



## CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

# Planning for Medical School

Approximately 5% of graduating Southwestern University students enter medical school each year immediately upon graduation. About 70% of students who apply to medical, dental, and veterinary programs through the SU pre-medical committee are accepted the first time. The Center for Career & Professional Development (CCPD) can help you construct a well-managed professional life as a physician.

## Do I Really Want to Be a Doctor?

What's not to like about a career in medicine? Medicine has prestige, helps people, makes good money, and is a known quantity—after all, everyone has been to a doctor. Many students begin college interested in medical careers, but over time and with more exploration, many find other fields that interest them more. The CCPD and SU faculty can advise you realistically on whether your credentials show promise for admission to medical school, but only you can decide if that is what you really *want* to do. Gaining exposure to the health field is crucial for your own decision-making and shows your commitment to prospective medical schools. Great ways to explore healthcare include volunteering at local hospitals or clinics, reading about professional schools and medicine as a career, joining student pre-health organizations, talking with or shadowing healthcare professionals, and even earning a certification to work part-time in healthcare (e.g. emergency medical technician, certified nurse's assistant, pharmacy technician, etc.).

## MD or DO?

There are two types of medical training: Allopathic and Osteopathic. Allopathic schools are traditional medical schools that confer MD degrees. Osteopathic schools are very similar but have additional courses in Osteopathic manipulative medicine and confer DO degrees. DOs take a holistic approach to patient care, promoting wellness by focusing on health education and injury and disease prevention. There are approximately 108,000 DOs in the U.S., about 60% in primary care and the rest in a range of other specialties. To find out more about Osteopathic Medicine, go to [www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org).

## What are Medical Schools Looking for?

Admission to medical school is extremely competitive. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, in 2020-2021 22,239 students entered medical school nationwide, 1,852 in Texas. Schools will examine your grade point average for both science and non-science courses as well as your standardized test scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).

These numbers 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. The average profile of a student entering medical school in 2020-2021 was:

- **NATIONWIDE:** 3.73 GPA (3.66 science GPA); 511.5 total MCAT score (127.8 Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; 127.0 Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills; 128.1 Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; 128.6 Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior)
- **TEXAS:** 3.77 GPA (3.7 science GPA); 511.6 total MCAT score (127.9 Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; 127 Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills; 128.1 Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; 129 Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior)

In addition to strong numbers, medical schools seek well-rounded applicants with diverse out-of-class experiences, including healthcare- and science-related activities. Your medical school application essays and supportive recommendation letters from faculty will document these experiences. For more information, see our "Applying to Medical School" handout.

Once you move from "applicant" to "interviewee," your selection is based on characteristics including motivation, experience, and communication skills. See our "Interviewing for Medical School" handout and schedule a practice medical school interview with a career advisor for more help in this area.

## What Type of Major Looks Best?

Medical schools have no preference for what your major is as long as you do well and meet basic entrance requirements. In Texas, about half of med school applicants are non-science majors (of which psychology is the most common). We suggest you choose the major that most interests you because (a) you are more likely to do well in a field of your interest and (b) exploring more broadly provides good insurance if you change directions or postpone entry. If your chosen major doesn't include med school prerequisite courses, you must complete them either as general education or elective credit hours. Since two and a half years of chemistry are required, completing general chemistry your first year helps you progress through the curriculum in a timely manner. Be careful not to overextend yourself, however, especially if your high school preparation was not as strong as it could have been.

## What Courses are Required for Medical School?

The minimum course entrance requirements (each completed with a grade of "C" or better) for Texas medical schools are:

- 14 semester hours (12 lecture, 2 lab) of Biology
- 8 semester hours (6 lecture, 2 lab) of General Chemistry
- 8 semester hours (6 lecture, 2 lab) of Organic Chemistry
- 3 semester hours of Biochemistry (not introductory course)
- 8 semester hours (6 lecture, 2 lab) of Physics (at SU, calculus is a pre-requisite for taking physics)
- 6 semester hours of college English
- 3 semester hours of Statistics

Although not required by med schools, Principles of Psychology and Social Patterns and Processes (or Social Problems) are recommended to prepare you for the behavioral sciences section of the MCAT. Some medical schools also require other pre-reqs. Note that some medical schools do not accept AP credits for prerequisite coursework. It's important to check requirements at medical schools that interest you early in your undergraduate career. Pre-med students are encouraged to go beyond minimum requirements and take additional upper-level courses to prepare themselves for the rigors of medical school.

## What Is the MCAT and When Should I Take It?

The MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) is a standardized, computer-based examination designed to assess problem solving and critical thinking skills as well as the examinee's knowledge of science concepts and principles needed for the study of medicine. The four sections of the exam are Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills. The latest you should plan to take the MCAT if you want to go directly to medical school after graduation is in the spring of your junior year, so that you can apply (and interview) early. You will need to have taken the requisite pre-med coursework by the time you take the MCAT in order to do well on the exam. For more information about the MCAT, see our "Applying to Medical School" handout.

## What Timeline Should I Be Following?

**FIRST-YEAR:** Depending on your high school preparation, begin med school pre-reqs your first semester, including introductory biology, statistics, and especially general chemistry. Start building relationships with faculty Pre-Med Advisor Dr. Maria Cuevas, your academic advisor, and CCPD. Get your feet solidly on the ground in terms of academics and then begin investigating out-of-class experiences to round out your education.

**SOPHOMORE:** Continue building a solid academic record. Acquire out-of-class experience in volunteer, leadership, research, and clinical settings. Review your progress with your advisors to make sure you are staying on track.

**JUNIOR:** In addition to your academics and out-of-class pursuits, during your junior year you may choose to apply to medical school. This involves soliciting recommendation letters, writing your personal statement, preparing for and taking the

MCAT, and applying at the earliest possible opportunity (usually June of your junior year). See our "Applying to Medical School" handout for more details.

**SENIOR:** In the fall you will be interviewing and awaiting responses in the spring. Do a practice interview with CCPD before your actual interviews begin. See our "Interviewing for Medical School" handout for more details. Continue to do well in your courses and build on your out-of-class experiences, especially if you end up waiting to apply or reapplying.

## How Fast Can I Get into Medical School?

While a bachelor's degree is not required to apply to medical school, students are rarely competitive enough to be admitted to medical school with only the minimum requirement of 90 credit hours. We **strongly** recommend you take a full four years of coursework and strive to do well in all the courses you take. For electives, don't go for what's easy—"round out" your education by taking unfamiliar courses that are interesting and challenging. Med schools give much more credibility to this type of record.

## Should I Plan for a "Gap (or Bridge) Year"?

Today, most graduate and professional school programs—including medical schools—see increasing numbers of applicants who have worked in their field before beginning graduate study. For medical school applicants, the advantages of a bridge year or two include being able to take more time to accrue necessary application requirements (pre-reqs, volunteerism, clinical experience, etc.) while maintaining a strong academic record, gaining more maturity and life experience, and possibly saving up money. On the downside, taking a bridge year means more time before you're out practicing as a physician.

## How Fast Can I Get Out of Medical School?

Medical schools require four years of study, including didactic (instructive) coursework and clinical rotations/patient care. Depending on your specialization, after "undergraduate medical education," you could be in residency (i.e. "graduate medical education") an additional three to seven years.

## 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 and shadowing doctors. Volunteer on weekends or apply to work in a hospital/clinic. Develop study habits and increase reading efficiency. Be active in pre-health professional clubs. Attend pre-health workshops offered on campus. Keep good records of your experiences to make it easier to relate them on applications in the future.

## Pre-Medical Resources

CCPD provides pre-med advising; reviews resumes, applications, and essays; offers practice medical school interviews; provides access to healthcare professionals via on-campus events and off-campus job shadowing; and hosts medical-school-related events, such as a free practice MCAT, MCAT information sessions, and workshops on medical school application and interviewing. For more details, visit

<https://www.southwestern.edu/career-services/graduate-school/medical-schoolhealth/>