KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

Planning for Medical School

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So, you want to go to medical school?

In a sea of medical school applications differentiating yours from the crowd of other hopeful applicants is crucial. One way to stand out is to select an undergraduate major that will challenge you, inspire you, and allow you to reach your intellectual potential. Even if your sights are set on medical school, this doesn't mean that your undergraduate major must be science related. The traditional path to acceptance has changed.

If you have managed to gain the grades and the work experience necessary to secure a place on a medical course, then the chances are you're no stranger to hard work. Despite this, you'll need to be prepared for even more challenges, both during your studies and in the years ahead. This is a profession that can demand a lot both intellectually and emotionally, with an intensive and time-consuming workload.

Have a backup plan

You've probably heard this statistic before. Many who begin a pre-med program do not become doctors. There are several reasons for this. Sometimes the pre-med courses are just too rigorous for a student. Other times, just like with many other college majors, students get part of the way through their pre-med program and decide to change their major. There is nothing wrong with this. Medical school is not for everyone, and it's okay if it turns out that it is not for you. The best thing for you to do is to choose a pre-med program at a school that offers a variety of other good degree programs.

What to study in college

Preparing yourself for medical school will include taking a lot of science classes, but there will be other classes too. You'll take Chemistry (inorganic, organic and biochemistry), Physics, Biology, English, physics, calculus, and possibly statistics. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), at a minimum, students will want to consider completing all the following:

- One year of biology
- One year of physics
- One year of English
- Precalculus
- Statistics and/or Calculus
- Two years of chemistry (organic and inorganic chemistry)

Depending on the school, optional courses may include:

- Anatomy and Physiology
- Genetics
- Molecular Biology
- Cellular Biology and Statistics
- Cellular and Molecular Physiology
- Biochemistry

It's not just about the classes

Getting into medical school does not simply require completing a set of classes. Your performance in science classes (and all classes) matters. Specifically, you must earn high grades. Your overall grade point average (GPA) must be no lower than 3.5 on the US 4.0 scale. Non-science and science GPAs are calculated separately but you should earn at least a 3.5 in each. Ultimately, you don't need to be a premed major to complete these courses and meet the prerequisites for medical school, but a premed major makes it easier for you to fulfill all the prerequisites within 4 years of college. A premed major is helpful but not necessary.

Additional considerations

The MCAT exam is offered January through September. Aim to take the MCAT as early in the year as possible, preferably no later than mid-May before AMCAS application submissions begin in early June. Completing the exam earlier will allow you to complete your AMCAS application early, and the earlier you submit your application, the better. Applicants considered to be Highly Competitive usually have MCAT score of at least 27 out of 45 points.

- Highly Competitive GPA
- MCAT
- Letters of Recommendation
- Observation hours
- Other clinical experience
- Experience
- Volunteerism
- Innovation
- Leadership
- Interest in Underserved Populations
- Personal interests
- Diversity of the class
- Cultural competency/Cultural responsiveness

In addition to challenging coursework, applicants should look for opportunities to demonstrate a range of competencies. To gain experience, applicants should consider volunteering at a local hospital or clinic to gain practical experience in the health professions. A well-rounded sampling of extra-curricular activities or work experiences, both related and unrelated to medicine, will help broaden an applicant's knowledge and development. Requirements vary from one medical school to another, so students are cautioned to check carefully with the admissions counselors of the medical school that they wish to attend.

Getting accepted to a medical school

The first step to being accepted to medical school is to understand the prerequisites required by various schools. Sometimes they are different. So, you should start researching medical schools as a freshman in college. This way you can be certain that you will have taken the required classes for the schools that interest you. Next is to prepare for the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). Typically, you take the MCAT during your senior year in college – or the year before you plan on starting medical school. Most medical schools have a minimum test score that you must get in order to be accepted. Knowing this score, practicing and studying for the test are key elements to getting into your preferred school.

Medical school and residency

Typically, you will spend your first two years of medical school studying science. You'll learn medical concepts. You'll learn more biology and anatomy, as well as study diseases and various conditions. During the last two years, you'll get some hands-on experience with patients.

Often during your third year in medical school, you will have what you need in order to choose your specialty. You will have worked several clinicals and actually seen and helped patients. During your final year in medical school, you'll start applying for residency programs relating to your specialty.

Start Your College Search Now!

To find school-specific requirements for each U.S. and Canadian medical school, see the Association of American medical Colleges (AAMC) Medical School Admission Requirements.