Guide to Medical School
2019 - 2020
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INTRODUCTION
Being a Physician is a noble profession. Many times, however, our perceptions of the process to become a doctor is informed by television and social media. It is important to realize that medical school is a serious, long-term commitment that requires persistent dedication to scholastic work. Medical school, depending on personal factors, can take up to four years to complete with another three years of specialty. As of this writing, a General Practitioner (also known as a Primary Care Physician) can be expected to make entry level in Pennsylvania $73,000 with a median salary of $198,000. Specialists can make more depending on area.

Medical School Admission Committee (Adcoms) Standards
- A well rounded student to make a well-rounded, ethical, and compassionate doctor
- Students dedicated to academics

What does this mean?
- Time Management Skills
- Experience in the Field
- Extracurricular Activities
- Resilience Factors & Self Care
- Self-Reflection
- Reasonable Expectations of Medicine
- Proven Academic Performance

1. MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATIONS: PRIMARY APPLICATION
Medical schools share a general application process, but individual schools can vary significantly in how they evaluate candidates. Here’s what you need to know about your primary and secondary med school applications to stay on track.

Applying to Medical School
Most U.S. medical schools participate in the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), a centralized, third-party organization that administers and processes medical school applications. The majority of medical schools admit students on a rolling basis, which means that spaces in the program are offered to qualified students until all the spots are filled.

Medical School Application: Primary Application
First, you'll submit a single application, usually through one of three centralized online application services:
- AMCAS (for MD admissions)
- TMDSAS (for Texas Medical Schools)
- AACOMAS (for DO admissions)

Your primary application provides medical schools with enough information to make an initial screening of applicants. A completed primary application includes:
- Your transcripts (undergraduate transcripts plus any for grad or post-bacc work)
- MCAT scores
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- information about your most meaningful experiences (academic, research, clinical, and extracurricular activities)
- A short personal statement
- Letters of recommendation (though some schools ask for LORs as part of the secondary application only)

Each medical school sets its own final deadline for applicants submitting information through the application service. Regardless of these deadlines, med school admission experts recommend you submit your application as early as possible. Applications that are submitted early in the cycle are reviewed first and therefore have a better chance of acceptance at almost all schools.

*Procrastinators take note: these application services are serious about their deadlines. If an application is late, you’ll get it back without a refund.*

If any of your chosen schools have interest, they will invite you to submit a secondary application.

**American Medical College Application Service® (AMCAS)**
The central application system for the majority of American medical schools
Timeline of Applications: May – August

**Qualities of AMCAS**
- Similar to an Applicant Tracking System – Time consuming
- Contains Transcript Entries, Essay Sections, Coursework and Official Transcripts, Letters of Evaluation, Work and Activities

2. SECONDARY APPLICATION

An additional application to the primary application sent through AMCAS that is school specific.

Asks questions on personal character and why you are interested in that particular school

**Essay questions**
- Favorite Novel
- Leadership Roles
- Hardships
- Greatest Academic Achievements
- Examples of Continuing Service to the Community

Diversity prompts are about how you will add diversity to the class or what unique qualities you will bring, not your ethnic background. Think of it this way, what would your professors or your friends say are the best qualities about you.

Hardship prompts are prompts that require you to dig deep. These prompts are about a real life event that occurred to you that shaped you as an individual. Do not be superficial in your choice of event or risk having your application overlooked.
Do not underestimate the amount of time that it will take to create a QUALITY secondary application. The job isn’t done until the secondary application is completed thoroughly.

Be mindful in your writing. Stay away from clichés in your writing.

Application Essay/Question Response Prompts
Here are some prompts that you may see on medical school secondary applications

- Thinking of examples from your recent past, how would you assess your empathy and compassion?
- What qualities do you look for in a physician? Can you provide an example of a physician who embodies any of these ideals? How do they do this?
- Does your academic record reflect any major challenges, if so, what are they and why did they occur?
- What has your experience with the medical profession been and what things about that experience did you like and would want to emulate as a physician? On the other hand what things did you not appreciate and would want to change?

3. TIMELINE FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATION

| Spring Semester, Junior Year – around February/March or one calendar year before application | • Take the Medical College Admission Test (MCATS)
  - MCAT scores take some time to matriculate to be available for electronic application systems |
| Summer Semester, Junior Year (June/July) | • Prepare for interviews using BigInterview
  • Start Applying for Medical School
  - At the latest, you should be applying to medical school in August. Admissions of medical schools/colleges get busy after this with the hard deadlines approaching. |

Special Notes:
- An early application does not weight as importantly as an outstanding application. Be sure that your application is complete, concise and error-free.
- You can start applying without your MCAT if you need to.
- Some schools will not finalize their processes until April. Expect to hear from many schools starting around this time for interviews.
- Do not underestimate the expense of application. Start a savings account day one of college.
• Have other people go over your application with you. More eyes on your application increase your success.

4. THE MCAT

Weighted about as importantly as GPA
• 230 Questions spanned over 6.15 hours
  o Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems – 95 minutes
  o Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems – 95 minutes
  o Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior – 95 minutes
  o Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills – 90 minutes
  o Begin preparing for the MCAT for at least 6 months in advance
  o 23.8% of medical school applicants re-took the MCATS in 2017
  o 90.7% reported that they improved their scores

5. MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

Interview format will vary from school to school. Anticipate doing the interview first. There will be time to spend with faculty, students, a campus tour, admissions, financial aid, and potentially student life. Take the time when having your discussions with students to get the overall feel of the campus to see if it is a good fit for you. Remember that you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you.
• Ask them “what is campus life like”

The interview can vary from individual, group, and multiple-mini individual (MMI) format. MMI can be especially challenging as it is brief time based and interviewers switch rapidly. Remember to prepare yourself with BigInterview and other sources ahead of time so you are not fumbling in your prep time for answers to the questions.

A possibility that you might face is a Standardized Situational Judgement Test (SJTs). These test problem solving and cognitive abilities. You are shown a video prompt and asked how you would respond. These tests test your behavioral skills – how you would behave as a doctor. Another potential is for an aptitude test. Bear in mind while you may come across these tests, these are very rarely encountered by students in the field. You can ask your admissions team prior to applying to the school if their school requires these tests.

Special note: If you are going into medicine, you should know the difference between the Caduceus and the Rod of Asclepius and which one is the correct symbol of medicine. This is especially important if applying or practicing places out of the United States.

6. HELPFUL TIPS, RESOURCES AND LINKS TO STUDY MATERIALS

Out Of State Students
Some schools will require you to write a “Letter of Strong Ties”. This letter will explain your ties to the state and usually indicate an application process that prefers in-state students.
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Potential ways to answer this essay is to reference:
- Relative who resides in the state
- Previous residence in the state

You may also want to demonstrate interest in the state in this particular essay by talking about the unique health care challenges facing the state and how you as a practitioner could assist or how you show/demonstrate interest.

*Potential Red Flags on an Application*

Red flags are issues that could hinder your chances of a successful application to Medical school.

Some red flags are:
- Failure from a previous medical school
- Felony convictions
- Negative social media posts
- Negative Press
  - A juvenile offense that was published in the paper
- DUI’s or other drug/alcohol related offenses
- Institutional Student or Judicial Affairs Actions
- Poor GPA / too many withdrawals
- Poor grammar in applications
- Bad letters of recommendation/references

Sometimes people make mistakes, and the offense and wording will depend on whether or not your application passes to the interview phase.

Be advised: a background check will be run on you. Be honest in your application if you think that something could come up.

*Extracurricular Activities*

Extracurricular activities should be focused on ones that would garner clinical experience and may have a vocational focus. Here are some examples of part-time jobs you could hold during college, or certifications you could earn during your degree program that may be helpful to your medical school application:
- Emergency Medical Technician
- Phlebotomy
- Pharmacy Technician
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Dialysis Technician
- Volunteer Experience (ex: hospice care)

Notes:
- Extracurricular activities should demonstrate the *human* side of being a doctor.
- Job shadowing counts as extracurricular but not as clinical experience
- A 4.0 GPA will not make up for little to no extracurricular experience.
• Extracurricular activities and volunteer experience should start during your first year of college and continue each year to application. Admission committees want to see dedication to the profession of helping and serving others.

**Grade Point Average (GPA)**
GPA is a major factor to the medical school application process. GPA reflects preparation and readiness for the academic challenges of medical school. Expect GPA to be weighted significantly in a medical school application. GPA demonstrates time management capabilities to Adcoms. **Freshman and Sophomore grades may weigh less than Junior and Senior grades.**

• Average GPA of a medical school applicant – Matriculants – 3.70
  ○ Science GPA – Matriculants – 3.77
  ○ Non Science GPA – Matriculants – 3.64
  ▪ (source: [https://www.kaptest.com/study/mcat/whats-the-average-gpa-for-medical-school-matriculants/](https://www.kaptest.com/study/mcat/whats-the-average-gpa-for-medical-school-matriculants/))

**Helpful Hints**
• Your application will very likely be rejected at least once. Top medical schools have an acceptance rate of 5%. Mid-tier medical schools will be higher but the process is still difficult. Don’t let that discourage you – keep applying and apply to more than 1-2 schools.
• Continue to work on gaining experience if you do get rejected from all of your schools. You can always apply again.
• You can take the MCAT up to three times. Average score gained depends on subject area. For more information, reference page 11 of [https://www.aamc.org/download/462316/data/mcatguide.pdf](https://www.aamc.org/download/462316/data/mcatguide.pdf)
• Applying to school is like applying to a job – apply to many. Many applicants will not reach the interview stage.
• GPA Matters. 3.8 has a better chance than a 3.4
• If you are waitlisted, you can still be accepted into schools up until August.
• Until you sign the papers, submit, and receive your official letter of acceptance, the process is not done.
• Consider taking a gap year. 62.6% do!
• Have a backup plan in case you are not accepted to any schools you have applied to.

**Helpful Resources**
**Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR)** – Cost: $28
• Provides information on in-state and out-of-state acceptance rates
• Tuition and fees
• Size of first year class
• Application deadline
• Degrees offered

**Association of American Medical Colleges: What Is On The MCAT**
Medical School Guide

- Provides a resource of everything that is on the MCAT exam including information on the sections.

**Study Materials**

**Princeton Review MCAT**
Box set of books broken down by MCAT section

**Khan Academy MCAT Prep**
Free resource to help you prep for the MCAT

**MedSimplified**
YouTube Channel with various videos on biological processes

**MCAT Review**
Website dedicated to free online MCAT prep. Has notes on various sections of the MCAT.

*(Adapted from Goro’s Guide/The Princeton Review)*