

# Applying to Medical School



Applying to medical school usually takes place during the junior year, following several years of planning and acquiring the requisite academic knowledge and out-of-class experiences (see "Planning for Medical School" handout). In consultation with SU's faculty pre-med advisor, your academic advisor, other faculty and Career Services, you can access the most resources to complete the application process successfully.

## First Steps

Various websites help centralize the medical school admission process. They also require fees to use. Make sure you explore each thoroughly before beginning the actual applications.

### Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)

MSAR is a suite of guides produced by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) in collaboration with medical schools. The guides are available in print form, e-book form and online and contain various resources, including school-specific admission requirements, applicant and acceptee statistics, medical education process information and tips on how to choose the right school for you. The guides are updated annually and can be purchased from the AAMC's website: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/>.

### The American Medical College Application Service® (AMCAS®)

AMCAS ([www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/)) is a non-profit, centralized application processing service that is available to applicants to the first-year entering classes at participating US medical schools. Most medical schools use AMCAS as the primary application method. Advanced standing and transfer applicants should contact medical schools directly for assistance. Regardless of the number of medical schools to which you apply, you submit just one online application to AMCAS. AMCAS does not render any admission decisions and does not advise applicants where to apply.

### Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMSDAS)

TMSDAS (<https://www.tmsdas.com/>) is the centralized application processing service for applicants to the first-year entering classes at all public medical, dental and veterinary schools in Texas (this excludes Baylor College of Medicine). TMSDAS does not process advanced standing or transfer student applications. Those applicants should contact schools directly for application instructions. TMSDAS serves only as an information clearinghouse and does not influence schools' review and selection of candidates. In addition to the centralized application, schools may also require supplementary materials that must be submitted directly to the institutions.

### Fee Assistance Program (FAP)

The AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP) (<https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/>) assists MCAT examinees and AMCAS applicants who, without financial assistance, would be unable to take the MCAT or apply to medical schools that use the AMCAS application. FAP eligibility decisions are tied directly to the US Department of Health and Human Services' poverty level guidelines.

## Components of the Application

Medical school applications collect data about your identifying information, schools attended, criminal history, coursework, work

experience, leadership and other activities, clinical and research experience and more. The main components include:

**Academic record:** Do your grades reflect academic excellence, rigorous coursework, upward trends and overcoming obstacles? Schools will look at coursework loads (ideally  $\geq 15$  credits per semester), how many upper-division courses you took, whether you pursued an honor's thesis, as well as a year-to-year GPA trend (rising is better than falling). All of these factors will be considered in your own academic context, including the size of your home community and high school, your high school class rank, your parents' educational background and non-academic activities which required extended time-commitment, such as employment, athletics, band, leadership in an organization, etc. Doing well at SU when coming from a less rigorous high school or being among the first in your family to have attended college, for example, may make your accomplishments shine even more.

**Standardized test scores:** The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is a computerized standardized examination designed to assess problem solving and critical thinking skills, in addition to the examinee's knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. The test takes about seven and a half hours to complete and comprises four multiple choice sections, each scored on a scale ranging from 118 to 132:

- Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems
- Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems
- Psychological, Social and Biological Foundations of Behavior
- Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills

The MCAT is offered approximately 20 times a year at hundreds of test sites. The latest you should plan to take these tests is in the spring of the year you plan to apply for medical school. Popular test dates fill up quickly, so sign up for your slot as soon as registration opens (about 12 weeks in advance). **Never take the actual MCAT for practice.** Most students also take an MCAT preparation course. See the Pre-Medical Resources section below for more information.

Not only will schools consider your MCAT and MCAT subtest scores, they will also review your SAT/ACT scores. A rising trend in standardized test scores is helpful.

**Non-academic experiences:** Schools seek candidates with well-rounded interests and participation outside the classroom in activities both related to medicine and more broadly. Examples include clinical (e.g. volunteering in a doctor's office, hospital, abroad), volunteer (e.g. elder care, suicide hotline, Habitat for Humanity) and leadership (e.g. student government, academic organizations, athletics) experiences. Schools will evaluate not only breadth but also depth – it's more important to dig deep into a few experiences than to be in every student organization. In addition to exposure to medical or dental environments, research experience can be valuable. Your clinical experiences not only serve to show medical schools that you know what you're getting yourself into and are still committed to it, but they also help you test and confirm your decision to enter medicine as a career field. You will be better prepared to write your application essays and to interview by making the time to gain the experience and keeping good records of doing so.

**Personal statement and "optional" essays:** The personal statement (or any other narrative parts of your application) should be well written using good English grammar and not include typos. Do NOT count on spell-check alone. Have your professors, the Writing Center, Career Services or at least another person review any and all narrative responses before submission. Though your statement should be authentic and personalized, we suggest you do NOT include religious references, political references or Greek Life references (unless you have/had a leadership role). By law, your religious and political views are protected, but if you choose to share them, you run the risk that a reader may hold biases against you for your views. You may decide it's worth falling on your sword to mention those topics, but do so with your eyes wide open. Things you've only told your therapist should of course not appear. Some essays are described as "optional," but in medical school "optional" and "extra credit" are required! Take the opportunity to share more about yourself in these so-called optional essays. Typical topics often include barriers you have overcome and contributions you could make to medicine based on your background

**Letters of recommendation:** Supportive letters of recommendation (usually three letters, at least one from a professor) are extremely valuable. These letters are basically character references so they should come from someone who knows you well. Usually these are professors with whom you've had significant contact (e.g. several courses, collaborative research, academic advising, etc.) and rarely physicians. Ideally you have been working to cultivate relationships with faculty throughout your undergraduate career, but you can also increase the strength of your relationship with a prospective recommender by requesting to speak with her/him in office hours about your medical school interests.

**Other:** In addition to the official materials you submit as your application, realize that all encounters you have with evaluators from the medical schools (in person or virtual) can affect their impression. To that end, reviewing your online "brand" is an important part of applying for any opportunity these days. It would not be uncommon for someone at a medical school to research you online, so do a trial run and search for yourself. Don't be fooled by privacy settings. If someone really wants to find you, they can find a way. With regard to social media sites like Facebook, check your profiles often for negative information and take it down! Be discrete when posting photos. Keep your opinions to yourself. Employ the grandmother rule (i.e. if you wouldn't share it with your grandmother, don't post it online). And most of all, remember that you can't take it back.

Having a positive online brand is not only about limiting negative information. It's also about creating a positive public record. Personal blogs, LinkedIn profiles and other websites where you can document your academic, extracurricular, research, volunteerism and employment success stories can be helpful.

## The Interview

The interview is a very important step in the selection process. Interviews are offered on a rolling basis and take place between August and December annually. You will receive an email inviting you to interview on a specific date (which is generally non-negotiable). Your interview will likely consist of several meetings with different evaluators, as well as tours and lunch. Be assured that you are being evaluated each step along the way and remain professional throughout. For more details on preparing for an interview, including researching the organization, interview attire and possible interview questions, please see our "Interviewing for Medical School" handout. Also visit the website [www.StudentDoctor.net](http://www.StudentDoctor.net), a website where students report on their medical school interview experiences.

## Application Timeline

The actual logistical process of applying to medical school typically begins in the fall of your junior year. An important fact to know is that **60 % of all interviews come from applications received between May 1 and June 1** each year. Though you could theoretically apply at a later point in the cycle, your chances are best when you **apply early!** The approximate timeline below can help you plan:

### September-December (junior year):

- Meet with Pre-Med Advisor and/or Career Services to plan your strategy.
- Start soliciting letters of recommendation.

### January-April (junior year):

- Study for MCAT.

### February/March (junior year):

- Register for MCAT.
- Follow up on letters of recommendation.

### April/May (junior year):

- Take MCAT.

### June/July (summer between junior and senior years):

- Apply to medical schools by June 15.
- Send recommendation letters.
- Summer MCATs

### August-December (senior year):

- Interviews
- Fall MCATs

### January-April (senior year):

- Acceptance letters
- Complete financial aid forms ASAP.

### August

- Enter medical school!

## Pre-Medical Resources

SU Pre-Med Advisor Dr. Kerry Bruns, [brunsk@southwestern.edu](mailto:brunsk@southwestern.edu), in the chemistry department is the main pre-med advisor on campus and chair of the campus Pre-Med Committee, which writes letters of recommendation for students. Career Services also provides general pre-med advising, reviews resumes, applications and essays and offers practice medical school interviews. We also bring healthcare professionals to campus and facilitate off-campus job shadowing so you can explore career options. Alpha Epsilon Delta (pre-health) and Beta Beta Beta (biology) are campus honor and professional societies for students that sponsor various pre-med-related events. Other resources include:

- Association of American Medical Colleges: [www.aamc.org/](http://www.aamc.org/)
- American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine: [www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org)
- Official MCAT Website: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>
- AMCAS: [www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/)
- TMSDAS: [www.utsystem.edu/tmsdas/homepage.html](http://www.utsystem.edu/tmsdas/homepage.html)
- Princeton Review's Med Schools & Careers: [www.princetonreview.com/medical-school.aspx](http://www.princetonreview.com/medical-school.aspx)
- Kaplan's MCAT Preparation: [www.kaptest.com/MCAT/Home/index.html](http://www.kaptest.com/MCAT/Home/index.html)
- The Student Doctor Network: [www.studentdoctor.net](http://www.studentdoctor.net)