

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I: Introduction	1
The Florida State University College of Medicine	1
The Prehealth Professions Advising Office	1
A Letter to Our Readers	2
About the Authors	3
Part II: Profile of the Successful Medical School Applicant	5
Completion of the Premedical Requirements	5
Strong Academic Record	7
Strong MCAT Scores	7
Realistic Understanding of the Medical Field	7
Commitment to Service	8
Extracurricular and Leadership Activities	8
Research Experience	8
Part III: Planning Ahead, A Four-Year Guide: Freshman Year	9
What You Should Be Doing Freshman Year	9
What Every Premed Freshman Should Know	9
Questions and Answers	10
Can I major in premed at Florida State?	10
Do I need to maintain a 4.0 GPA to get accepted to medical school in Florida?	10
Should I major in Biological Sciences or choose a non-science major to appear unique or well-rounded?	10
Is freshman year too early to start getting involved?	10
Is there a club on campus for premedical students?	10

Part IV: Planning Ahead, A Four-Year Guide: Sophomore Year	13
What You Should Be Doing Sophomore Year	13
What Every Premed Sophomore Should Know	13
Questions and Answers	14
I have heard Organic Chemistry is a “weed-out” course for premedical students. What advice can you give med about this class?	14
How important is participating in research with a faculty member and how should I get started?	14
Many of my science courses are in large lecture halls. How can my professors know who I am, let alone write a personal letter about me?	14
I know it is important to volunteer, but how much time should I commit?	14
Do I have to volunteer or can I get paid for my medical experience?	15
How do medical schools view employment?	15
Should I take an elective such as a language course pass/fail?	15
If I am struggling in a course should I just drop it or give up?	15
Part V: Planning Ahead, A Four-Year Guide: Junior Year	17
What You Should Be Doing Junior Year	17
What Every Premed Junior Should Know	17
Medical College Admissions Test: Questions and Answers	18
I have heard a great deal about the MCAT. Could you give me more details on this exam?	18
How is the MCAT scored?	19
When should I take the MCAT?	19
Do I need to prepare for the MCAT?	20
The Computer Based MCAT (CBT)	20
How can I prepare for the MCAT exam?	20
Should I enroll in a prep course for the MCAT?	21

How do I register for the MCAT?	21
How much does it cost to register for the MCAT and is there a way to receive financial aid?	22
How do schools receive my score?	22
Should I release my scores to the Health Professions Advisor?	22
When do I get the results?	22
Should I retake the exam if I do not do well?	22
The Admissions Process: Questions and Answers	22
How do I apply to medical school?	22
How do I know which schools are non-AMCAS schools and how do I apply to these schools?	23
When should I apply to medical schools?	23
I heard about an Early Decision program. Can you tell me more about it?	24
Where should I apply to medical schools?	24
Can you tell me more about letters of evaluation for medical school?	24
Choosing a Medical School	25
Teaching Style	25
Emphasis on Research or Clinical Aspects of Medicine	25
Clinical Exposure in the First and Second Years	26
Rotation Emphasis	26
Residency Placement Rate	26
Reputation	26
Hospital Affiliation	26
Tuition and Cost of Living	26
Scholarships and Grants	27

Location	27
I heard it costs a great deal to apply to medical school. How much should I budget?	27
What should I write in the Personal Comments section of the AMCAS application?	27
How will I know if the school received my application?	28
Part VI: Planning Ahead, A Four Year Guide: Senior Year	29
What You Should Be Doing Senior Year	29
What Every Premed Senior Should Know	29
Questions and Answers	30
I applied to several schools and have only heard that my application is complete. Does this mean I will <u>not</u> be granted any interviews and should I call to ask?	30
I received a letter today inviting me for a medical school interview - should I take this as a good sign?	30
How is an interview day set up?	30
How should I best prepare for my interviews?	30
Step 1 – What are your motivations and reasons for pursuing a career in medicine?	31
Step 2 – Analyze yourself in light of specific qualities and significant events that have shaped your life.	31
Step 3 – What have been your experiences in the medical field?	31
Step 4 – How have you demonstrated responsibility and commitment up to now?	32
Step 5 – Brush up on the school itself.	32
Summary on Interviews	32
I received a letter in the mail telling me I was on hold at my first choice medical school. What does this mean?	33

I had been placed on hold at a medical school and received a letter telling me I was now on a waiting list. What is the difference between hold and the waiting list?	33
Do you know of any medical school scholarships?	33
What should I do if I am not accepted?	33
Part VII: Post-Baccalaureate Year	35
What Every Premed Post-Baccalaureate Student Should Know	35
Questions and Answers	36
How much course work do I need to prepare for admission to medical school ?	36
I heard that the Organic Chemistry sequence is tough. Can I take these courses at the local community college?	36
I did not do well in my previous undergraduate work. What must I do to prove I can succeed in medical school?	36
I have a professional degree in another discipline, will that affect my chances for acceptance to medical school?	36
As a post-baccalaureate student should I just take the premedical requirements or should I obtain a second degree?	37
Can I work full-time and take my premedical courses?	37
Medical School Application Timeline	38
Bibliography	39

Part I:

INTRODUCTION

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

The Florida State University College of Medicine was created in May 2000 as the first medical school established in the U.S. in over twenty years. The College of Medicine continues to carry on the mission of the Program in Medical Sciences, which was founded in 1971 to increase the number of primary care physicians in the underserved regions of Florida. The College of Medicine will emphasize the training of generalist physicians for practice in ambulatory settings, specifically to serve in rural or inner city areas, and geriatric patients. The College now accepts out of state applicants; however, Florida residents will be given preference.

The first two years of classes will be taught at Florida State. This community-based clinical training model ensures students experience in a variety of practice settings, including rural and inner city hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and doctor's offices. The third and-fourth year clerkships will be located in Tallahassee, Pensacola, Orlando, Jacksonville, Sarasota and several communities in north Florida.

Students should seek advisement regarding preparation for medical school early in their college career.

The Prehealth Professions Advising Office

The Florida State University College of Medicine provides academic advising and counseling to students interested in pursuing careers in the health sciences. Currently, over two thousand students are enrolled in this advising program. Many of the students who seek advising in the advising office are premedical students. However, the program is open to all prehealth students including predentistry, preveterinary, prepharmacy, prephysician assistant, preoptometry and prephysical therapy. Prehealth Professions Advisors meet regularly with these students throughout their college years assisting with career goals, course scheduling, long-term academic planning and professional school admissions procedures.

In addition to one-on-one advising, the Advising Center also sponsors programs of special interest to prehealth students. Programs from recent years included panel discussions with admissions representatives from various medical and professional schools and workshops on *Succeeding in the Application Process and Interviewing Strategies*.

Florida State University has a competitive acceptance rate to medical and professional schools nationwide and many of our graduates have been recognized for their outstanding contributions and achievements in the field of medicine.

To register with the College of Medicine Prehealth Professions Advising Office, call or visit to setup an appointment with the Health Professions Advisor at your earliest convenience (Phone: 850-644-7678).

Every attempt is made to keep the material in this handbook as up to date as possible. The most current information regarding the prehealth clubs, course

requirements and the application process can be found on the Health Professions Advising Office website at www.med.fsu.edu/prehealthadvising.

A Letter to Our Readers

Dear Students,

This handbook has been compiled through a collaborative effort by students and staff for you, the premedical student at Florida State University, to share current information and advice on the successful pathway to medical school. As a premedical student, one of the most important qualities you must possess is commitment. Please demonstrate your commitment now by taking a few moments to sit down, read this handbook and familiarize yourself with the complex yet exciting journey ahead.

The first section of this handbook is dedicated to describing the profile of the successful medical school applicant. By closely analyzing the students who have been selected to medical school over the past several years, we have seen a consistent pattern emerge. This pattern has been confirmed by various medical school admissions directors. Based on this information we have broken down the profile into seven criteria with a description under each on how you can best meet this criteria. Remember this profile should be used as a guideline. Each applicant to medical school is an individual with unique qualities and gifts. There will be some areas in your application that are stronger and some weaker. The most important goal for this section is to educate you on the standards from which you will be judged.

The next section of this handbook is a four-year guide. Under each academic year we have made a list of what you should be doing, information you should know and a question and answer section covering topics most consistently raised during that academic year. We also included an additional section for post-baccalaureate students, those individuals who have already obtained a bachelor's degree and are pursuing course work to qualify for medical school.

We wish you the best of luck and encourage you to schedule regular advising appointments and take full advantage of all the resources available to you in the College of Medicine Prehealth Professions Advising Office.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Shea Smith, Ph.D.
Coordinator of Special Projects
Advising First
Florida State University

Carolyn Fontana Stalvey, M.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor
Associate Program Director, Internal Medicine Residency
Department of Medicine
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About the Authors

Carolyn Stalvey

Carolyn Fontana Stalvey received her Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences from Florida State University in 1995 and received her MD degree from the University of Florida in 1999. She completed a residency in Internal Medicine at UF in 2002 and was the Chief Resident in 2002-2003. Carolyn served as vice-president of Alpha Epsilon Delta, the premedical honor society. She was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi. In addition, she was named the Florida State Top Junior Woman in academics. She was twice a recipient of an American Cancer Society fellowship for research. Carolyn is a professor and associate program director at the UFCOM in Gainesville.

Carolyn contributed a great deal of time and energy to this project long after she was a premedical student at Florida State University. Her first-hand experience and special insight will greatly benefit the readers of this handbook.

Kathleen Shea Smith

Kathleen Smith served as the Health Professions Advisor at Florida State University from 1992 to 1997. Her area of focus remains on issues affecting students choosing professional health careers. Kathleen received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Kenyon College in 1987 and her Master of Education from Temple University in 1992. Prior to serving Florida State students, she worked as an Academic Advisor and Career Coordinator at Temple University from 1989 to 1992. In 1994 Kathleen was honored by President Talbot D'Alemberte with a University Advising Award for excellence in undergraduate advising.

Part II:

PROFILE OF THE SUCCESSFUL MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICANT

Completion of the Premedical Requirements

Most medical schools have the same standard list of premedical requirements. With the exception of the Biochemistry sequence, they are also the same classes required prior to taking the MCAT exam and thus should be completed by the end of the junior year. Although most medical schools require the same classes, it is still a good idea to contact each of the schools you are considering or consult the Medical School Admission Requirements book put out by the Association of American Medical Colleges to verify the requirements. The standard list of premedical requirements are:

English	6 Semester Hours
General Biology (For Science Majors With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
General Chemistry (With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
Organic Chemistry (With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
General Physics (With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
Mathematics	6 Semester Hours
Biochemistry	4 Semester Hours
*Genetics	3 Semester Hours
*Psychology	3 Semester Hours

**General Genetics and General Psychology are strongly recommended for the Florida State University College of Medicine*

Here are the specific classes at Florida State University which fulfill the premedical requirements:

Biology

BSC 2010	Biology I	3 Semester Hours
BSC 2010 Lab	Biology I Lab	1 Semester Hour
BSC 2011	Biology II	3 Semester Hours
BSC 2011Lab	Biology II Lab	2 Semester Hours
¹ PCB 3134	Cell Structure and Function	3 Semester Hours

Chemistry

CHM 1045	General Chemistry I	3 Semester Hours
CHM 1045 Lab	General Chemistry I Lab	1 Semester Hour
CHM 1046	General Chemistry II	3 Semester Hours
CHM 1046 Lab	General Chemistry I Lab	1 Semester Hours

Organic Chemistry

CHM 2210	Organic Chemistry I	3 Semester Hours
CHM 2211	Organic Chemistry II	3 Semester Hours
CHM 2211 Lab	Organic Chemistry II Lab	3 Semester Hours

Physics

PHY 2053C	College Physics A (Trig. Based)	4 Semester Hours
PHY 2054C	College Physics B (Trig. Based)	4 Semester Hours

or

PHY 2048C	General Physics A (Calc. Based)	5 Semester Hours
PHY 2049C	General Physics B (Calc. Based)	5 Semester Hours

Note: Either trigonometry-based Physics or calculus-based Physics are acceptable courses as prerequisites to medical school.

Mathematics

MAC 1105	College Algebra	3 Semester Hours
MAC 1140	Precalculus	3 Semester Hours
MAC 1114	Trigonometry	2 Semester Hours
¹ MAC 2311	Calculus I	4 Semester Hours
¹ STA 2171	Biostatistics	4 Semester Hours

or

¹ STA 2122	Applied Statistics	3 Semester Hours
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Biochemistry

² BCH 4624	Human Biochemistry	4 Semester Hours
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Additional Requirement

¹Required by FIU

²Required by FSU and UF

Strong Academic Record

Academic success in medical school is best indicated by a consistently strong undergraduate grade point average (GPA). Medical schools pay close attention to your academic course load and expect to see a full load of courses each semester. There are two exceptions to this statement. The first semester, when you are making the adjustment to college, and the semester you are studying for the MCAT are periods when it is acceptable to enroll for 12-14 hours. There should be an emphasis on science and mathematics courses balanced with non-science courses. The most recent report from the AAMC states the average GPA for FSU students who matriculated into medical school is as follows:

Science (Biology, Chemistry Physics and Math) GPA:	3.6
Total GPA:	3.7

Strong MCAT Scores

The MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test) is a standardized national exam required of all students applying to medical school. The test is offered in over 20 times per year. It is recommended that students register early. The test is made up of four parts: Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences and Writing Sample. The exam tests material covered in required premedical course work. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges' Student Manual, admission officers use the exam to predict success in medical school, to determine students' strong and weak areas and to compare students from different colleges and universities. Performance on the MCAT is also used by admissions committees to determine the likelihood of success on the national licensing exams required to practice medicine in the United States. The most recent report from the AAMC states the average MCAT scores for students who matriculated into a Florida medical school are:

Overall MCAT:	28
Verbal Reasoning:	9
Physical Sciences:	9
Biological Sciences:	10
Essay:	0

Realistic Understanding of the Medical Field

Once it is determined an applicant is academically qualified and proficient in taking standardized tests, it must then be determined how strong his/her motivations are for a career in medicine. The best way to display commitment to a career in medicine is to demonstrate an ongoing interest in the medical field outside of the classroom. By the time you are ready to apply, you should have spent substantial time volunteering, working or shadowing a physician in a variety of medical settings. These settings could include hospitals, nursing homes, doctors' offices, clinics, psychiatric facilities or any other place where medicine happens. Many FSU students volunteer at several local places including Tallahassee Memorial Health Care (TMH), Thagard Student Health Center, Children's Medical Services, Neighborhood Health Services and many more. The Health Professions Advisor can provide ideas and contact names for premedical students, but do not hesitate to research opportunities on your own and seek them out. Many industrious students have found placements with local doctors,

clinics and organizations just by calling around! School breaks are also an excellent time to work one-on-one with a physician from your own community. It is recommended you keep a journal of the time you volunteer. Write down your first impressions, any significant experiences and your opinions and feelings about your time as a volunteer. This information will be extremely valuable when you later prepare for interviews and must describe your experiences in the medical field.

Commitment to Service

Another area where motivation for a career in medicine is determined and evaluated is through the student's demonstrated commitment to service in the community. As a physician, one entire life is devoted to serving others, requiring great sacrifice and a strong devotion to one's career. When a student commits time to others he/she demonstrates this devotion and, at the same time, gains a better understanding about the lives of people from different backgrounds. It is recommended that every premedical student give some time in a service capacity that is interesting and rewarding to them. Local agencies are dependent on volunteers and appreciate the volunteer hours from FSU premedical students. Many students volunteer with the Alzheimers Project of Tallahassee, the American Cancer Society, Big Bend Cares, Big Bend Hospice, Meals on Wheels, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Florida HIV/AIDS Hotline, Planned Parenthood Pregnancy Help and Information Center, and Neighborhood Health Services.

Extracurricular and Leadership Activities

The college experience is unique to each student. As a premedical student it is important to take full advantage of the many opportunities offered at this time in your life. Medical school admissions committees want to see students involved! For some, this may mean joining a sorority or fraternity, and for others a sport or club. It is important to focus on activities outside of school to help you develop and grow as a person.

Also, medical school admission committees look favorably upon roles of leadership. Much can be gained by experiencing the challenges of overseeing peers and taking on projects. Just try to experience life outside of Dirac Science Library. It will help you stay balanced and well rounded!

Research Experience

Finally, research experience is looked upon favorably by some medical school admissions committees. Undergraduate research requires initiative, dedication to science and develops problem-solving skills. There are different ways to obtain research experience such as approaching a professor from whom you have taken a class or one whose research topic is especially interesting to you. One way to learn about the current research of FSU biology professors is to enroll in BSC 3930, Seminar in Biological Frontiers. This pass/fail biology course has a different professor lecture each week on his/her research. You may also contact your major department to learn more on how to get started.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part III:

FRESHMAN YEAR

What You Should be Doing Freshman Year

- Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study
- Make an appointment with the Health Professions Advisor and establish your advising file.
- Attend Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED) Premedical Honor Society, Premedical American Medical Student Association (AMSA), American Medical Women's Association (AMWA), and/or Multicultural Association of Prehealth Students (MAPS) meetings.
- Begin exploring extracurricular, volunteer and community service activities on campus and in the community. Identify summer employment.
- Get to know your professors.

What Every Premed Freshman Should Know

The first year of college is a time of transition. Leaving home and entering college bring many changes in all areas of life including living arrangements, friendships, daily chores, academic expectations and requirements, just to name a few. For most students the first semester is a period of great adjustment and, because of this, it is recommended you focus on making this transition as smooth as possible. Academically, freshmen should not overload themselves. The average course load should range from 12 to 15 hours. It should be set up with the assistance of the Health Professions Advisor and should take into consideration several factors including your academic background and personal course load preference. If you choose less than 15 semester hours, you may want to catch up during the summer and take a few courses at your local community college or get an early start on the nine-hour summer requirement and take classes at a university in the state university system. The main focus for the freshman year should be on academics. If you feel there is time to begin getting involved, you can start by exploring campus activities, volunteer work or part-time job possibilities. The prehealth and premedical student organizations (listed above) welcome freshmen and the regular meetings and various activities offer a great opportunity to meet other premedical students.

Questions and Answers

Can I major in Premed at Florida State?

At Florida State University premed is not a major, but more of a specialization or focus. You must select a major department and meet the degree requirements for that major, while at the same time, work on the premedical courses. For most science majors, the premedical courses already fall within the major curriculum, but for non-science majors, these courses must be completed in addition to major requirements. Biology is still the most popular premedical major.

Do I need to have a 4.0 GPA to get accepted to medical school in Florida?

No. The average GPA for admitted students to medical school is approximately 3.6. You are expected to maintain A's and B's with, of course, the more As the better! Also, remember every grade you make in college is looked at by medical schools, so a few poor grades may not be reflected in a strong GPA, but will be considered in an evaluation of your academic record.

Should I major in Biological Science or choose a non-science major to appear unique or well-rounded?

There are several benefits to majoring in Biological Sciences at FSU as a premedical student. The department is ranked nationally and prepares students well for medical school. The Biological Science curriculum also includes most of the premedical requirements so students do not have to be concerned with incorporating premedical classes into their schedules - it is automatic.

A non-science major does stand out as unique, but the reasons for selecting such a major must not be because the science major is too difficult. A non-science major is a good choice if there is a specific discipline that really interests you and you would like to study this discipline in depth. If you choose a non-science major however, you will also need to incorporate the premedical classes into your schedule each semester, which may require additional time. Also, because the non-science major's science ability is being judged from a limited number of science courses, the non-science major is expected to do exemplary work in the premedical courses.

The best advice is to major in an area that is most interesting to you and one where you will subsequently do well. The AAMC reports that in the 2003 entering class for medical schools nationwide, the entering class was 57% Biology majors, 13% Humanities majors, 13% Physical Science majors and 12% Social Science majors.

Is freshman year too early to start getting involved?

Because the transition to college is different for each individual, it depends on how comfortable you are with your academics. Academics must always come first. If you find yourself with extra time then begin sampling the many extra-curricular, community service and medical opportunities available to you.

Is there a club on campus for premedical students?

Yes! There are at least seven such organizations at Florida State University. Information and registration materials may be picked up in the FSUCOM Health Professions Advising office. Updated information about the following organizations can be found at www.med.fsu.edu/prehealthadvising.

American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

The American Medical Student Association is a pre-medical organization at Florida State University. It is a small community for sophomores, juniors and seniors who have a strong desire to learn about what it takes to become a physician. There are no minimum academic requirements for membership. Volunteering as a group, social activities, guest speakers and field trips are just a few of the activities that take place within AMSA. Membership drives take place at the beginning of each fall.

American Medical Women's Association (AMWA)

The American Medical Women's Association is an organization of women physicians and medical students interested in promoting women's health and the advancement of women in medicine. Since its establishment at Florida State University, the organization, which is open to undergraduate students, has grown in membership, interest, and involvement. Florida State University undergraduate and medical school students are invited to hear speakers discuss various women's health issues and are made aware of volunteer opportunities pertaining to such topics.

In addition to previous goals, we wish to promote a mentoring program between the first year medical school students and the premedical undergraduate students. We strive to foster an environment in which students can draw from the knowledge and experience of their peers.

Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED)

Alpha Epsilon Delta is an honor society for students interested in pursuing a career in the healthcare field. Membership offers undergraduate students the opportunity to develop initiative, leadership and self-education through participation in the activities of the chapter. Meetings include presentations by faculty members, physicians and personnel from various professional schools. In addition to the bi-weekly meetings, students can volunteer in campus and community service organizations.

Multicultural Association of Prehealth Students (MAPS)

MAPS strives to enrich the academic and professional development of its members. The prime mission of MAPS is to enhance the recruitment of under-represented students into the healthcare field and to help members become successful candidates for professional health and medical programs. As MAPS members, students will be eligible to participate in special activities and programs that will strictly focus on helping them accomplish their goals as undergraduate prehealth students. MAPS offers many opportunities to develop leadership skills through volunteer work, community service projects, and tutorial services.

International Medical Outreach (IMO)

The mission of this organization is to provide an international learning experience to a small group of premedical students, providing first hand medical care in countries less advanced.

FSU Volunteer First Responders List

This organization functions as a Basic Life Support Quick Response Unit at FSU. The unit provides a safety net on the FSU campus in case of medical emergencies.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part IV:

SOPHOMORE YEAR

What You Should be Doing Sophomore Year

- Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study
- Make an appointment and check in with the Health Professions Advisor.
- Attend prehealth and premedical organization meetings.
- Commit your time to at least one or two extra-curricular, medical and community service activities.
- Get to know your professors (next year you will need to ask for letters of evaluation).
- Explore research opportunities.

What Every Premed Sophomore Should Know

By the sophomore year you should be feeling more settled at Florida State, knowledgeable about what is expected of you academically and feeling more comfortable with the independence college brings. If you got off to a shaky start, don't throw in the towel just yet. Medical school admissions committees are more understanding of a weaker GPA your freshman year if it is offset by a steady increase in grades the years after. Your course load should be close to 15 semester hours with a good balance between science, mathematics, and liberal studies classes. Since Florida State requires you to complete 9 semester hours in the state university system during a summer, it is recommended you attend classes during the summer between your sophomore and junior years. This is a good way to balance the heavy requirements and complete as much course work before you take the.

Questions and Answers

I have heard Organic Chemistry is a “weed-out” course for premedical students. What advice can you give me about this class?

Organic chemistry is a very challenging class. It is true that admissions committees look closely at these grades when evaluating your transcript. These courses require you to handle a large volume of material, the same requirement for getting through classes in medical school. The organic sequence is extremely time consuming which should be taken into account when setting up your overall schedule. Think of it as a full-time job and give it the time it requires. Remember also, Organic II is dependent on the knowledge from Organic I so it is not recommended you take each part at different universities. Organic I, Organic II and Organic II Lab are required before you take the MCAT. Many of the MCAT questions are phrased as experiments you will have performed in the lab, so be sure to fit the lab in before taking the MCAT.

How important is participating in research with a faculty member and how should I get started?

The importance of having undergraduate research experience varies among medical schools. Most medical schools look favorably upon students with research experience. You can get started by approaching professors and asking if you can take on volunteer work or a Directed Individual Study (DIS) for credit. If you are unsure about whom to approach, you can ask the departmental advisor. Also, working in a professor's lab is one of the best ways to get to know him/her and earn a strong letter of evaluation.

Many of my science courses are in large lecture halls. How can my professors know who I am, let alone write a personal letter about me?

A better question to ask would be, “What can I do so that my professors can come to know me well?” You must make an extra effort to make an impression on a professor. For starters you must attend class regularly and stay alert and interested in the material. Even in the largest lecture classes, professors notice who is there, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed versus who is catching up on missed sleep. Don't be afraid to approach professors with questions or to discuss material covered that day in class. Perhaps a topic will arise that is of particular interest to you. You may wish to do some independent research on this topic and share your findings with the professor.

Many professors will actually interview a student prior to writing a letter of evaluation to get to know you better. You may want to suggest this when you approach a professor for a letter of evaluation. Another way to help the professor get to know you beyond your performance in his/her class is to provide him/her with additional information. You may want to include a resume, a mini-auto biography or your medical school essay along with your evaluation form (forms can be picked up at the Health Professions Advising office). Again, this makes the evaluator aware of your outside interests and activities. When personal information is included with an academic evaluation, it adds a deeper dimension to the letter of evaluation, thus making it stronger. This part of the application process is one of the most challenging for students, but there is no way to get around it.

I know it is important to volunteer, but how much time should I commit?

Quality is more important than quantity when it comes to medical experience and community service. As a general rule you should commit at least two to six hours each

week for the year prior to application. You should select at least one activity where you are making an impact and the work is making an impact on you. The length of commitment will be looked at and what you gained will be evaluated from the content of your essays and interviews when you are applying to medical school. It is important to take an active roll in your volunteer work. You should start out by earning the trust of the department or organization and then, as time passes, take initiative to gain more responsibility and exposure.

Do I have to volunteer or can I get paid for my medical experience?

Paid work will also enhance your application, although it is challenging to find positions in the medical field without certifications or years of experience. Some students will begin as volunteers and then later get promoted to paid positions. If you are seeking paid employment you should put together a resume (the Career Center can help) and visit different doctors' offices and clinics.

How do medical schools view employment?

Many college students must work while they are in school. Work is looked upon favorably by medical school admissions committees. However, when work interferes with academics, it becomes another issue. Some committees look at grades in light of work responsibilities, but many do not. Before work responsibilities get in the way of academics, it is important to plan ahead. Be sure to learn of all financial aid deadlines so you can take full advantage of assistance available to you. You should visit the FSU STAR scholarship center (located in the Financial Aid office) and research special scholarships. If you must work, take a lighter academic load during the semester and continue with classes throughout the summers. Many students take summers off from school and work to save for the year. If working does not interfere with your grades, all the better, an admissions committee will view this in a positive light.

Should I take an elective such as a language course pass/fail?

No. Medical school selection committees do not like to see any shortcuts. Taking a course pass/fail can be viewed as such. Besides, knowing another language will be very useful as a practicing physician as our nation is made up of individuals who are not native speakers of English.

If I am struggling in a course should I just drop it or give up?

No. Never give up in a class. When you submit your medical school applications, your GPA will be calculated separately from the FSU GPA. If you are struggling in a class, you need to discuss the situation with the instructor, seek out a study group or inquire about any tutoring and special help sessions available to you.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part V:

JUNIOR YEAR

What You Should be Doing Junior Year

- Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study, Study
- Make an appointment and check in with the Health Professions Advisor.
- Attend prehealth and premedical organization meetings and consider taking on a leadership role.
- Commit your time to at least one or two extra-curricular, medical and community service activities.
- Start or continue with research opportunities.
- Begin preparing for the MCAT.
- Begin planning where you would like to apply.
- Register on-line for the MCAT.
- Download an American Medical Colleges Application Service (AMCAS) worksheet from the AAMC website and submit the AMCAS application during early summer after your junior year.

What Every Premed Junior Should Know

Junior year is finally here - the most significant year as a premedical student. This year will be the busiest yet. You will be preparing for and taking the MCAT, selecting your list of medical schools and collecting letters of evaluation. You will also be submitting your AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service) application, the standard one-time application for most medical schools. Because the application process to medical school begins in June, this is the last full academic year admissions officers have to review when making their evaluations. This is a good reason for it to be the strongest year yet. Academically, the junior year should include the final courses required prior to taking the MCAT. Continue taking a full load. However, the semester you are preparing for the MCAT should be planned very carefully.

The most important junior year advice for you is not to procrastinate. Timing is essential. In every aspect of the application process, the earlier you do what is required of you, the higher your chance for success. Any delay on your part will put off the review of your application. After many years you have worked towards this goal, it would be a shame to risk your chances for acceptance because of procrastination. Good luck as you begin this challenging, yet thrilling journey.

Medical College Admissions Test: Questions and Answers

I have heard a great deal about the MCAT. Could you give me more details on this exam?

The MCAT (Medical School Admissions Test) is an exam required by most medical schools for admission. The test required reading for all students planning on taking the MCAT and a complete description called MCAT Essentials is available at www.aamc.org/mcat. According to the AAMC's Student Manual, admission officers use the exam to predict success in medical school, to determine students' strong and weak areas, and to compare students from different colleges and universities. The exam tests your knowledge of biology, chemistry and physics. This means you will have to review previously learned material as well as study any topics your courses did not cover. It also requires the use of problem solving and critical thinking skills. The exam consists of four sections: Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, Writing Sample, and Biological Sciences. All sections are multiple choice except the Writing Sample section. The total test time for the computer-based MCAT is 4 hours and 50 minutes.

The Verbal Reasoning section has 40 questions and lasts 60 minutes. The topics of the passages are either humanities, social science or natural science (in other words, sciences not covered by other sections of the MCAT, like geology and astronomy). This section does not require you to have previous knowledge of the material, but to extract the information from the reading needed to answer the questions. It tests your reading comprehension and critical thinking.

The Physical Sciences section covers physics and general chemistry. It contains 52 questions and is 70 minutes long. This section does not require you to have previous knowledge in these areas. However, it does not test upper level course work. Think of this section as a final exam in these courses and know the material as well (or better) than you did for their respective finals. The reading comprehension questions are different from those in Verbal Reasoning. To answer the questions in this section you must apply your own knowledge of the subject to the new information given in the reading passages. In other words, the material in the passage does not necessarily have all the information needed to answer the questions. For example, you must have a broad understanding of how acids and bases react and apply it to the new information provided in the passage. The discrete questions are more straight forward multiple choice questions. For example - "What is Al? - a metal, non metal, colloid, or proton" (but not that easy!).

The Writing Sample section requires you to write two essays, 30 minutes in length. It is used to see how well you can compose a concise essay on a given statement. An example of a statement is "Patient confidentiality must never be violated." The directions will tell you that you must explain the statement, give an example of when the opposite would be true, and discuss when the statement or its antithesis might be true. This section does not require previous knowledge. The MCAT Student Manual states the function of the Writing Sample is to evaluate your ability to construct a

main idea, to use supporting data logically, and to write clearly, following the correct rules of writing.

The Biological Science section covers biology and organic chemistry. This section consists of 52 questions in 70 minutes. The emphasis is on biology — 65% biology and 45% organic chemistry. Also like the Physical Science section, you need to come to the exam knowing certain material in each area. Again, think of it as a final exam. This section does not require any upper level organic chemistry course work, however, some upper level biology courses are recommended. The introductory biology classes at Florida State University cover the basic concepts for the MCAT, but it is still recommended you complete additional upper-level biology electives including courses in microbiology, genetics, vertebrate physiology, cell biology and biochemistry.

How is the MCAT scored?

The MCAT score consists of a number and letter. The number score represents your score on the Verbal Reasoning, Physical Science and Biological Science sections. The total possible score is 45 points - 15 points for each section. First, you are given a raw score that consists of the total number of correct answers per section. There is no penalty for incorrect or unanswered questions. Therefore, it is better to guess than to leave an answer blank. The raw score is converted to a number score. The conversion varies between different test dates to ensure there are no differences in the overall scores from slight test variations. In other words, each time the MCAT is given, it is graded on a curve. You are also given a percentile score to determine how you scored compared to others who took the same exam.

The Writing Sample is graded using a letter scale. The scale ranges from J to T, with J being the worst score and T being the best score. (A good way to remember is to think J stands for “junk” and T for “tops.” Your essays are graded based on whether they include the various criteria mentioned above and not on whether the reader agrees with your positions. Each of your essays is scored by two readers using a six point scale. If the two scores differ by more than one point, the essay is graded by a third reader who decides the final grade. The number grade is then converted to a letter grade.

When should I take the MCAT?

You should plan to take the MCAT during the year you will be applying to medical school. For example, if you plan to begin medical school in the summer (FSUCOM) or fall of 2010, you should plan to take the MCAT in 2009.

The decision on when to take the MCAT should be carefully considered and discussed with the Health Professions Advisor. It is advisable to take the MCAT when the premed prerequisites have been completed and as early into the application process as possible for two reasons. First, applications to most medical schools are reviewed on a rolling admissions basis. When completed applications are submitted to medical schools, they are reviewed on a “first come, first serve” basis. If you take the MCAT early into the admission cycle, your scores will be reported to the medical schools in June. This makes your application complete in the beginning of the cycle and immediately ready for review. This increases your chances for acceptance because, as an early applicant, you are vying for one in many available seats, compared to later in the cycle, when you are competing for one of the few remaining seats. It is also advisable to take the MCAT early in the event that your scores are lower than you anticipated or circumstances arise which make it difficult for you to do well (i.e., sickness, etc.). This way you can retake the exam if you need to improve your scores.

For some students, taking the exam after the summer session is the preferred choice. The summer provides extra time to study or to complete the pre-MCAT classes. If you do decide to take the MCAT later into the admission cycle it is strongly advised to still submit your AMCAS application in June. This will allow schools to create your file and process your application materials. When your MCAT scores are reported, your admissions file will be ready for review without any delay. Although your application will be behind those that took an earlier MCAT, it is still better to submit all application materials as early as possible.

Do I need to prepare for the MCAT?

As stated earlier, think of the MCAT as a final exam covering the material from all of your science classes. It should not be taken lightly. You are required to have a broad knowledge base for the exam. The questions are not all common sense, nor can you find the answers in the reading passages provided. This is obviously true for the discrete questions. In addition, the MCAT is weighted very heavily by admission committees. Think of it as being almost equal to your GPA. With this said, the MCAT must be taken seriously. Study and give it the time it deserves.

When you decide to take the MCAT, you should go in with the mindset that this is the only time you will take it. Do not take it to “see how you score.” MCAT provides admission committees with the scores from all of your attempts. Medical schools do not look favorably on whimsical attempts at the exam because it may appear you did not approach it in a serious way. If you would like to take a full practice test, the AAMC has released several full length exams. These can be ordered with a form in the MCAT registration booklet or through the AAMC.

The Computer Based MCAT (CBT)

Beginning in 2007 the MCAT will no longer be offered in the paper and pencil format. The exam will only be offered in a computer-based format. It is anticipated to be offered up to 28 times per year as opposed to the traditional April and August test dates. It is expected that the test will be shorter in length due to the elimination of procedures used to assure test takers identity and exam security. The test scores will be reported much quicker to both the students and AMCAS. Because of the format changes, students need to become familiar with the computer-based exam-like environment. It is expected that there will be a test center in Tallahassee offering the MCAT several times during the year.

How can I prepare for the MCAT exam?

There are a variety of study methods for the MCAT. The method you choose depends on how you study best and the amount of money you plan to spend. It is not recommended you only study old class notes and textbooks. For example, the biology section does not require knowledge of photosynthesis, although this is a large section covered in Biology I. Therefore, be selective about what topics you review. Also, for example, if you have not taken a human physiology course, you may not have notes on the endocrine system. Finally, the material covered in your college courses might not have been presented in the same manner required to do well on the exam. Therefore, the best way to familiarize yourself with the content of the MCAT exam is to refer to the MCAT syllabus found in the MCAT Student Manual. The manual offers information on the MCAT and contains a general syllabus of what topics you should master for the exam and can be downloaded at www.aamc.org/students/mcat/studentmanual/start.htm.

There are a variety of MCAT review books available in bookstores and in the Prehealth Professions Advising Office. Before you purchase these books though, it would be wise to compare them to the MCAT syllabus found in the MCAT Student Manual. Although these books offer a review of the required science material, they vary in the amount of detail they cover. Be sure you choose a book that will prepare you properly.

The use of practice exams can also be very helpful. These give you an idea of how the questions will be phrased on the real exam. MCAT has released three full-length exams as well as some practice questions. Taking the practice exams also allows you to time yourself. Remember the exam is approximately 5 1/2 hours long (including breaks), thus pacing yourself is very important. It is helpful to know how long you have per question, since this will prevent you from running out of time or rushing through the exam unnecessarily. The store-bought MCAT books may contain these released exams and/or practice questions as well as some extra questions. However, not all of the extra questions may be “MCAT style” and although it is good to test yourself it may not give you the proper preparation.

Since the Verbal Reasoning section is not knowledge-based, it is not necessary to review specific material for this section. All the information required to answer the questions is found in the reading passages provided. However, it is still recommended you prepare for this section. Different sections require different skills. Take the practice exams and questions to be comfortable with the format and style of the questions and to increase your critical thinking skills.

Like Verbal Reasoning, the Writing Sample is also not knowledge-based. It may be helpful for you to write out a few of the essays to practice writing in their format. Also, some of the store-bought books offer suggestions on how to write the MCAT essays well in one draft since you do not have time for many revisions.

Should I enroll in a prep course for the MCAT?

In deciding whether to take a review course, there are a few factors you should consider. The courses can be quite expensive but some students find them very helpful. The courses generally have in-class instruction or review of the material. They also offer many practice questions that they have created based on previous tests. These “MCAT-style” questions and exams range from short tests on specific topics to full length exams and offer very good preparation. Generally, students who have used the prep courses say you get out of them what you put into them. Simply going to the class will not help you as much as if you use the study material provided by the courses. Some students also say the courses help you plan a study schedule and may motivate you to study more. However, you may not need this if you have no problem motivating yourself. Keep in mind though, that no prep course can prepare you for an exam if you do not put the time and effort into studying and using practice exams. In the Tallahassee area, there are several MCAT prep tutoring classes during the spring semester through the Health Professions Advising Office. Financial aid is available for students who receive financial aid from Florida State University. Students interested in applying for aid should contact the test centers prior to the start of the course.

How do I register for the MCAT?

Registration for the MCAT is done on line through the AAMC website (www.aamc.org/MCAT). The deadline to register for the test is several weeks before the test date so it is important to register early. You can also order a registration booklet by writing to MCAT Registration, The American College Testing Program, P.O. Box 414, Iowa City, IA 52243, or by calling 319-337-1357.

How much does it cost to register for the MCAT and is there a way to receive financial aid?

The 2009 exam costs \$225 and the price will most likely increase in the coming years. Fee reductions are available for those with financial need. Applications for the fee waivers are found in the registration packet and must be submitted earlier than the regular deadline since approval must be completed before registering for the MCAT. If you qualified in 2009, the exam would have cost \$85.

How do schools receive my score?

Most medical schools belong to a central application processing agency called AMCAS, American Medical College Application Service. To apply to medical schools, you must complete an AMCAS application. In the application you designate the schools where you would like your application sent. AMCAS copies your application and forwards it, along with all your MCAT scores, to the designated schools. By registering for the MCAT you are automatically releasing your scores to the AAMC.

For students applying to non-AMCAS schools such as osteopathic, medical, podiatry or veterinary school, MCAT scores can be sent without an additional fee. After the MCAT score is received, go to the AAMC website (www.aamc.org/students/MCAT/start.htm) and go to **MCAT Testing History (THx)** and **Online Score Release**. An AAMC login user name and password can be set up and the score can be sent without a fee to a non-AMCAS participating institution.

Should I release my scores to the Health Professions Advisor?

Yes, we encourage you to release your scores so it can be used in advising you as well as compiling data on Florida State premedical students.

When do I get the results?

Approximately 2-3 weeks after the exam.

Should I retake the exam if I do not do well?

Deciding to retake the MCAT can be a difficult dilemma and should be discussed with the Health Professions Advisor. All scores of students applying to medical school will be sent to the medical schools by the testing service. Different schools look at multiple MCAT scores differently. They may look at both equally or look for improvements. Generally it is recommended you retake the test if you do not score at least an 8 on each section.

The Admissions Process: Questions and Answers

How do I apply to medical school?

Applying to medical school is not an easy process. There are quite a few steps, many essays, and even more forms. Obviously the more schools to which you apply, the more forms and essays there are to juggle. However, if you made it through the last three years of college to get to this point, it should not be too bad.

Most medical schools belong to an application service called AMCAS, American Medical College Application Service. This is a centralized application service where you complete a computerized application and submit it to AMCAS along with a designation form listing where you would like the application sent. AMCAS then sends it to these designated schools. The schools review the content of the application and make a decision whether to send you a secondary or supplemental application. Most schools

have a loose cut-off for GPA and MCAT scores and send the majority of the applicants a secondary application. Upon receiving your secondary application, the schools will reevaluate your entire application and will then decide if you appear to be a match for their program. If you fall within the top group of candidates you will be invited for an interview. If offered an interview, your chances for acceptance rise significantly.

The fee for applications for the 2009 entering class is \$160 for the first designated school and \$30 for each additional school. Those unable to pay this fee may apply for a waiver through the AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP). Information about this program can be found at www.aamc.org/fap.

How do I know which schools are non-AMCAS schools and how do I apply to these schools?

To apply to any of the non-AMCAS schools you must contact each school directly and request an application. The list of the AAMC member non-AMCAS schools include:

University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine, Kansas City, Missouri

University of North Dakota School of Medicine, Grand Forks, North Dakota

To apply to any of the six allopathic medical schools in Texas, students should contact the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS) at www.utsystem.edu/tmdsas.

Texas A&M University College of Medicine, College Station, Texas

Texas Tech University Health Science Center School of Medicine, Lubbock, Texas

University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas Southwestern Medical School, Dallas, Texas

University of Texas Medical School at Galveston, Galveston, Texas

University of Texas Medical School at Houston, Houston, Texas

University of Texas Medical School at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas

When should I apply to medical schools?

The AMCAS applications can be accessed through the AAMC website at www.aamc.org, in the beginning of May and can be submitted from the end of June until the deadline set by the individual school. Different schools have different deadlines, ranging from October through January, so it is important that you know the deadline for the schools where you will be applying. The AAMC's book, *Medical School Admission Requirements* (MSAR) includes the schools' addresses, phone numbers, and deadlines. For non-AMCAS schools, be sure you contact the schools early (in the late spring or early summer) to give them sufficient time to send you the application without missing their deadline.

For most schools, though, it is important to apply as early as possible. Many schools have a rolling admissions application process. This means schools begin evaluating, interviewing and accepting applicants as the applications arrive. You can't assume the medical schools will receive your information as soon as it is postmarked, however. When you first submit your application to AMCAS, it can take from four to six weeks for AMCAS to process your application and forward it to your designated schools. As previously stated, it is relatively less competitive early in the application

season when you are vying for a position in a class of many with few people already accepted, than later when you are trying for one of the few spots left. Some schools have filled all their interview spots by December.

I heard about an Early Decision program. Can you tell me more about it?

If you are certain of the school you wish to attend and are a competitive applicant, you can apply Early Decision. This option allows you to apply to your first choice medical school in the summer and be considered for admission before the majority of the applications are reviewed. You can only apply to one school through Early Decision and if you are accepted you must attend that school. For AMCAS schools, you complete the AMCAS application and designate Early Decision. Submit these as early as possible to when the AMCAS application process opens. You should also contact the medical school directly for special instructions for Early Decision candidates. You are not eligible to apply to other schools through the normal application process until your school's Early Decision process is over. If you are accepted through Early Decision, then the application process is completed for you. If you are not accepted, then AMCAS will release you to apply to other medical schools.

The advantage of early decision is that you save yourself time, effort, and money by applying to your preferred school. If you are not accepted, the disadvantage is that your regular application cannot be sent to other schools until AMCAS releases you, which can happen as early as mid-summer and as late as early fall when the early decision admission program is completed. Before you choose this option, be sure you carefully evaluate the timing of the admissions process and be certain you are ready to commit yourself to that one school. Not all medical schools offer early decision programs so be sure to check the AAMC Medical School Admissions Requirements book for more information on the AMCAS and non-AMCAS Early Decision programs.

Where should I apply to medical schools?

The highest percentage of Florida State University students who matriculate into medical school attend one of the six Florida allopathic (MD) medical programs or two osteopathic (D.O.) schools. These are: Florida State University College of Medicine, University of Florida College of Medicine, University of Miami School of Medicine, University of South Florida College of Medicine, University of Central Florida College of Medicine, Florida International University College of Medicine, Nova Southeastern College of Osteopathic Medicine and Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine. Like most state institutions, these schools primarily accept applicants from the state of Florida because they are state-funded. Therefore, it is highly recommended you apply to all four of these programs. Beyond Florida schools, there has been no consistent pattern of matriculants to other medical schools to offer you a recommended list. You should do your research and consider many factors when looking at medical schools, in fact, an entire handbook could be written on this topic alone. You must decide what factors are important to you.

Can you tell me more about letters of evaluation for medical school?

As part of the medical school application, you are required to provide letters of evaluation. The numbers and types of letters of evaluation required by each medical school may vary. When applying to medical schools in Florida, you will need to obtain two letters from either biology, chemistry, physics or mathematic faculty and an additional letter from another professor outside these areas. You may also need two or three character letters (employers, physicians, volunteer coordinators, community leaders, etc.). It is important to select individuals who know you well enough to write

you strong letters. Also remember, Teaching and Graduate Assistants are not faculty and some schools will not accept letters from TAs as a substitute for faculty letters. Even if these letters are accepted, they are almost never given the weight of a letter from a professor.

As a service to premedical students, evaluation letter files can be established in the FSUCOM Prehealth Professions Advising Office and mailed directly to medical schools free of charge. By setting up the letter of evaluation file, you simplify the process for yourself and your evaluators.

Instead of having to send a letter to each school, your evaluator sends one general letter to the Prehealth Professions Advising Office. To establish a file in the Advising Office, you must make an appointment to set up a file and complete a waiver granting permission to keep and duplicate your letters. Standard evaluation forms and envelopes addressed to the advising office are made available to premedical students at the front desk. Once obtained, the evaluation forms must be distributed to the individuals whom you have selected to write your letters. The completed forms must then be returned (by the evaluator) to the Prehealth Professions Advising Office where they will be placed in your file. During the application process, when you would like to have your letters sent out, you must come into the office and complete a form requesting and authorizing your letters be mailed out to each medical school.

All letters of evaluation should be typed neatly on formal letterhead and should be general. **Some evaluators see the Florida State University form and address the letter specifically to the Florida State College of Medicine which is inappropriate if you wish to send the same letter to other medical programs.**

Choosing a Medical School

Teaching Style

Traditionally the first two years of medical school are spent in large classroom lectures. Recently, however, there has been a trend to change the method of teaching. Instead of the usual lecture style of teaching, some schools incorporate Problem Based Learning (PBL). In PBL, the class is divided into small discussion groups. A patient case is presented to the group and students learn by researching the patient's medical problems. Many medical schools use a combination of PBL and lecture - some relying on one style more than the other.

Another new approach to learning is the integrated curriculum. In this format, your courses cover the major organ systems concurrently. In other words, when you are studying the anatomy of the heart in Gross Anatomy, you are also studying the biochemistry of the heart and the development of the heart in Biochemistry and Embryology, respectively.

Emphasis on Research or Clinical Aspects of Medicine

Some medical schools have a stronger reputation as a research facility while others are known for producing top-notch clinicians. Some research oriented schools have research as a component of the medical school curriculum. If you are interested in participating in research, an MD/Ph.D. program might interest you. At the other extreme, clinically oriented schools might offer more opportunities for patient contact in the first two years (see Clinical Exposure below). For more information on individual schools, the Health Professions Advising Office has current medical school catalogues that you can compare.

Clinical Exposure in the First and Second Years

As stated earlier, traditionally in medical school, the first two years students are engaged in course work and the second two years are spent seeing patients in rotations in the hospital. It was a common complaint among medical students, however, that the first two years were “dry” and they wanted more contact with patients in these years. Now, many schools offer students a break from the traditional first and second year classwork although the amount and setting vary among schools. Some schools include physical diagnosis classes to learn the basics of patient examination. In addition, at some schools, students have the opportunity to examine “real” patients, not just fellow medical students.

Rotation Emphasis

During the third and fourth years, students rotate through the various medical areas. During the third year, most schools have required rotations for students. However, the amount of time spent in each area varies by school. For example, some schools stress primary care and might require students to spend more time in rotations through these areas. The content of the fourth year also varies among schools. Some have specific rotation requirements the entire year while others allocate the entire year for elective rotations depending on individual students’ interest areas. Some schools offer rotations away from the medical center including overseas, rural, or inner-city areas.

Residency Placement Rate

Upon request, each school can provide the percentage of students who get their first, second or third choice of residency programs. You can also look at where the students are going for residency to see the quality of the residency programs.

Reputation

Some premedical students are interested in the reputation of certain medical schools. This can be difficult to determine since there is no official ranking. *US News and World Report* determines their own ranking of graduate schools, which is usually published in March. Also, the book, *Educational Ranking Annual* by Lynn Hattendorf (found in the Reference section of Strozier library), offers its own rankings. When considering these rankings, though, investigate what factors they used to rank the schools. Sometimes the factors they use to rate schools (e.g., research funding) are not equally important to every student and may not directly impact medical education as other more important characteristics. It is difficult to quantify a medical education so be aware of what factors are used in the rankings.

Hospital Affiliation

Medical schools vary in their association with different types of hospitals. Often private hospitals are better staffed and offer more instruction to medical students. Public hospitals offer students more hands-on training. There are advantages to each type of hospital and many schools are affiliated with both types of hospitals. Also, medical schools with urban medical centers have more trauma cases than smaller cities.

Tuition and Cost of Living

If you attend a private medical school or a state school as an out-of-state resident, tuition will be much higher than if you attend one of your state schools. In addition, you must also add in the cost of living expenses (rent, food, entertainment, etc.). If you are planning on securing loans, this could be an extra \$20,000 a year you assume in

debt. Nevertheless, if you would like to attend a school with higher than average tuition and cost of living expenses, most schools state that you should not have a problem finding loan sources to pay for your education.

Scholarships and Grants

Some schools offer scholarships and grants to help students with the high cost of a medical education. You should contact individual schools for more information. Some are need based while others are academic based.

Location

You should consider such factors as distance from family, if you prefer to attend school in an urban or rural environment and perhaps the climate of the state.

I heard it costs a great deal to apply to medical school. How much should I budget?

Each step of the application process costs money. The AMCAS application costs \$160 plus \$30 for each additional school. Secondary or formal applications can cost from \$20 to \$100 depending on the individual school. Also, interviews can drain the wallet. If the school is within driving distance you can save money by not flying. Most schools give you at least two weeks' notice when they schedule the interview so, if you must fly, the cost of the airplane ticket can be reduced. Many schools are willing to reschedule your appointment, especially if you are traveling from a distance. To bring down the costs of the interviews for you, some schools have medical students who have volunteered to let you stay at their homes to avoid the cost of a hotel. This can be a benefit by allowing you time to talk to a student, especially one that is not associated with the admissions committee. Also for the interviews, you will need to buy a nice business suit and have money for daily expenses such as parking and food. One more note - unfortunately, the interview requests do not arrive in any particular order. In other words, you might get asked to an interview at a long shot school quite a distance away or your last choice school before you hear from your state schools or your first choice school. You might have to spend the money to interview at the less favorable school just because you have not yet heard from your top choices.

What should I write in the Personal Comments section of the AMCAS application?

The personal comments section is a one-page essay on any topic you choose. This essay is your opportunity to let the admissions committees see who you are and what you think. There are no instructions given about the topic. Some people use it to explain why they want to be a doctor, while others tell meaningful life experiences. It can include anything you want them to know about you and your motivations for a career in medicine. If you would like to see some sample essays, you can find examples in books on the application process to medical school. You can also visit the Prehealth Professions Advising Office where samples of actual essays from former FSU students (these students gave their full consent) are available in our resource library. The Reading/Writing Center, located in room 222 of the Williams Building, offers help to students in writing the professional Personal Essay.

Remember, this is the most significant essay you will write up to this point in your academic career! It will be read by every admissions committee and can be the deciding factor in whether or not you receive an interview. Because this essay is so important, you should give yourself plenty of time to write it. Get advice from your parents, friends, relatives, professors and advisor. Have it proofed for mistakes and

also ask for honest feedback on their impressions of you from the essay. Nothing looks worse to an admissions committee than a poor essay, especially one with grammatical or spelling errors. The personal essay is your opportunity to set yourself apart from other applicants.

How will I know if the school received my application?

When you send off the secondary application, it is a good idea to send it registered mail. This will enable you to have a record that the school received your application. Again, it is advisable to copy all materials before they are sent in case they are misplaced by the school (it has been known to happen). Once your letters of evaluation and your secondary application have been sent, you might want to call the school to make sure your file is complete. Some schools will send you a postcard or email stating either that your file is complete or incomplete. Once you send off your secondary application (which should be sent back as quickly as possible) you must sit and wait to hear from the schools. If they are immediately interested in you, they will ask you to come for an interview. However, they might hold your application to compare you with other applicants before deciding to ask you to come for an interview. Although this can be a very stressful waiting period, it is important that you do not hassle schools by continuing to call and check on the status of your application. The contact person may remember who has been a nuisance and may mention this to an admissions committee member.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part VI:

SENIOR YEAR

What You Should be Doing Senior Year

- Make an appointment and check in with the Health Professions Advisor.
- Attend prehealth and premedical organization meetings and consider taking on a leadership role.
- Commit your time to at least one or two extra-curricular, medical and community service activities.
- Collect final group of letters of evaluation.
- Start or continue with research opportunities.
- Submit all application materials as early as possible (as soon as you receive them).
- Attend an Interview Workshop in the Health Professions Advising Office.
- Select the medical school you wish to attend.

What Every Premed Senior Should Know

Senior year is a year filled with many ups and downs. The beginning of the year brings heavy time pressures. It seems that all the secondary applications are due on the same day coinciding with your first big biochemistry exam. In spite of these stressful conditions, it is still critical that you turn everything in as quickly as possible. Most schools follow a rolling admissions application process. Again, this means they begin evaluating, interviewing and accepting applicants as the applications arrive. It is relatively less competitive early in the application season when you are vying for a position in a class with few people already accepted, than later when you are trying for one of the few remaining slots. Thus, any delay on your part will put off the review of your application. After the many years you have worked toward this goal, it would be a shame to risk your chances for acceptance because of procrastination.

Once you have returned all the application materials to the medical schools, you enter a waiting period. For many students this period is even more difficult than the crunch period at the beginning of the application process. Your application to medical

school is completely out of your hands and you must wait. Depending on the time of application, you could hear from medical schools as early as August and as late as the following summer.

You will eventually hear from each school and may be forced to choose among several offers or be thankful for the one. You may not get accepted this year and will be faced with the decision of applying next year. There will surely be many questions during this period. We at the Prehealth Professions Advising Office would like you to know that even though you may be finished with planning your classes, we are here to discuss any issues that may present themselves this year. We wish you the best as your last year as a premedical student unfolds.

Questions and Answers

I applied to several schools and have only heard that my application is complete. Does this mean I will not be granted any interviews and should I call to ask?

It is normal to submit your AMCAS and secondary application materials and wait anywhere from several days to several weeks before hearing from a medical school. Most medical school admissions offices receive thousands of applications with few personnel to process these applications.

Once you receive notification (usually in the form of a postcard) that your application is complete, you must then wait to hear from the school regarding an interview. Again, this may be anywhere from several days to several weeks.

Calling in regard to an application or a possible interview is not recommended unless a long period of time has passed since submitting application materials. It can be viewed as pushy and may work against you in the admissions process.

I received a letter today inviting me for a medical school interview - should I take this as a good sign?

Congratulations - once a school offers you an interview they believe, based on all the information you have submitted, you are a qualified candidate for their medical school. Once you receive an interview, your chances for acceptance rise dramatically. The interview is the opportunity for the medical school and you to determine if you are a match for one another. You should take the interview very seriously, prepare well and dress for success (both men and women should wear suits).

How is an interview day set up?

Most interview days begin with a general information session on the school itself. It is important to listen closely and key in on the speaker's message about the mission of the medical school program. You may want to include these points when asked why you chose their medical program. Most likely you will be given a tour of the medical school facility and affiliated hospital(s) and will be offered a sit-down lunch.

Interviews will take place with representatives from the selection committee, usually comprised of faculty members, program administrators, physicians and medical students. You must convince your interviewers you are the right match for their medical school program.

How should I best prepare for my interviews?

You should plan to spend some time in preparation for your interviews. Many students make the mistake of assuming that interviews are a minor aspect of the

application process. They also believe there is really nothing they can do to prepare. There is a great deal you can do and if you prepare well and practice, we guarantee you will have a significantly better interview than your competitors. In addition, the Health Professions Advising Office offers interview workshops during the fall semester. In addition, the FSU Career Center offers mock interviews in both fall and spring semesters. Information can be found at www.career.fsu.edu/mock_interview.html. The following is a list of steps to help you better prepare for your interviews:

Step 1 - What are your motivations and reasons for pursuing a career in medicine?

You will undoubtedly be asked why you have made this decision. It is important you look at the key events or relationships that have influenced this decision and give a great deal of thought to how they have affected you. Have you wanted to be a doctor since your first game of “Operation” years ago, or did the illness of someone close to you inspire your decision? Medical school admissions committees want to know these details, so it is important you have thought about them before you are required to explain them to a medical school selection committee member. Typical questions you may be asked in regards to your motivations for a career in medicine include:

Why do you want to become a doctor?

When did you decide you wanted to enter the medical field?

Who has had the most influence in your making this decision?

If you do not get accepted to medical school this year, what will you do?

Step 2 - Analyze yourself in light of specific qualities and significant events that have shaped your life.

The committees are very interested in getting to know you on a personal level. They are interested in learning about your upbringing, your family and important events that have shaped you as a young adult. They want to know how you spend your free time, what issues are important to you and how you see the world. Set aside some time to think about these topics. It is often difficult because these are topics we usually take for granted. Each of us is a unique individual and this is your opportunity to show your qualities to the selection committee. Typical questions you may be asked include:

Tell me about yourself.

How are you similar and different from your parents?

What do you do for fun?

How would your friends describe you?

How have you changed since you started college?

Describe your biggest strength and weakness.

Step 3 - What have been your experiences in the medical field?

This is your chance to talk about your hands-on knowledge of the medical field. You should recount specific examples from your time spent observing volunteering or working in medicine. This is the time to go back and review your journal entries describing your volunteer work from the past few years. Talk about aspects of medicine you enjoyed or did not enjoy, doctors you look up to and ways you feel you

can make a difference. Also, you can use memorable, relevant experiences from your own or a family member's medical treatment, influential books or movies and friends or relatives who have worked in medicine. Finally, this is the time the interviewers will be looking for an understanding of the medical field so your answers should be realistic and mature. Typical questions you may be asked in regard to your knowledge of the medical field include:

How have you gained insight into the medical field?

What has been your most positive experience in medicine?

What was the most difficult experience and what would you do differently if you were in control of the situation?

Have you read any books on the medical field?

Is there a particular area of medicine that interests you at this point?

Step 4 - How have you demonstrated responsibility and commitment up to now?

Medical school is known for presenting students with many challenges and hardships. It is important you be equipped to handle these. The best way to demonstrate your commitment is to give examples of when you were faced with difficulties and overcame them. For some, the biggest challenge could have been a difficult course and for others it could be a personal tragedy. Regardless of the actual event, it is important to ponder the lessons you learned and how you will apply these to future difficult situations. Typical questions you may be asked include:

What was your most difficult class in college and why was it a difficult class?

What is your biggest accomplishment and why are you most proud of it?

Give me two examples where you faced challenges but did not give up.

How do you handle stress?

Outside of school, describe a time where you made a commitment to something and followed through.

Describe a time when you helped someone who really needed your help.

Step 5 - Brush up on the school itself.

It is very important you are knowledgeable about the medical school where you are interviewing. You should review the catalogue and pay particular attention to the mission of the school, how each year's curriculum is set up and the unique elements of the program. Based on this information, you should sit down and comprise a list of specific questions regarding the information you uncovered. Most interviews end with, "Do you have any questions about our school?", and it helps to prepare beforehand a well thought out question or two. Typical questions you may be asked in regard to your knowledge of the school include:

Why do you want to attend this medical school?

What do you think you will gain from this type of curriculum?

Summary on Interviews

The interview is a very important element in the application process and should be taken seriously, however, it is important to relax and be yourself. The interview is an

opportunity for the admissions committees to confirm you are an interesting person who is pursuing medicine for all the right reasons. Take time to think about how all the pieces fit together. Beyond that, all you can do is look at the interview process as an opportunity to talk about what you have worked hard for all this time.

I received a letter in the mail telling me I was on hold at my first choice medical school. What does this mean?

Being put on hold means the medical school selection committee could not come to an immediate decision regarding your application. Many students go from the hold status to acceptance within weeks or months and other students are never accepted. If you are placed on hold, it is important you periodically update your file with new information such as an updated transcript or a list of new honors and awards. All contact should be in writing so that any admissions personnel reviewing your file will have access to this new information.

I had been placed on hold at a medical school and received a letter telling me I was now on a waiting list. What is the difference between hold and the waiting list?

When a medical school class is full, the waiting list is established to fill seats if they become vacant before the beginning of school. Many times students give up an acceptance at one medical school to attend another that notified them later in the process. This frees up a seat and goes to the first person on a waiting list. Medical schools rarely tell the student where they are ranked on the waiting list, however, many will give this information to the premedical advisor. If you are placed on a waiting list, you should consult with the Health Professions Advisor.

Do you know of any medical school scholarships?

There are many federal, state and local scholarship programs for medical students and the Prehealth Professions Advising Office resource area has some information on these programs. When you interview at medical schools, you will be informed of financial aid information available to you. It is important that you do your own research as well. The STAR Center located in the University Center has financial aid information for all students.

What should I do if I am not accepted?

If you are not accepted to medical school you have a great deal to consider and several decisions to make. You must first decide if you will apply again and how you will spend your time during the next year. You may wish to pursue another health profession or change your direction altogether.

You should consult with the Health Professions Advisor and perhaps admissions representatives from some of the medical schools where you applied, to help you determine if you are a candidate for readmission. If you do decide to reapply, you must find the weak area in your first application and do every thing you can do to make it competitive. For example, you may need to show stronger grades, raise your MCAT score or gain more medical experience. Some students are ready to reapply the next cycle and for others, it may take a few years out of the application cycle before they are ready to reapply. Regardless of when you reapply, you should not submit the same application. You must write a new essay, submit new letters of evaluation and update the admissions committees on how you are now a better applicant.

This can be a very difficult time. If you need assistance please do not hesitate to make an appointment with the Health Professions Advisor. The Career Center at

Florida State University also welcomes students who need assistance with any aspect of career planning.

Part VII:

POST-BACCALAUREATE YEAR

What Every Premed Post-Baccalaureate Student Should Know

Students who make the decision to pursue undergraduate premedical course work beyond their bachelor's degree come to this point from so many different places. Some have made previous attempts for admission to medical school and need additional upper-division courses to strengthen their application. Others have been out of school for several years, are making a career change and must start at the basic level. Regardless of where you fall in this range, it is important to stress that as a post-baccalaureate student you have a unique past and must follow an individualized plan in order to reach your goal of medical school. The Prehealth Professions Advising Office offers assistance to all post-baccalaureate students at Florida State University and you are strongly encouraged to work closely with the Health Professions Advisor to create a personalized pathway to medical school.

The first section of this handbook describes the profile of a successful medical school applicant and pertains to all applicants including post-baccalaureate students. It should be closely followed when setting up your plan for acceptance to medical school. For post-baccalaureate students the time and context may be different compared to the traditional four-year premedical student, but the advice regarding each step of the application process described in this handbook is relevant to all applicants to medical school. Strong grades and MCAT scores demonstrate the ability to handle the academic rigors of medical school and licensing examinations. Medical experience and community service show your genuine interest in the field of medicine and your commitment to serving others. Research gives you the opportunity to experience first-hand how scientific discoveries unfold.

The Prehealth Professions Advising Office has helped many post-baccalaureate students reach their goals for medical school. We have witnessed several success stories including students from both strong and weak academic backgrounds. We have seen applicants succeed from unique previous careers including the military, another medical field or a completely different professional career. Regardless of your personal history, once you make the decision to apply to medical school, take advantage of every opportunity available to you as a premedical student at Florida State University and leave no stone unturned as you embark upon this exciting journey.

Questions and Answers

How much course work do I need to prepare for admission to medical school?

If you are getting started in the basic sciences, you must focus on completing the required premedical classes needed for the MCAT which include courses in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Organic Chemistry and Physics. For most students, this takes two full years and should be completed on a full-time basis. Medical school admissions committees must be convinced you can handle heavy science course loads similar to what you will be taking in medical school, which is why it is critical you attend as a full-time student.

If you have recently been in college, yet need additional course work to demonstrate your ability to handle the medical school curriculum, it is again advised you take full-time course loads. In order for a student to demonstrate solid academic ability you must show at least four consecutive semesters of excellent academic performance while completing a full load (12-16 hours) of science-based courses.

I heard that the Organic Chemistry sequence is tough. Can I take these courses at the local community college?

It is not recommended you attempt any of the premedical courses at a community or junior college. Medical school admissions committees prefer the course work be completed at a senior institution where the environment is more similar to a medical school environment. It is also important you obtain strong letters of evaluation from senior level faculty at the senior institution.

I did not do well in my previous undergraduate work. What must I do to prove I can succeed in medical school?

Poor performance in previous academic work is never a great starting point when pursuing a medical education. Some schools are forgiving of previous work because they consider it to be a separate time in your life before you became committed to a medical career, however, other medical schools average your previous grades with your current grades in evaluating your academic abilities. If your grades were weak before, it is important you seek out advice from admissions administrators from the medical school(s) you are most interested in and receive an honest assessment of your chances for acceptance.

If you make the decision to proceed with your goal, again you must demonstrate at least four consecutive semesters of excellent academic performance while completing a full load (12-16 hours) of science-based courses. Regardless of your previous performance, if you have made the decision to pursue post-baccalaureate course work, your grades must be excellent in order for your application to be considered.

I have a professional degree in another discipline, will that affect my chances for acceptance to medical school?

Applicants who have spent years preparing for another profession (i.e., a law degree or a Ph.D. in a non-medical area) must have very clear intentions for making the serious decision to now pursue a career in medicine. Medical schools are cautious of “professional students” or individuals who are more interested in obtaining another degree than actually becoming a physician. If you have another professional degree and are now pursuing medicine, you must clearly explain your reasons for now pursuing a medical degree and describe in great detail how you came about this decision in your AMCAS and secondary application essays.

As a post-baccalaureate student should I just take the premedical requirements or should I obtain a second degree?

Regardless of your plans to actually complete a degree, it is important you become enrolled in a degree program - preferably in a science discipline (i.e., biological sciences, biochemistry, etc.). This enables you to register early and obtain the courses you need each semester. Most applicants will first focus on completing the pre-MCAT courses which are included in the requirements for most science degrees. If additional course work is required because of a weaker academic background or an unsuccessful first attempt at medical school, it is usually best to enroll in the degree program and obtain the second degree.

Can I work full-time and take my premedical courses?

Because it is recommended post-baccalaureate students take a full load of courses each semester, and required they perform extremely well, it is not recommended you try and work in addition to taking classes. You may wish to continue working another year and save enough money to attend school as a post-baccalaureate student or visit the financial aid office or STAR Scholarship Center and learn about financial aid programs available to post-baccalaureate students.

It is not uncommon for a post-baccalaureate student to get over committed with school, work and family obligations, often requiring a student to withdraw from a course. Admissions committees view withdrawals as the student's inability to handle the rigors of school and are taken into account when evaluating the student's abilities. Before you make the decision to begin a post-baccalaureate program, it is important to include all of your personal, financial and family commitments in assessing if now is the right time to pursue this goal. Once you make this decision, give it your all and don't look back!

MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

JUNIOR YEAR

January

Begin preparing for the MCAT and check testing schedule.

Establish file for letters of evaluation.

- 3 Academic Letters
- 2 Character Letters
- 1 Peer Letters (UF only)

February

Submit registration for the MCAT, available on the AAMC website.

March

Keep track of letters of evaluation attached to your file.

Finalize your list of medical schools.

April

AMCAS applications are available on-line from the AAMC website.

May

AMCAS applications are available on-line from the AAMC website.

Files for letters of evaluation should be complete.

June

Submit AMCAS.

July

Make sure letters of evaluation have arrived.

August

Early Decision applications due August 1.

SENIOR YEAR

September

Interviews for early decision begin.

Return all secondary applications ASAP.

Send out letters of evaluation from the

Health Professions Advising Office.

Attend an interview workshop.

October

Interviews begin for regular admission.

November-May

Interviews continue for regular admission.

Notification is made on admission status.

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MCAT Student Manual. Association of American Medical Colleges, 12007.

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