

Planning for Medical School



Approximately 5 % of graduating Southwestern University students enter medical school each year immediately upon graduation. About 30% of SU graduates each year enter some kind of continuing education program. Obviously SU students are well-qualified for graduate and professional school. Nevertheless, the first questions a student must answer are:

Do I really want to be a doctor?

Career Services and SU faculty can advise you realistically on whether your credentials show promise for admissions to medical school, but only you can decide if that is what you really want to do. One way to explore your interest is to volunteer at a local hospital or clinic. Another way is to read information about professional schools and medicine as a career. Be sure to join one of the campus pre-health organizations. The following paragraphs contain basic information to get you started in determining if medicine is right for you.

MD or DO?

Before you apply to medical school you should know that there are two types of medical training: Allopathic and Osteopathic. Allopathic medical schools are the traditional medical schools that confer MD degrees. Osteopathic schools confer DO degrees. They are very similar except that Osteopathic schools have additional courses in Osteopathic Manipulative Treatment (OMT). OMTs are manipulative techniques to help heal, relieve pain, and restore range of motion. There are approximately 38,000 DOs in the U.S., 57% in primary care and 43% in a range of other specialties. The remainder of this handout focuses on the MD. To learn more about the differences between an MD and DO see <http://www.princetonreview.com/medical/research/articles/decide/DOissues.asp> . To find out more about Osteopathic Medicine go to www.aacom.org.

What are medical schools looking for?

The average profile of a student accepted into medical school in 2001 was:

- 3.6 GPA (3.54 science GPA)
- 29.6 total score on the MCAT (9.5 verbal reasoning, 10 physical sciences, 10.1 biological sciences, P writing sample)
- Supportive letters of recommendation (3 letters, at least 1 from a professor)
- Well-rounded interests and participation outside the classroom
- Exposure to medical or dental environments as well as research experience can be valuable
- Solid interviewing and communication skills

Admission to medical school is extremely competitive. Schools will examine your grade point average for both science and non-science majors. These grades and MCAT scores are generally the criteria used to make initial selections from the applicant pool, so it is important to develop good study habits in your first year. Once invited to interview, selection is based on overall characteristics including motivation, experience, and communication skills.

What courses are required for medical school?

The minimum entrance requirements for medical school are as follows, each of which must be completed with a grade of "C" or better:

- 2 semesters of English
- 1 semester of Calculus or Statistics
- 2 semesters of Introductory Biology with lab
- 2 semesters of Upper-Level Biology
- 2 semesters of Inorganic Chemistry with lab
- 2 semesters of Organic Chemistry with lab
- 2 semesters of Physics with lab

*Some medical schools require additional courses in calculus, comparative morphology, and quantitative analysis; others do not accept AP credits for prerequisite course work. Always check with the medical schools in which you are interested before you begin your undergraduate program.

What type of major looks best?

Many applicants believe that medical schools want science majors or that certain programs prefer liberal arts majors. In actuality, medical schools have no preference for what your major is as long as you do well and meet the basic entrance

requirements. We suggest that you choose a major that leads to what you would select as an alternative career for these reasons: you generally do best at what you enjoy the most; this is another way to determine whether medicine is the right choice; and an alternative career provides good insurance if you should happen to change directions or postpone entry. If your chosen major does not include the prerequisite courses in its curriculum, you must complete the above mentioned required courses either as science credit hours or elective credit hours. Since many higher levels build upon each other, freshman biology and chemistry are good courses to complete during your first year. However, be careful and do not overextend yourself.

What is the MCAT and when should I take it?

The MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) is a standardized examination designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills in addition to the examinee's knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. Beginning in 2007 the MCAT will only be offered as a computerized exam. Scores are reported in each of the following areas: Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, Writing Sample, and Biological Sciences. The test takes just over five hours including breaks and contains three multiple-choice sections, each graded on a 15-point scale, and two essays. The MCAT is offered approximately 22 times throughout the year at hundreds of test sites. The latest you should plan to take these tests is in the spring of your junior year of college, so that you can apply (and interview) early. You can register for your desired test date beginning 12 weeks in advance. **Never take the actual MCAT for practice.**

When should I apply to medical school?

Starting in fall of your junior year, the approximate timeline below can help you plan for the next two years:

<i>September-December</i>	<i>January-April</i>	<i>February/March</i>	<i>April/May</i>	<i>June/July</i>	<i>August-December</i>	<i>January-April</i>	<i>August</i>
Meet with Career Services or Pre-Med advisor to plan your strategy. Start soliciting letters of recommendation.	Study for MCAT.	Register for MCAT. Follow up on letters of recommendation.	Take MCAT.	Apply to medical schools by June 15. Send recommendation letters. Summer MCATs	Interviews Fall MCATs	Acceptance letters. Complete financial aid forms ASAP.	Enter medical school!!!

How fast can I get into medical school?

Of all those accepted to medical school, at least 98% will have attained a bachelor's degree before they enter. The disadvantages of not earning a bachelor's degree are that you miss out on the best parts of college (the social interactions and unrelated courses that provide depth and lifelong memories) and, again, you have no insurance should something go awry. It is rare that a student will have competitive enough grades, MCAT scores, extracurricular activities, and maturity to be admitted to medical school with only 90 credit hours and to dental school with only 60 credit hours. We **strongly** recommend that you take your time. Go slowly and strive for good grades and for becoming a well-rounded and well-educated individual. If you need a challenge, contact Career Services, or take advantage of the incredible range of extracurricular activities and research projects offered at Southwestern University. Medical and dental schools give much more credibility to this type of record.

How fast can I get out of medical school?

Medical schools require four years of study. The first two years are spent in concentrated learning of anatomy and basic sciences (unless you attend Baylor College of Medicine, which has condensed the classroom experience to 18 months). The third and fourth years incorporate clinical rotations and patient care. Afterwards, depending on your specialization, you could be in residency an additional two to seven years. Take it one step at a time.

What can I do now?

Learn as much as you can about medicine and other health-related fields by reading, watching public-TV specials, and interviewing doctors. Volunteer weekends or apply to work next summer in a hospital or clinic. Develop your study habits and increase your reading efficiency. Be active in pre-health profession clubs. Attend workshops offered on-campus. Finally, decide to make the commitment, then go for it!

Other Pre-Medical Resources

- SU's Beta Beta Beta: Honor and professional society for students of biological sciences
- SU Career Services' Website: www.southwestern.edu/careers/students/internet/gradschools/medschool.html
- Official MCAT Website: www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm
- American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine: www.aacom.org
- Princeton Review's Med Schools & Careers: <http://www.princetonreview.com/medical/research/articleIndex.asp>