PRE-MEDICAL PREPARATION

Preparation for medical school involves, first and foremost, completion of certain required courses and taking the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). After meeting these basic requirements, students with diverse records and backgrounds apply to medical school and are accepted. Although there is no “formula” or direct path that leads to acceptance, the most competitive applicants are well prepared in several areas.

You can major in any undergraduate degree area provided that you include required premedical prerequisites in your course of study. In the past, successful applicants have majored in many non-science subjects such as economics, philosophy, and international relations, as well as the more common science majors such as physiology, biochemistry, and biological sciences. You should major in what interests you. Most students, however, do major in science since this ensures that there will be a great deal of overlap between courses required for their major and those required for medical school; it makes course planning easier. Those choosing non-science majors often make their choice for breadth and do very well in the applicant pool. But your major does not matter and there is no place to list a minor on the medical school application.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Specific course prerequisites vary somewhat for each medical school but the following courses will fulfill all that are generally required.

- General Chemistry: 1 year with laboratory (Chem 1A + 1B)
- Organic Chemistry: 1 year with laboratory at the upper division level (No equivalencies)
- Mathematics: 1 year of calculus (Math 60 + 70)
- Physics: 1 year with laboratory (Physics 2A + 2B or 3A + 3B + 3C)
- Biology: 1 year with laboratory (Bio 1A + 1B)
- English: 1 year (any college level courses in the English or Comp Lit area) (Engl 1 or 1H and 2 or 3 or 3H)

All required courses must be taken for a grade, not on a Passed/Not Passed basis, and have a grade of C- or better.

ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA

MCAT: The MCAT examination is given every April and August and includes four sections: Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Verbal Reasoning and Writing Sample. The actual test time is 5 hours and 45 minutes. Chemistry is included in both the Biological and Physical Sciences sections. You should take the examination at least a year before you plan to enter medical school but 18 months to 2 years before is better. At the earliest this will be in the fall or spring of your junior year but many take it later. As a general guideline, you should not take the MCAT until you are ready and have completed all general prerequisites (except calculus as these topics do not appear on the MCAT); you may also want to complete courses in genetics, biochemistry, and physiology prior to taking the MCAT. You should plan to apply based on when you have competitive scores rather than when you graduate, although you will need to complete your bachelor’s degree prior to matriculation in medical school.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: There is a wide range of experience possible in this area but it is very important for a competitive applicant to have extracurricular activities. Often, students must support themselves and work becomes their primary extracurricular activity. Most students have research and clinical experience. Research or clinical internships that you initiate or develop yourself are particularly rewarding and are viewed very positively by admission committees. Community and campus service, participation on organized sports, and well-developed personal interests can all be important in the admission process. It is critical that you have some type of clinical experience, as medical schools want to be certain that you have knowledge of the field.

For further information, you must see a counselor. You can make an appointment to see a counselor by calling (562) 938-4561 for LAC or (562) 938-3920 for PCC.

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