

Applying to Medical School

MAKING THE DECISION TO APPLY

Professional programs place the highest importance on an entering student's ability to complete the curriculum and pursue a professional practice. Successful applicants demonstrate to admissions committees that they have thoroughly investigated their chosen profession and have thoughtfully considered how they will handle the challenges. The Career Center is one resource that provides assistance as students evaluate whether or not to pursue a health care profession.

CHOOSING A MAJOR

While some students anticipating medical school admission choose a science major, medical schools also look favorably upon applicants with humanities and social sciences majors. However, those interested in admission to MD/PhD programs and other research intensive career fields should complete a science major with research experience.

Regardless of major, medical schools and other healthcare programs require successful completion of a series of "pre-med" courses which most often include more than two courses in biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics. Some medical schools require one or two courses in calculus, biochemistry and English.

GPA AND ENTRANCE EXAMS

Given the competitive nature of admission to medical school, a strong cumulative and science GPA is necessary. If you are concerned about your grades, see your advisor immediately to map out the best strategy for you to pursue.

Most life sciences professional programs give considerable weight to some type of pre-professional entrance exam in their admissions decisions. The MCAT, DAT and GRE have preparation materials available from the organizations that sponsor the exams. Most students take the MCAT or DAT in the spring of their junior year; students usually sit for the GRE in the beginning of the senior year. We recommend studying extensively for the exam. To guide

your preparations, Washington University offers an MCAT review course every spring. For specific MCAT scores required by particular medical and dental schools, Barron's Guide to Medical and Dental Schools is a good resource.

ADMISSIONS PERSPECTIVE

Students considering life sciences professional programs have many factors to consider. Although specific requirements of schools may vary, most look for some key components:

- Future success in a demanding program is shown through a strong GPA, overall and in science coursework
- Letters of recommendation from professionals that show the applicant is mature and committed
- Candidates who score well on pre-professional admissions tests
- The most attractive applicants are those making an informed decision based on research experiences, shadowing, volunteering, informational interviews and internships. Many schools value prior exposure to a hospital or health care-related setting.

Professional schools want to be certain they only admit those who will have a high probability of success completing a rigorous program and passing licensing exams.

Students should begin building an attractive portfolio their freshman year that includes: excellent grades, career exploration activities, genuine community service, and relationship building with mentors and professors for future recommendations. In addition, students should register with the College of Arts & Sciences as a life science pre-professional student so you can be notified of additional information throughout the year. E-mail prehealth@artsci.wustl.edu to register.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Arts & Sciences students will be required to submit a Personal PreHealth application Institutional Review (PIR) to the College Office. The details you provide will play a crucial role in the evaluation letter prepared for you by the pre-health professions advisors and sent to the schools to which you apply. Please see your advisor for details.

NOTE: Requirements for entry into a specific program may vary. It is your responsibility to research and learn those entry requirements according to the specific programs. Your advisor can assist in planning the coursework needed to meet the general requirements set by most American medical, dental, veterinary, allied health and osteopathy schools.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Compelling letters of recommendation are a cornerstone of your application portfolio. Recommendations should be from someone who really knows your caliber of work and capabilities, as well as your personality. Many programs will insist that two of your letters be from science faculty. A few may even insist that you have a letter from a health care practitioner in your field of career choice. The Career Center and Prehealth team offers various workshops throughout the year to advise you on how to map out a strategy for how you will seed the groundwork for securing excellent letters.

For a detailed overview on requesting letters of recommendation, see the Career Center's handout on *Applying to Graduate School*.

Letter of recommendation for Medical Schools (MD, MD/PhD, DO), Dental Schools, Veterinary Schools, Schools of Public Health, Schools of Nursing are handled through the online system, ArtSci Letters. The URL is <https://letters.artsci.wustl.edu>. You will need to create an account.

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

The personal statement is a means of giving your admissions reviewers a real picture of you. Use this space to communicate a strong narrative of what is

important to you and how that relates to your career goals.

- Admissions committee members hope to read interesting, insightful, revealing, and specific essays that demonstrate you have successfully gone through a process of careful reflection and self-examination about why you want to be a doctor and why you'll be a good one.
- According to the Director of Admissions at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, personal statements should be original and be an honest expression of the applicant. It should also be carefully planned out, neatly typed, should not exceed the space provided on the application, and should be proofread carefully.
- A personal statement is perhaps the only opportunity that an applicant will have to allow the admissions committee to get to know them in a personal way. It also provides an opportunity for applicants to express themselves and show they can write in a coherent manner.
- If statements are made about special skills or talents, support them with concrete evidence of academic work or extracurricular activities. Be prepared to elaborate in the interview.
- Be honest, straightforward, and simple. Do not be self-congratulatory.

THE COMMON APPLICATION SERVICES

Submit all of your materials in a timely fashion.

- Pay attention to application fees and never miss a deadline.
- Request official transcripts be forwarded to the application service and to yourself from ALL academic institutions you have attended.
- Be honest, neat and keep a photocopy of everything you submit.

THE ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW

Many medical schools will require an admission interview to get to know you and better understand your motivation for applying to their program. Most schools have either morning or afternoon interview sessions, with one or more, sixty-minute, one-on-one interviews.

Make sure you know and are prepared to describe and expand on the activities you list on your application. You may wish to explain details about how you got involved in the organization/activity, describe your role in the activity, and relate what you gained from the experience, and whether you will be continuing your involvement.

Schools will ask you different questions, often depending on the type of applicant they typically admit. The Student Doctor Network at www.studentdoctor.net is an extremely helpful Web site to familiarize yourself with the interview format for each school, as well as the types of questions you are likely to face.

General Questions

- Tell me about yourself / your family.
- What do you do during your spare time?
- What book outside of school have you read lately?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses? What are some things you want to change about yourself?

- Tell me about your research.
- Tell me about your (most significant) volunteer work.
- Who has been your most influential mentor?
- How would a friend describe you?
- Tell me about a time when you failed.
- Do you want to add anything that we didn't cover in this interview?
- What questions do you have for me?

Questions about Medicine/Your Career

- How did you decide to go into medicine? What would you say was the defining moment?
- How have you reconfirmed your passion for medicine?
- If you had to choose a career other than medicine, what would it be?
- If you are not admitted to a medical school, what profession would you pursue?
- What do you see yourself doing in ten years?
- What do you think will be your greatest challenge in completing medical school or learning how to be a doctor?
- In your view, what is the most pressing problem facing medicine today?
- What do you view as a strength of the current health care system?
- Which area of medicine interests you the most?

School or Program-Specific Questions

- Why this school?
- What are you looking for in a medical school?
- Our school is interested in recruiting a diverse student body. How do you fit these criteria? What unique quality do you bring to the entering class?
- Where else are you applying?

More Common Questions

- Which of your college courses interested you the most?
- Which was the worst course you took in college and why? What was your grade in the class?
- How did you choose your undergraduate school? How has your experience been?
- How are you planning to pay for your medical education?
- Are you a leader or a follower?

Ethical Questions

Ethical questions are not as common as you might fear, but it still makes sense to be prepared.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Medical education is quite expensive to provide and thus few medical schools offer scholarships. Most health care practitioners depend upon loans to subsidize their education. Some government and nonprofit organizations do offer tuition subvention in return for service after completion of training and licensure. For individualized assistance related to paying the expense for medical and other health care professional training, contact the financial aid office of the school you will be attending. You may also discuss financial considerations with Student Financial Services, who can help you determine what questions to ask based on your individual circumstances. Note: If medical research in a clinical setting is your passion, most MD/PhD programs provide full tuition grants.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- A list of upcoming news and events, as well as FAQs can be found on the College of Arts & Sciences Web site at <http://college.artsci.wustl.edu>
- An informative description of health care professional fields and the preparation necessary to be admitted to those programs can be found in the Natural Sciences Learning Center site at www.nslc.wustl.edu/handbook/health.html#anchor183923.
- Other resources are located in the College Office, 104 Cupples II, and Cornerstone
- Student Organizations: Minority Association of PreMedical Students, Pre-Medical Society, Alpha Epsilon Delta, Pre-OT/PT Society and Pre-Veterinary and Zoological Science Society
- Informational sessions sponsored by the College Office are scheduled in the fall and spring. Check your e-mail for information of interest to pre-professional students.
- The Career Center also offers resources for students including: guides to medical school, mock interviews, personal statement reviews, and advising
- For research opportunities, visit www.nslc.wustl.edu/courses/bio500/bio500.html.



TIMELINE

Students should secure informational interviews, permission to shadow practitioners, engage in community service activities, and complete research experiences and internships early. Continue and build upon these activities throughout your undergraduate years. Be sure to connect with a prehealth advisor by the end of sophomore year.

The application process can start as early as the summer before your junior year. Many students take MCAT prep courses during the summer in preparation for taking the MCAT in the spring of junior year. Junior year is also the time to begin securing letters of recommendation, researching different programs and completing your AMCAS application.

While June after junior year is the earliest you can apply, many students find that an additional year of strengthening their application credentials is a great benefit.

IDEAL APPLICATION TIMELINE

1 year ahead:

- Reflect on PIR questions
- Begin talking with prehealth advisor about portfolio
- Plan test prep and test dates

By winter break before applying:

- Personal statement draft
- Test prep continues
- Plan letters of recommendation
- Stay in touch with prehealth advisor

By Spring Break:

- Exact exam date selected
- PIR interviews completed

- Personal statement nearly final
- Recommendations requested
- Craft overall application narrative from personal statement, activities list, and PIR responses

By May:

- Begin online application
- MCAT completed
- Personal statement finalized
- Schedule mock interview

By June:

- Finalize and submit application