Why Medicine?

When I was in 5th grade we all had to write on a piece of paper what we wanted to be when we grew up. Thirty strips of paper got thrown in a bowl, and the whole class got to guess who had written which response. Someone wrote 'police officer', another 'hairdresser', and another a 'Professional baseball player'. My teacher stumbled reading what I had written: 'asthma-allergy pediatric specialist.' At 10, I not only
knew I wanted to be a doctor, but I had already decided my specialty, including residency and fellowship.

I didn’t grow up in a family of physicians. My father has his GED; my mom graduated high school. They were not in the medical field, but for as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a doctor.

I spent much of my childhood in doctors’ offices and Emergency Departments. My asthma was unmanageable but my clumsiness was worse. I was the kid who knew her whole medical history—including recent hospitalizations, and medications doses and frequency. I watched as the nurses placed my IVs; I wanted to see my chest X-rays.

Right after my 8th birthday, my family (mother, aunt, and cousin) were on a boat that exploded. My then 9-year-old cousin/best friend was burned over 50% of her body. She spent months in the hospital, and years recovering. At that time, my 8-year-old self made a deal with the universe: “If Briana lived, I would be a doctor.” Twenty-three years later, I’ve never looked back.

![Image](image-url)

In March of 2014, Briana opened my letter on stage on Match Day.

Everyone has their journey to MD. Mine has been studded with many successes, a few failures, a bit of perseverance, and whole lot of hard work. I am so incredibly lucky to have found my calling in life, and am grateful every day for the opportunity to practice medicine.

I, like many others, have ALWAYS been a B student. I was never the top of the class, ever. I have never had a semester with straight As. I was NOT valedictorian or salutatorian (like my cousins). I did not graduate college Magnum Cum Laude. I was not inducted into AOA. I instead had a tireless work ethic and used my other skills to help me stand out in medicine.

For me, my academic journey to medical school started in elementary school. I had moved in first grade twice, and then again in 4th grade. For 3 years I was in the same school, but starting in 7th grade, I once again changed schools, but this time it was 4 times in 3 years. I was always the new kid. I was always struggling to catch up both academically and socially.

For the first part of high school I attended Saint Francis Preparatory School, which is the largest Catholic High School in the country. I received a scholarship and paid the rest of my tuition myself. I took honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes, I cheered, I played basketball, and I had a job. Balancing all of those things, I learned time management skills. I continued to not be perfect, but I did OK in school. I had high enough grades to stay in honors classes, and met all my requirements for my extracurricular activities. I knew I had to do all of these things to get into a good college—which was the first step to getting into medical school.
Just when things were going my way, I was hit with **Failure #1**: I took the SAT and missed EVERY SINGLE reading comprehension question. Every one. I would have scored better had I NOT answered ANY of the reading questions. In Elementary School they had suggested I had a learning disorder, but I had always been smart enough to not call too much attention to my difficulties. My scores were good enough. In my mind, I didn’t have problems with learning- I was distracted; I was bored. So instead, I got new reading glasses and moved on. It wasn’t until this test that I realized how much I was being affected from what I likely have but have never been formally diagnosed with- dyslexia.

Luckily my math score was high enough to balance out my apparent inability to read. My mom informed me that I had scored high enough to receive a 100% scholarship to a Florida University. I was elated- I knew I would need scholarships to make college and medical school financially work for my family. My cousins had gone to the University of Florida, and one of them was a doctor. If I went there, I could be a doctor too! There was one big issue: I needed to be a Florida resident to qualify. So, smack in the middle of my Junior year, while I was (in my mind) expertly balancing school, sports, and work, I was uprooted once again.

*My advice: It can be hard to acknowledge our deficits, but it is important in order to be able to improve them. I had ignored my reading issues for years. I had managed to cover it up from everyone, but it finally caught up with me. Luckily, I was able to work through this on my own and now it is much easier for me to read, and I actually enjoy it. Additionally, while this was an incredibly hard move (the hardest of them all) this was financially the best decision I’ve ever made. I graduated from the University of Florida with 0 dollars in debt. While you WILL be able to pay off your debt, $150k is a lot easier to pay off than $350k (which can happen easily). Making good financial decisions early will greatly help you in the long run.*

I moved from a prestigious private school in New York City to a C High School in Florida. For perspective, at my school in New York, our valedictorians went to Harvard, Yale, Cornell, or another Ivy League school. In Florida, our valedictorians went to small state school in a neighboring state. I was incredibly bored, and anxiously waiting for my 1.5 years at this High School to end. Due to my move, I had missed about 1 month worth of US History, Algebra 2, and chemistry (NY schools start in September, Florida in August). Instead of catching up, I assumed I would be just fine. Turns out I was not- **Failure #2**: I failed my AP United States History exam.

*My advice: Moving is hard, moving in the middle of the academic year is harder. Simply being smart sometimes isn’t enough. It’s easy to fall back on your intelligence, but the smartest people are the most hard working.*

Finally, I started at the University of Florida (Go Gators) in August of 2005. During my 4 years at Florida, we won 2 Football and 2 Basketball National Championships- it was the best 4 years of my life. I was not in the Honors College, but that was OK. I was a UF student and would definitely get into Medical School. I signed up to be a Biology major. I planned my course work for all 4 years. I was organized; I was going to hit the ground running. College was going to be where I became an A student. I was not going to be changing schools in the middle of the year. I was not going to be distracted.

This was going to be my time, until **Failure #3**: I got Cs in BOTH General Chemistry courses. Chemistry was where it started, but not where it ended. I got B’s in Biology, Physics, Calculus, Biochemistry, and Organic Chemistry. My GPA was so low I was told applying to medical school was a waste of my time; applicants with my GPA did not get in. No matter what I got on the MCAT, I could not recover from the Cs in General Chemistry.

Instead of giving up on my dream after my freshman year, I decided to take an alternative approach. I would make myself a great medical school candidate, grades notwithstanding. After I accidentally signed up for
4000 level Sociology class my Freshman Spring, I changed my major to Sociology. I studied sex and gender, women and society, and the sociology of medicine. I wrote papers on gender in medicine, the LGBTQ population and medicine, and how patient-provider interactions affect health outcomes. I began working with a health education outreach program to East Gainesville, educating the low socioeconomic population about health. I joined a research team studying cultural sensitivity in medicine. I dedicated myself to minimizing health disparities, I found a niche for myself as a premedical student.

My advice: Be true to yourself. Find what you’re passionate about and run with it. Be an individual. Do not let anyone tell you that you CANNOT do something. There will always be people telling you that you will fail. Let the voice within yourself be louder.

I took the MCAT in May of 2008. I wasn’t elated, but I decided to not retake it. It was the average score for people who got into medical school, and average has always been good enough for me. I applied to Medical School that summer, and was offered interviews at 4 places (none of which were in the state of Florida).

After a series of interviews, and was waitlisted at 2 of the schools. While I was in Bahamas on a spring break course (Tropical Marine Ecology) I was ACCEPTED. This was EVERYTHING I had waited for. I was going to be a doctor. As soon as I got back from my trip, I mailed in my $250.00 deposit check.

The check I mailed arrived a day past the deadline. I lost my spot. We have arrived at Failure #4: I did NOT go to medical school my first time I applied. I had been accepted, but I had lost my spot because of the mail. The MAIL. My Dad lived near the school and tried to talk to them, but they were unflinching. They did not care I was out of the country when my acceptance letter had arrived. They did not care it was 1 day late. They revoked my acceptance, and I was absolutely devastated.

Come August, I realized I was not going to be accepted anywhere else. I scrambled and applied to the University of Florida’s Certificate in Public Health program, and got a job doing registration in an Emergency Department. I used my "gap year" to travel, learn, and grow. I reapplied in August of 2009, and received an interview at only one school- Florida State College of Medicine. This was the first institution that asked about all the things I had done to affect health disparities. It seemed as though my personal mission and the mission of FSU College of Medicine aligned.

The Florida State University College of Medicine will educate and develop exemplary physicians who practice patient-centered health care, discover and advance knowledge, and are responsive to community needs, especially through service to elder, rural, minority, and underserved populations.

I was accepted and I started at Florida State College of Medicine in May of 2010. I had found where I belonged and it was absolutely worth the wait.

My advice: Things work out the way they are supposed to. That other medical school was clearly not the right place for me. FSU College of Medicine was absolutely where I belonged, and I would NOT be where I am today if it were not for FSU. Sometimes you need to take a year (or more) for things to work out. Taking a year off is not failing, its realigning.

As expected, in medical school I continued to be a "B student", never at the top of the class but for the first time in my life, that was truly OK with me. I instead found ways to focus on what I was good at- I took on leadership positions within the Class of 2014, the College of Medicine, and the Florida State University. After all my moves as a child, I had learned how to be the new kid. I also learned how important it is to welcome the new kids. That drive, to be welcoming, is what eventually lead to my career in academic
During the summer before my second year, I volunteered to help teach our incoming medical students Gross Anatomy. Once again, my grades were barely good enough to qualify, but my leadership roles strengthen my application. I wanted to teach because I wanted to be the incoming students first point of contact- I wanted to welcome them to the world of medical school. Little did I know that during that summer I would fall in love with teaching and find my true calling in medicine.

Each of these experience, the failures and successes, lead to my career in academic Emergency Medicine, my passion for undergraduate medical education, and the creation of sheMD.