expect that a year of biology with lab will be completed, no matter the applicant’s major or AP status. The most common biology sequence that students use to fulfill requirements are below:
- Bio 1B, 1A/1AL
- Bio 1B may be taken before 1A

**Mathematics:** Requirements vary greatly. Some schools require a year of calculus; others require some calculus and may accept statistics or computer science as partial satisfaction. At Berkeley, calculus is required for physics. AP credits probably will be accepted for at least part of the math requirement at some schools. Caution should be exercised before enrolling in 1B on the basis of AP credits alone. Being prepared is important. The most common math sequences that students use to fulfill requirements are below:
- Math 16A, 16B
  - OR
- Math 1A, 1B
  - OR
- Math 10A, 10B
  - OR
- Math 1A, 16B
  - OR
- Math 1B, 53,
  - OR
- Math 53, 54

**Other:** Some medical schools recommend or require advanced courses in the physical and biological sciences and mathematics, for example, biochemistry, developmental biology, genetics, molecular biology and physical chemistry. Refer to medical school websites or the MSAR online to check school requirements and recommended courses.

**Timing of Preparation**

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is based in part on the basic pre-med requirements noted above. Having these courses completed at the time of the test is recommended. Usually, the test will be taken no later than April/May of the year that the applicant is applying, some 16 months prior to anticipated entrance. The 2012 AAMC MCAT Essentials guide states that July through September are peak testing times for the MCAT, which indicates that many students choose to take the MCAT some 24 to 26 months prior to anticipated entrance. Thus the timeline for applicants looking to start medical school in the Fall would look something like this below based on the average AAMC peak testing period:
- August 2016 – Start medical school
- June 2015– Application year -apply to medical schools using AMCAS or other service
- April 2014 – May 2015– Take MCAT (recommended latest date to take MCAT)

For many, the “ideal” path into medical school is to apply and be accepted into med school while still an undergrad, then to proceed directly into medical school following graduation. In reality, there are many timeframes and approaches to entering medical school. Some undergrads applying to medical school do so at the end of their junior year hoping to enter medical school the fall after their Berkeley graduation. However, the majority apply at the end of the senior year or just before the last semester at Cal. These people will be out of school a full year before they hope to enter. Any of these options is acceptable.

The medical schools do not care if an applicant has been out of school for a year or even longer as long as the person is a strong candidate. According to the AAMC the average age of matriculating applicants in 2010 was 23. Many who take time before applying to medical school have more opportunities to further validate their interest in medicine and strengthen their application through various post graduate experiences. You can also consider taking time off before applying to medical school and working for the Peace Corps, Teach for America, pursue a masters and of course, begin or continue to do research or volunteering in a clinical setting. There is no single path to medical school.
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Academic Preparation

Academic Major

Any major in any college or school is fully acceptable for those hoping to enter medical school. There is NO required major nor is any particular major favored. As long as the pre-med requirements are satisfied the choice of academic major should be a personal choice based upon personal preference. Students can see what percentage of admitted applicants were science or math majors for individual medical schools in the MSAR online on the Matriculants/Demographic tab. It shows in part that while, as expected, science/math majors make up the largest group of applicants, the acceptance rate for some majors in the humanities is higher than for those in sciences/math. This should not be seen as a reason to pick English, for example, when another field is of greater interest. However, it does demonstrate that one can choose any major and be accepted. Follow your own interests.

Some ask if a double major or a major and a minor or minors will be helpful in gaining admission. By itself, having more than a single major is not an important factor. Schools do like applicants with breadth of educational experience and demonstrated academic interests. If more than one major shows the applicant to have these qualities then that is helpful. On the other hand, the more major or minor requirements a student has to satisfy the less room there is for electives and thus obtaining the breadth that many favor. Again, the best advice is for the potential applicant to follow individual interests in choosing an educational path consistent with showing strength in pre-medical requirements and obtaining breadth of educational experience.

Research

It frequently is believed that there is an unwritten rule that participation in research, particularly in the biological or physical sciences, is required for admission to medical school. While research is often a highly valuable feature in an application, it is probably more accurate to say that medical schools seek students who give evidence of scholarly interests, a desire to go beyond what is taught in the classroom, and who will be life-long learners, obviously a trait of great importance in medicine. Clearly, research may go a long way in demonstrating these qualities; but it is not the only way to prove that one is the kind of dedicated and interested student medical schools desire.

Research is something that should interest pre-meds, particularly at a great research university like Berkeley. However, research need not be in any particular field or to have any direct relationship to medicine. While many Cal pre-meds pursue research in the biological sciences because of their interests in that field, others focus their research attention on topics in the social sciences or humanities as well as the physical sciences.

It is a mistake to pursue research unless there is a real interest in doing so. A number of strong applicants have not done research but have stood out in other ways. Going to a lab out of a sense of obligation or in hopes it will somehow create a stronger application is likely to be counterproductive and be a source of frustration to student and research supervisor. Getting involved in research means taking on an obligation in terms of time and effort, therefore waiting until senior year is not a competitive strategy to obtain research experience. Nobody wants to train a student researcher only to have the newcomer put in half hearted efforts or quit after a short time.

Over the years, many Berkeley pre-meds have become deeply involved in research frequently devoting major effort to their projects. There are a number of methods available to locate research opportunities. The most direct is to identify a faculty member who is conducting research in an area of interest and after doing adequate preparation, approach that person and inquire about joining his/her research program. Academic departments have information on the research interests and publications of the members of their faculties. The “Research at Berkeley” website research.berkeley.edu provides many good leads to finding research on this campus and nearby research groups. Various student groups in MCB, hold information sessions on how to locate research opportunities. A number of medical and graduate schools conduct summer research program. Some of these are intended for minority students; others are open to all those interested. Many of these opportunities may be located through the Career Center’s website and at the Getting Experience for Pre-Med programs offered late in the Fall and again early each Spring semester. With the huge research program on the Berkeley campus, nearby institutions, and the private biotechnical industry any Cal student seriously interested in research should be able to find it.

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

With one or two exceptions, all US MD and DO schools require the MCAT. As of 2015 the MCAT will have the following four sections: Critical Analysis & Reasoning Skills (analyze, evaluate and apply information in prose passages from the humanities and social sciences); Biological & Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems (knowledge of basic concepts and facility with scientific problem solving in biology and biologically related chemistry); Chemical & Physical Foundations of Biological Systems (knowledge of basic concepts and facility with scientific problem solving in general and organic chemistry as well as biochemistry); and Psychological, Social & Biological Foundations of Behavior (examines knowledge and use of basic concepts in psychology, sociology, biology, research methods and statistics).

The MCAT is offered multiple times a year from late January through early September. It usually is advisable
to take the MCAT during the months of April/May but no later than June of the year that you are applying (16-18 months before entrance). You may take the test in the months of July, August or September of the year that you are applying, however, taking the test during these months in the application year will make your application late for schools with rolling admissions, thus delaying serious consideration. There are exceptions to this rule, but for most applicants, taking the test in or after July during the application year is likely to harm your chances of acceptance at many schools. As previously stated, according to the AAMC many applicants choose to take the MCAT in the year before they apply to medical schools, some 24 to 26 months prior to anticipated entrance.

**MCAT 2015 Logistics**

- Total testing time will be approximately 7 ½ hours.
- Accommodated examinees with extra testing time will test over two or more days.
- Examinees who take the current version of the MCAT exam before it is retired will not necessarily be required to take the new version. The AAMC will continue to report scores from the current MCAT exam, along with scores from the new exam, for two to three AMCAS application cycles (i.e., AMCAS 2016 cycle to AMCAS 2017/2018 cycle), after which scores from the retired version of the MCAT will no longer be reported. Applicants should review the MSAR for each medical school’s policy for the oldest MCAT score considered in applications.

Additional information on the MCAT 2015 exam can be found at: https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/

Preparing for the MCAT is a matter of real concern to many pre-med students. While Cal students as a whole do very well on the MCAT as might be expected due to the rigor of Berkeley, most put considerable effort into preparation. The AAMC website discusses materials including retired exams that can be used to prepare. Applicants prepare in many ways. Opinion on the best method varies; it is very much a personal decision. Some review on their own using notes and textbooks and other study materials from their classes. Many take a commercial review course. Many find a review course helpful; others do not. For some, a review course provides a structure and organization upon which to prepare. A course also may provide an incentive to study and offer a form of discipline which some find helpful. The Career Center does not necessarily recommend a review course nor does it recommend any particular course. Someone contemplating taking a course should compare the pros and cons of the various methods used, materials available, costs, etc., and then choose the one, if any, which best meets his or her learning style, schedule, budget, etc. It is very much an individual choice. No matter whether or not a course is taken careful and diligent preparation is necessary in most cases. Usually people taking the test in April or May will start to study right after the first of the year and put in many hours of preparation prior to the exam. Often, students take a lighter load during spring semester in order to have sufficient time to prepare.

Besides thoroughly learning the material in the basic pre-med classes upon which the science portions of the test are based, one of the best ways to prepare for the MCAT is to further develop or maintain a high level of reading speed and comprehension. The MCAT places considerable importance on reading rapidly and well. The Verbal Reasoning section in part contains material from the social sciences and humanities. If the years leading up to the test have contained few courses in non-sciences reading skills may suffer. Prospective MCAT takers should not ignore their reading skills as a month or two of study before the exam will not overcome years of neglect or inadequate attention. The schools consider the VR score to be important. A low score may seriously hurt even if the science scores are high. Medical students and future physicians need to be able to read well and to converse easily with faculty, colleagues, and patients.

While the MCAT is based on the basic pre-med classes, some believe that certain additional courses will help exam preparation. It should be noted that differences of opinion exist as to which, if any, additional course work is necessary. However, some feel that having taken a course like MCB 102 and a class in human physiology will be advantageous. Becoming familiar with the AAMC MCAT Content Outline in the “Preparing for the MCAT Exam” website will give the prospective test taker a good idea of the subject matter which may be included in the exam and allow for preparation throughout the undergraduate years.

The age of MCAT scores that are accepted varies from school to school. For most, scores can be two years old at the date of application. Each school indicates the acceptable age of scores in the MSAR online.

**Letters of Evaluation (Recommendation)**

Applying to medical school normally involves the submission of several letters of evaluation typically written by professors and others who have taught the applicant. While some schools do not specify from whom the letters should come, very often the applicant will be asked to submit two letters from science courses and one or more from non-science courses. In some cases, additional letters from research or volunteer supervisors may be appropriate. The number of letters that will be accepted will vary from school to school. Having three to five useful letters in one’s file is a good idea.
The medical schools usually seek letters from those who have taught and know the applicant well and thus can provide a comprehensive and thorough evaluation. A letter that only states that the applicant was in the professor's class and received a specified grade is not helpful. Nor is a letter which says, “though I do not know ___ well,” or, “during a brief conversation concerning this letter,” very helpful. The schools can see the grade on the transcript. While large classes can make contact and thus a useful letter difficult, much can be done to establish a relationship that may result in the instructor being able to write a worthwhile letter. The key to a good letter is the establishment of a natural relationship between teacher and student focused on shared academic interests. In other words, the student must go beyond basic class obligations to demonstrate interest and competence in the subject matter of the course. Attending office hours on a regular basis to raise and discuss thoughtful questions about the material of the course is one of the most basic ways to give the instructor a chance to know a student, especially in a large class. It may be possible to take more than one course from a professor giving that person a chance to better know the student. Active and interested participation in class, as appropriate, is another way to allow an instructor to know a student. Many Cal pre-meds do research and thus establish a close relationship with their research supervisors that can lead to valuable letters of support.

As a general rule, it is better to have letters written by professors rather than GSIs. The reason for the “more senior the better” stance is that by virtue of experience the older person may be in a better position to evaluate the student and to compare the applicant to current and previous classes of students. GSIs often write fine letters and frequently write parts or all of letters which professors sign or co-sign. Having a GSIs letter co-signed by a professor adds to its strength, especially if the professor can add useful comments. It is better to have a strong letter from a GSI than a letter from a professor that says little or nothing. But, the temptation to feel that since it often is easier to get to know a GSI than a professor, it is perfectly acceptable to settle for GSI letters should be resisted. Some medical schools specifically state that they will only accept letters from professors—no lecturers or graduate students. Other admissions officers have told the Career Center that they prefer letters that provide new insight on the applicant, and with this in mind may prefer the more specific letter, even if from a GSI. Letters from family physicians, friends, political figures and the like usually are discouraged and may in fact be detrimental.

It is important to plan ahead and to give prospective letter writers plenty of time. Students are well advised to request letters at least one month in advance; however, it may take several months to get a letter written. It may be necessary to make one or more “gentle” reminders to get a letter written. The prospective letter writer should be consulted as to plans to be away from campus which might interfere with getting the letter prepared. Waiting too long to request a letter may result in the writer being on vacation, leave, ill or otherwise unavailable.

Requesting a letter should be taken seriously. Usually it is a good idea to make an appointment with the potential writer. It often is wise to furnish the writer with information including a transcript, resume, copies of papers, projects, etc., from the class, a draft of the personal statement and other records which will give the letter writer as much background information as possible. The objective is for a helpful letter to be written. It is a good idea to remind the writer of topics that might be included such as a project in the class, a particular interest demonstrated in the class, etc. In instances when the writer knows the applicant very well this may not be necessary, but in other cases it will be very important in the preparation of a good letter.

The Career Center offers a Letter Service where a file may be opened and letters collected and stored until they are sent AMCAS or AACOMAS for distribution to medical schools of the applicant’s choice. One of the benefits of using the Career Center’s Letter Service is that you can open a file and keep letters for up to five years. This service is useful for applicants who are planning to apply after graduating from Berkeley. You can ask your letters to be written while the writers know you well and submit the letters later. Alternately, you can ask your letter writers to submit your letters directly to AMCAS once you have created your accounts with these services. For those applying to Osteopathic medical schools, their centralized application service, AACOMAS, does not have a letter service. Therefore using the Career Center Letter Service would be helpful to applicants.

There are several ways you can have your letters sent to AMCAS. If you have a Career Center Letter Service account, you would have the Letter Service submit your letters to AMCAS during your application year. Your letter writers could also opt to upload letters directly to AMCAS through the AMCAS Letter Writer Application during your application year. Once your letters are submitted to AMCAS, you can select which letters to distribute to each medical school with your primary application.

If you are applying to one of the few schools that is not participating in the AMCAS Letter Service, follow the individual school’s guidelines of how to submit a letter.
Firm and Clear Motivation

Medical schools seek “helping, caring people who know what they are getting into” from having explored the field of health and medicine.

Experience in “helping”

While it is essential that a prospective medical student demonstrate that he or she is a helping, caring person, there are many ways to provide that evidence; it need not be limited to medically related activities. Many non-medical situations offer the pre-med an opportunity to serve others and thus demonstrate the helping and caring qualities desirable in a physician-trainee. Some tutor or work with children or senior citizens in a variety of educational or social service settings. Others show their caring through service as labor coaches or a similar activity in a medical setting. The setting is not the issue; the evidence of a service orientation is.

There are many ways to find opportunities to serve. The Career Center lists internships and jobs on its website. Some of these positions will offer a chance to provide service to others, e.g., a camp for children with cancer. The Cal Corps office in Eshleman Hall provides information on opportunities to serve through Calcorps. Stiles Hall at www.stileshall.org is another example of many sources of referral both on and off the campus.

Exploring the Field

Those applying to medical school will be expected to show that they “know what they are getting into.” In other words, that they have explored the field, know the role physicians play, and are clear on why they want to go into medicine. Such evidence should come during the years directly preceding application. For the college student, this should occur during undergraduate years and not be limited to high school.

As with demonstrating the caring nature noted above, it is possible to show that one has explored the field in a variety of ways and in a variety of settings. Although not required, some admissions officers strongly recommend that the pre-med arrange some sort of “shadowing” experience in which it is possible to closely observe a physician in action to become knowledgeable as to the role that person plays in the health field. “Candy striping” or similar activities are good and provide service to others, but in most instances, do not allow the volunteer to really gain an appreciation of the role of the physician and the pros and cons of a medical career unless the student uses that opportunity to develop a relationship that will lead to a shadowing experience. Similarly, having a physician parent is not enough. The student should actively explore the field on his/her own. If an applicant is interested in an osteopathic medical school (DO) it is essential to obtain experience with a DO to become clear on the philosophy of that branch of medicine.

There are many ways to locate opportunities to explore the field of medicine and health. Students will receive information about opportunities via the Health and Medicine CareerMail list, such as those offered during the Career Center Externship program in the Fall. In addition, students sometimes seek references from their own health providers, and other off-campus sources provide opportunities to get exposed to the realities of medicine. Examples are the Over 60 Health Center, Asian Health Services, Planned Parenthood, the ER at San Francisco General Hospital, the Berkeley Free Medical Clinic, and the Suitcase Clinic. Many pre-meds take the decal class Public Health 116 and then get involved in its Field Studies component in which the students shadow physicians as part of the Health and Medical Apprenticeship Program (HMAP).
Outstanding Personal Qualities

Medical schools seek applicants who have the personal traits desired in physicians. The schools tend to accept applicants who stand out in one or more ways. They have been active in some program or endeavor and often have been a leader or real contributor to some significant effort. There is no formula for this. Nor is there a list of “acceptable” fields in which to put one’s time and effort. Those accepted have been involved in activities ranging from athletics to volunteer work, from music to research. The list is long. The important thing is that they have demonstrated their abilities, that they stand out from other applicants in some significant way and that they possess the personal qualities such as leadership, endurance, creativity, perseverance, dedication, and intelligence which are believed necessary for a career in medicine.

How do these qualities come out in the application process? On the application there are opportunities to list and describe extracurricular activities, work experiences, internships, community service, etc. Further, the personal statement is another very important place where the schools can learn about the applicant. Letters of evaluation can provide important insights into an applicant’s character. Finally, in the interview the schools attempt to learn as much as possible about the applicant.

All of this should encourage the prospective applicant to pursue extra curricular activities of interest in real depth and with great enthusiasm. It is important that whatever is chosen to do is something of real interest. Doing something out of sense that it is what is expected or “the thing to do” is a real mistake. The pre-medical student should follow his or her own interests and desires with the admonition to do something in depth. Quantity of activity should not be equated with quality of activity. Filling the resume with lists of activities pursued half-heartedly or of empty titles is not the goal. Such efforts often are quite obvious to the admission officers and will not be valued.

10 Tips for Pre-Med Students

1. Major in the field which interests you the most while showing strength in the required science courses. Medical schools do not prefer any particular major.

2. Explore the medical field; be sure you know its positive and negative features and trends. You will need to show that you know “what you are getting into.”

3. Pursue in-depth, extra-curricular activities that interest you. Medical schools like interesting people. Leadership skills and the ability to work with others, particularly in our multicultural society, are valued. Know another language.

4. While grades are important, more than academic performance is considered. Grade trends are important; a less than spectacular year can be overcome.

5. You will need letters of evaluation from instructors and others who know you and your work well. These come best from people with whom you have a “natural relationship,” e.g., shared interest in academic and/or professional matters.

6. Develop the ability to read, write, and think. Only part of medicine is science. Good communication skills are important for physicians.

7. Pursue an academic interest in depth, e.g., research. However, the research need not be in science.

8. Develop your ability to talk comfortably with people considerably older than yourself. It is unlikely that interviews will be with your peers.


10. There are many paths to a career in medicine. People of different backgrounds, experiences, and ages, etc., all get there. Your interests may change over time. Remain flexible.