

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Medicine

Health Professions Advising Office

PREMEDICAL HANDBOOK

2140 College of Medicine

PO Box 3064300

1115 West Call Street

Tallahassee, FL 32306-4300

850.644.7678

850.644.5766

Website: <http://med.fsu.edu/?page=advisingOutreach.home>

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Part I:

INTRODUCTION

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

The Florida State University College of Medicine was created in May 2000 as the first medical school established in the U.S. in over twenty years. The College of Medicine continues to carry on the mission of the Program in Medical Sciences, which was founded in 1971 to increase the number of primary care physicians in the underserved regions of Florida. The College of Medicine emphasizes the training of generalist physicians for practice in ambulatory settings, specifically to serve in rural or inner city areas, and geriatric patients. The College now accepts out of state applicants; however, Florida residents will be given preference.

The first two years of classes will be taught at the Florida State University College of Medicine main campus in Tallahassee. (This community-based clinical training model ensures that students experience a variety of practice settings, including rural and inner city hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and doctor's offices. The third and fourth year clerkships are done at regional campuses located in Tallahassee, Pensacola, Daytona Beach, Orlando, Fort Pierce, Sarasota, rural training sites in Marianna and Immokalee and several communities in north Florida.)

The Prehealth Professions Advising Office

Students should seek advisement regarding preparation for medical school early in their college career. The Florida State University College of Medicine provides academic advising and counseling to students interested in pursuing careers in the health sciences. Currently, over two thousand students are enrolled in this advising program. Many of the students who seek advising in the advising office are premedical students. However, the program is open to all prehealth students including predentistry, preveterinary, prepharmacy, prephysician assistant, preoptometry and prephysical therapy. Prehealth Professions Advisors meet regularly with these students throughout their college years assisting with career goals, course scheduling, long-term academic planning and professional school admissions procedures.

In addition to one-on-one advising, the Advising Center also sponsors programs of special interest to prehealth students. Programs from recent years included panel discussions with admissions representatives from various medical and professional schools and workshops on *Succeeding in the Application Process and Interviewing Strategies*.

Florida State University has a competitive acceptance rate to medical and professional schools nationwide and many of our graduates have been recognized for their outstanding contributions and achievements in the field of medicine.

To register with the College of Medicine Prehealth Professions Advising Office, call or visit to set up an appointment with the Health Professions Advisor at your earliest convenience (Phone: 850-644-7678).

Every attempt is made to keep the material in this handbook as up to date as possible. The most current information regarding the application process, course

requirements, and the prehealth clubs can be found at the College of Medicine website <http://med.fsu.edu/?page=advisingOutreach.home>.

A Letter to Our Readers

Dear Students,

This handbook has been compiled through a collaborative effort by students and staff for you, the premedical student at Florida State University, to share current information and advice on the successful pathway to medical school. As a premedical student, one of the most important qualities you must possess is commitment. Please demonstrate your commitment now by taking a few moments to sit down, read this handbook and familiarize yourself with the complex yet exciting journey ahead.

The first section of this handbook is dedicated to describing the profile of the successful medical school applicant. By closely analyzing the students who have been selected to medical school over the past several years, we have seen a consistent pattern emerge. This pattern has been confirmed by various medical school admissions directors. Based on this information we have broken down the profile into seven criteria with a description under each on how you can best meet this criteria. Remember this profile should be used as a guideline. Each applicant to medical school is an individual with unique qualities and gifts. There will be some areas in your application that are stronger and some weaker. The most important goal for this section is to educate you on the standards on which you will be judged.

The next section of this handbook is a four-year guide. Under each academic year we have made a list of what you should be doing, information you should know and a question and answer section covering topics most consistently raised during that academic year. We also included an additional section for post-baccalaureate students, those individuals who have already obtained a bachelor's degree and are pursuing course work to qualify for medical school.

We wish you the best of luck and encourage you to schedule regular advising appointments and take full advantage of all the resources available to you in the College of Medicine Prehealth Professions Advising Office.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Shea Smith, Ph.D.
Coordinator of Special Projects
Advising First
Florida State University

Carolyn Fontana Stalvey, M.D.
Clinical Assistant Professor
Associate Program Director, Internal Medicine Residency
Department of Medicine
University of Florida College of Medicine

About the Authors

Carolyn Stalvey

Carolyn Fontana Stalvey received her Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences from Florida State University in 1995 and received her MD degree from the University of Florida in 1999. She completed a residency in Internal Medicine at UF in 2002 and was the Chief Resident in 2002-2003. Carolyn served as vice-president of Alpha Epsilon Delta, the premedical honor society. She was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi. In addition, she was named the Florida State Top Junior Woman in academics. She was twice a recipient of an American Cancer Society fellowship for research. Carolyn is a professor and associate program director at the UFCOM in Gainesville.

Carolyn contributed a great deal of time and energy to this project long after she was a premedical student at Florida State University. Her first-hand experience and special insight will greatly benefit the readers of this handbook.

Kathleen Shea Smith

Kathleen Smith served as the Health Professions Advisor at Florida State University from 1992 to 1997. Her area of focus remains on issues affecting students choosing professional health careers. Kathleen received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Kenyon College in 1987 and her Master of Education from Temple University in 1992. Prior to serving Florida State students, she worked as an Academic Advisor and Career Coordinator at Temple University from 1989 to 1992. In 1994 Kathleen was honored by President Talbot D'Alemberte with a University Advising Award for excellence in undergraduate advising.

Part II:

PROFILE OF THE SUCCESSFUL MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICANT

Completion of the Premedical Requirements

Most medical schools have the same standard list of premedical requirements. With the exception of the Biochemistry sequence, they are also the same classes required prior to taking the MCAT exam and thus should be completed by the end of the junior year. Although most medical schools require the same classes, it is still a good idea to contact each of the schools you are considering or consult the Medical School Admission Requirements book put out by the Association of American Medical Colleges to verify the requirements. The standard list of premedical requirements are:

English	6 Semester Hours
General Biology (For Science Majors With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
General Chemistry (With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
Organic Chemistry (With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
General Physics (With Lab)	8 Semester Hours
Mathematics	6 Semester Hours
Biochemistry	4 Semester Hours
*Genetics	3 Semester Hours
*Psychology	3 Semester Hours
*Spanish	6 Semester Hours

General Genetics and General Psychology are recommended for the **Florida State University College of Medicine*

Here are the specific classes at Florida State University which fulfill the premedical requirements:

Biology

BSC 2010	Biology I	3 Semester Hours
BSC 2010 Lab	Biology I Lab	1 Semester Hour
BSC 2011	Biology II	3 Semester Hours
BSC 2011Lab	Biology II Lab	2 Semester Hours

Chemistry

CHM 1045	General Chemistry I	3 Semester Hours
CHM 1045 Lab	General Chemistry I Lab	1 Semester Hour
CHM 1046	General Chemistry II	3 Semester Hours
CHM 1046 Lab	General Chemistry I Lab	1 Semester Hours

Organic Chemistry

CHM 2210	Organic Chemistry I	3 Semester Hours
CHM 2211	Organic Chemistry II	3 Semester Hours
CHM 2211 Lab	Organic Chemistry II Lab	3 Semester Hours

Physics

PHY 2053C	College Physics A (Trig. Based)	4 Semester Hours
PHY 2054C	College Physics B (Trig. Based)	4 Semester Hours
or		
PHY 2048C	General Physics A (Calc. Based)	5 Semester Hours
PHY 2049C	General Physics B (Calc. Based)	5 Semester Hours

Note: Either trigonometry-based Physics or calculus-based Physics are acceptable courses as prerequisites to medical school.

Mathematics

MAC 1105	College Algebra	3 Semester Hours
MAC 1140	Precalculus	3 Semester Hours
MAC 1114	Trigonometry	2 Semester Hours

Required by FSU and UF

BCH 4053	General Biochemistry	3 Semester Hours
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Required by FIU – 2 semesters (2 of calculus, 2 of statistics or 1 of each)

MAC 2311	Calculus I	4 Semester Hours
STA 2122 or 2171	Statistics	3 or 4 Semester Hours

Strong Academic Record

Academic success in medical school is best indicated by a consistently strong undergraduate grade point average (GPA). Medical schools pay close attention to your academic course load and expect to see a full load of courses each semester. There are two exceptions to this statement. The first semester, when you are making the adjustment to college, and the semester you are studying for the MCAT are periods when it is acceptable to enroll for 12-14 hours. There should be an emphasis on science and mathematics courses balanced with non-science courses. The most recent report from the AAMC (2012) states the average GPA for FSU students who matriculated into medical school is as follows:

Science (Biology, Chemistry Physics and Math) GPA:	3.6
Total GPA:	3.7

Strong MCAT Scores

The MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test) is a standardized national exam required of all students applying to medical school. The test is offered 25 times per year. It is recommended that students register early. The test is made up of three parts: Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, and Biological Sciences. The exam tests material covered in required premedical course work. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges' Student Manual, admissions officers use the exam to predict success in medical school, to determine students' strong and weak areas and to compare students from different colleges and universities. Performance on the MCAT is also used by admissions committees to determine the likelihood of success on the national licensing exams required to practice medicine in the United States. The most recent report from the AAMC states the average MCAT scores for students who matriculated into a Florida medical school are:

Overall MCAT:	31
Verbal Reasoning:	11
Physical Sciences:	10
Biological Sciences:	10

Realistic Understanding of the Medical Field

Once it is determined an applicant is academically qualified and proficient in taking standardized tests, it must then be determined how strong his/her motivations are for a career in medicine. The best way to display commitment to a career in medicine is to demonstrate an ongoing interest in the medical field outside of the classroom. By the time you are ready to apply, you should have spent substantial time volunteering, working or shadowing a physician in a variety of medical settings. These settings could include hospitals, nursing homes, doctors' offices, clinics, psychiatric facilities or any other place where medicine happens. Many FSU students volunteer at several local places including Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH), the FSU Health and Wellness Center, Children's Medical Services, Neighborhood Medical Center and many more. The Health Professions Advisor can provide ideas and contact names for premedical students, but do not hesitate to research opportunities on your own and seek them out. Many industrious students have found placements with local doctors, clinics and organizations just by calling around! School breaks are also an excellent

time to work one-on-one with a physician from your own community. Some organization may require background checks and drug screening. It is recommended you keep a journal of the time you volunteer. Write down your first impressions, any significant experiences and your opinions and feelings about your time as a volunteer. This information will be extremely valuable when you later prepare for interviews and must describe your experiences in the medical field.

Commitment to Service

Another area where motivation for a career in medicine is determined and evaluated is through the student's demonstrated commitment to service in the community. As a physician, one's entire life is devoted to serving others, requiring great sacrifice and a strong devotion to one's career. When a student commits time to others he/she demonstrates this devotion and, at the same time, gains a better understanding about the lives of people from different backgrounds. It is recommended that every premedical student give some time in a service capacity that is interesting and rewarding to them. Local agencies are dependent on volunteers and appreciate the volunteer hours from FSU premedical students. Many students volunteer with the Alzheimer's Project of Tallahassee, the American Cancer Society, Big Bend Cares, Big Bend Hospice, Meals on Wheels, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Florida HIV/AIDS Hotline, Planned Parenthood Pregnancy Help and Information Center, and Neighborhood Medical Center.

Extracurricular and Leadership Activities

The college experience is unique to each student. As a premedical student it is important to take full advantage of the many opportunities offered at this time in your life. Medical school admissions committees want to see students involved! For some, this may mean joining a sorority or fraternity, and for others a sport or club. It is important to focus on activities outside of school to help you develop and grow as a person.

Also, medical school admission committees look favorably upon roles of leadership. Much can be gained by experiencing the challenges of overseeing peers and taking on projects. Just try to experience life outside of Dirac Science Library. It will help you stay balanced and well rounded!

Research Experience

Finally, research experience is looked upon favorably by most medical school admissions committees. Undergraduate research develops problem-solving skills, and requires initiative and dedication to science. There are different ways to obtain research experience such as approaching a professor from whom you have taken a class or one whose research topic is especially interesting to you. One way to learn about the current research of FSU biology professors is to enroll in BSC 3930, Seminar in Biological Frontiers. This pass/fail biology course has a different professor lecture each week on his/her research. You may also contact your major department to learn more on how to get started.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part III:

FRESHMAN YEAR

What You Should be Doing Freshman Year

- Study, Study
- Make an appointment with the Health Professions Advisor and establish your advising file.
- Join one of the premedical organizations on campus
<http://med.fsu.edu/index.cfm?page=AdvisingOutreach.student.org>
- Begin exploring extracurricular, volunteer and community service activities on campus and in the community. Identify summer employment.
- Get to know your professors.

What Every Premed Freshman Should Know

The first year of college is a time of transition. Leaving home and entering college bring many changes in all areas of life including living arrangements, friendships, daily chores, academic expectations and requirements, just to name a few. For most students the first semester is a period of great adjustment and, because of this, it is recommended you focus on making this transition as smooth as possible.

Academically, freshmen should not overload themselves. The average course load should range from 12 to 15 hours. It should be set up with the assistance of the Health Professions Advisor and should take into consideration several factors including your academic background and personal course load preference. If you choose less than 15 semester hours, you may want to catch up during the summer and take a few courses at your local community college or get an early start on the nine-hour summer requirement and take classes at a university in the state university system. The main focus for the freshman year should be on academics. If you feel there is time to begin getting involved, you can start by exploring campus activities, volunteer work or part-time job possibilities. The prehealth and premedical student organizations (listed above) welcome freshmen and the regular meetings and various activities offer a great opportunity to meet other premedical students.

Questions and Answers

Can I major in Premed at Florida State?

At Florida State University premed is not a major, but more of a specialization or focus. You must select a major department and meet the degree requirements for that major, while at the same time, work on the premedical courses. For most science majors, the premedical courses already fall within the major curriculum, but for non-science majors, these courses must be completed in addition to major requirements. Biology is still the most popular premedical major.

Do I need to have a 4.0 GPA to get accepted to medical school in Florida?

No. The average GPA for admitted students to medical school is approximately 3.6. You are expected to maintain A's and B's with, of course, the more A's the better! Also, remember every grade you make in college is looked at by medical schools, so a few poor grades may not be reflected in a strong GPA, but will be considered in an evaluation of your academic record.

Should I major in Biological Science or choose a non-science major to appear unique or well-rounded?

There are several benefits to majoring in Biological Sciences at FSU as a premedical student. The department is ranked nationally and prepares students well for medical school. The Biological Science curriculum also includes most of the premedical requirements so students do not have to be concerned with incorporating premedical classes into their schedules - it is automatic.

A non-science major does stand out as unique, but the reasons for selecting such a major must not be because the science major is too difficult. A non-science major is a good choice if there is a specific discipline that really interests you and you would like to study this discipline in depth. If you choose a non-science major however, you will also need to incorporate the premedical classes into your schedule each semester, which may require additional time. Also, because the non-science major's science ability is being judged from a limited number of science courses, the non-science major is expected to do exemplary work in the premedical courses.

The best advice is to major in an area that is most interesting to you and one where you will subsequently do well. The AAMC reports that nationwide in 2011, medical school students in the entering class' undergraduate major distribution was 51% Biology majors, 17% Physical Science majors, 12% Social Science majors and 5% Humanities majors. Florida State's percentages are similar with Biology representing 46% and Exercise Science 28% being the most common majors for students accepted into medical school.

Is freshman year too early to start getting involved?

Because the transition to college is different for each individual, it depends on how comfortable you are with your academics. Academics must always come first. If you find yourself with extra time then begin sampling the many extra-curricular, community service and medical opportunities available to you.

Is there a club on campus for premedical students?

Yes! There are many such organizations at Florida State University. Information and registration materials may be picked up in the FSU COM Health Professions

Advising office. Updated information about the following organizations can be found at <http://med.fsu.edu/index.cfm?page=AdvisingOutreach.student.org>

American Medical Student Association (AMSA)

The American Medical Student Association is a premedical organization at Florida State University. It is a small community for sophomores, juniors and seniors who have a strong desire to learn about what it takes to become a physician. There are no minimum academic requirements for membership. Volunteering as a group, social activities, guest speakers and field trips are just a few of the activities that take place within AMSA. Membership drives take place at the beginning of each fall.

American Medical Women's Association (AMWA)

The American Medical Women's Association is an organization of physicians and medical students interested in promoting women's health and the advancement of women in medicine. Since its establishment at Florida State University, the organization, which is open to undergraduate students, has grown in membership, interest, and involvement. Florida State University undergraduate and medical school students are invited to hear speakers discuss various women's health issues and are made aware of volunteer opportunities pertaining to such topics.

In addition to previous goals, we wish to promote a mentoring program between the first year medical school students and the premedical undergraduate students. We strive to foster an environment in which students can draw from the knowledge and experience of their peers.

Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED)

Alpha Epsilon Delta is an honor society for students interested in pursuing a career in the healthcare field. Membership offers undergraduate students the opportunity to develop initiative, leadership and self-education through participation in the activities of the chapter. Meetings include presentations by faculty members, community physicians and personnel from various professional schools. In addition to the bi-weekly meetings, students can volunteer in campus and community service organizations.

Multicultural Association of Prehealth Students (MAPS)

The Multicultural Association of Prehealth Students (MAPS) strives to enrich the academic and professional development of its members. The prime mission of MAPS is to enhance the recruitment of under-represented students into the healthcare field and to help members become successful candidates for professional health and medical programs. As MAPS members, students will be eligible to participate in special activities and programs that will strictly focus on helping them accomplish their goals as undergraduate prehealth students. MAPS offers many opportunities to develop leadership skills through volunteer work, community service projects, and tutorial services.

Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA)

The mission of the Florida State University Chapter of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) is to educate students on various health careers and to give them the leadership skills needed to further themselves in the attainment of their ambitions as career professionals in the health care industry. HOSA is a nationally recognized organization and is dedicated to those students pursuing a career in a health-related field.

Hands of Hope

FSU Hands of Hope is a newly recognized Registered Student Organization that prides itself in organizing consistent volunteering projects in the area mainly aimed at providing assistance to people with disabilities. Hands of Hope is officially affiliated with the College of Medicine at Florida State University and Tallahassee Memorial Hospital and has a variety of volunteering opportunities open within these and many other institutions that further reinforce its mission to integrate students with and without disabilities. Regular volunteering events include Stroke Awareness Group and Afternoon Bingo with patients at the TMH Rehabilitation Center, monthly Build-A-Ramps, and nursing home visits. Hands of Hope also hosts speakers from various health professions.

HERO

Health and Educational Relief Organization (HERO) is a student organization dedicated to volunteer service opportunities in Tallahassee and internationally. HOSA participates in two medical mission trips a year to Guyana, South America and other third world nations. These trips are made possible by a team of physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and prehealth students who dedicate their time to serving those less privileged in need of medical care. During each trip, HERO provides not only medical attention to patients but also works to bring the members of the community personal health education as well as literacy advancement programs for students. During the year while not on the medical mission trips, HERO actively fundraises and participates in various volunteer and service opportunities in the local Tallahassee community.

Aspiring Medical Professionals (AMP)

Aspiring Medical Professionals (AMP) provides an avenue for academic, professional and social activities to students taking pre medical coursework at FSU. AMP fosters interaction between faculty and students within the departments of biology, exercise science, psychology and the College of Medicine. The club's main goals are developing a mentorship program upper and underclassmen, facilitating the academic and professional development of its members, promoting undergraduate research and service.

MEDLIFE FSU

MEDLIFE is a national organization consisting of a network of medical professionals, motivated students and trained staff who work with low-income communities. MEDLIFE FSU focuses on the health aspect of this mission both locally and internationally. The club participates in mobile clinics allowing students to participate in clinical areas such as pharmacy, dentistry and medicine. MEDLIFE FSU also raises money for medical supplies and funding for special case surgical procedures for low income families.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part IV:

SOPHOMORE YEAR

What You Should be Doing Sophomore Year

- Study, Study
- Make an appointment and check in with the Health Professions Advisor.
- Attend prehealth and premedical organization meetings.
- Commit your time to at least one or two extra-curricular, medical and community service activities.
- Get to know your professors (next year you will need to ask for letters of evaluation).
- Explore research opportunities.

What Every Premed Sophomore Should Know

By the sophomore year you should be feeling more settled at Florida State, knowledgeable about what is expected of you academically and feeling more comfortable with the independence college brings. If you got off to a shaky start, don't throw in the towel just yet. Medical school admissions committees are more understanding of a weaker GPA your freshman year if it is offset by a steady increase in grades the years after. Your course load should be close to 15 semester hours with a good balance between science, mathematics, and liberal studies classes. Since Florida State requires you to complete 9 semester hours in the state university system during a summer, it is recommended you attend classes during the summer between your sophomore and junior years. This is a good way to balance the heavy requirements and complete as much course work before you take the MCAT.

Questions and Answers

I have heard Organic Chemistry is a “weed-out” course for premedical students. What advice can you give me about this class?

Organic chemistry is a very challenging class. It is true that admissions committees look closely at these grades when evaluating your transcript. These courses require you to handle a large volume of material, the same requirement for getting through classes in medical school. The organic chemistry sequence is extremely time consuming which should be taken into account when setting up your overall schedule. Think of it as a full-time job and give it the time it requires. Remember also, Organic II is dependent on the knowledge from Organic I so it is not recommended you take each part at different universities. Organic 1, Organic II and Organic II Lab are strongly recommended prior to taking the MCAT. Many of the MCAT questions are phrased as experiments you will have performed in the lab, so be sure to fit the lab in before taking the MCAT.

How important is participating in research with a faculty member and how should I get started?

The importance of having undergraduate research experience varies among medical schools. Most medical schools look favorably upon students with research experience. You can get started by approaching professors and asking if you can take on volunteer work or a Directed Individual Study (DIS) for credit. If you are unsure about whom to approach, you can ask the departmental advisor. Also, working in a professor's lab is one of the best ways to get to know him/her and earn a strong letter of evaluation.

Many of my science courses are in large lecture halls. How can my professors know who I am, let alone write a personal letter about me?

A better question to ask would be, “What can I do so that my professors can come to know me well?” You must make an extra effort to make an impression on a professor. For starters you must attend class regularly and stay alert and interested in the material. Even in the largest lecture classes, professors notice who is there, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed versus who is catching up on missed sleep. Don't be afraid to approach professors with questions or to discuss material covered that day in class. Perhaps a topic will arise that is of particular interest to you. You may wish to do some independent research on this topic and share your findings with the professor.

Many professors will actually interview a student prior to writing a letter of evaluation to get to know you better. You may want to suggest this when you approach a professor for a letter of evaluation. Another way to help the professor get to know you beyond your performance in his/her class is to provide him/her with additional information. You may want to include a resume, a mini-auto biography or your medical school essay along with your evaluation form (forms can be picked up at the Health Professions Advising office). Again, this makes the evaluator aware of your outside interests and activities. When personal information is included with an academic evaluation, it adds a deeper dimension to the letter of evaluation, thus making it stronger. This part of the application process is one of the most challenging for students, but there is no way to get around it.

I know it is important to volunteer, but how much time should I commit?

Quality is more important than quantity when it comes to medical experience and community service. As a general rule you should commit at least two to six hours each week for the year prior to application. You should select at least one activity where you are making an impact and the work is making an impact on you. The length of commitment will be looked at and what you gained will be evaluated from the content of your essays and interviews when you are applying to medical school. It is important to take an active roll in your volunteer work. You should start out by earning the trust of the department or organization and then, as time passes, take initiative to gain more responsibility and exposure.

Do I have to volunteer or can I get paid for my medical experience?

Paid work will also enhance your application, although it is challenging to find positions in the medical field without certifications or years of experience. Some students will begin as volunteers and then later get promoted to paid positions. If you are seeking paid employment you should put together a resume (the Career Center can help) and visit different doctors' offices and clinics.

How do medical schools view employment?

Many college students must work while they are in school. Work is looked upon favorably by medical school admissions committees. However, when work interferes with academics, it becomes another issue. Some committees look at grades in light of work responsibilities, but many do not. Before work responsibilities get in the way of academics, it is important to plan ahead. Be sure to learn of all financial aid deadlines so you can take full advantage of assistance available to you. You should visit the FSU STAR scholarship center (located in the Financial Aid office) and research special scholarships. If you must work, take a lighter academic load during the semester and continue with classes throughout the summers. Many students take summers off from school and work to save for the year. If working does not interfere with your grades, all the better, an admissions committee will view this in a positive light.

Should I take an elective such as a language course pass/fail?

No. Medical school selection committees do not like to see any shortcuts. Taking a course pass/fail can be viewed as such. Besides, knowing another language will be very useful as a practicing physician as our nation is made up of individuals who are not native speakers of English.

If I am struggling in a course should I just drop it or give up?

No. Try not to give up in a class. When you submit your medical school applications, your GPA will be calculated separately from the FSU GPA and too many dropped classes reflect negatively on your application. If you are struggling in a class, you need to discuss the situation with the instructor, seek out a study group or inquire about any tutoring and special help sessions available to you.

PLANNING AHEAD A

4 YEAR GUIDE

Part V:

JUNIOR YEAR

What You Should be Doing Junior Year

- Study, Study
- Make an appointment and check in with the Health Professions Advisor.
- Attend pre-health and premedical organization meetings and consider taking on a leadership role.
- Commit your time to at least one or two extra-curricular, medical and community service activities.
- Start or continue with research opportunities.
- Begin preparing for the MCAT.
- Begin planning where you would like to apply.
- Register on-line for the MCAT.
- Download an American Medical Colleges Application Service (AMCAS) worksheet from the AAMC website and submit the AMCAS application during early summer after your junior year.

What Every Premed Junior Should Know

Junior year is finally here - the most significant year as a premedical student. This year will be the busiest yet. You will be preparing for and taking the MCAT, selecting your list of medical schools and collecting letters of evaluation. You will also be submitting your AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service) application, the standard one-time application for most medical schools. Because the application process to medical school begins in June, this is the last full academic year admissions officers have to review when making their evaluations. This is a good reason for it to be the strongest year yet. Academically, the junior year should include the final courses required prior to taking the MCAT. Continue taking a full load. However, the semester you are preparing for the MCAT should be planned very carefully.

The most important junior year advice for you is not to procrastinate. Timing is essential. In every aspect of the application process, the earlier you do what is required of you, the higher your chance for success. Any delay on your part will put off the review of your application. After many years you have worked towards this goal, it would be a shame to risk your chances for acceptance because of procrastination.

Good luck as you begin this challenging, yet thrilling journey.

Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT): Questions and Answers

I have heard a great deal about the MCAT. Could you give me more details on this exam?

The MCAT (Medical School Admissions Test) is an exam required by most medical schools for admission. In spring 2015, a redesigned MCAT exam will debut. Students applying to medical school in 2015, to enter in 2016, will take the new 2015 MCAT. Most medical schools will accept scores that are 2-3 years old so students who took the old MCAT might still be able to use their test scores.

As with the previous version, the new MCAT is designed to test the academic competencies that students need to succeed in medical school. Comprehensive changes were made to the exam in order to prepare students in managing the rapid advances in science as well as the changing demographics of patient populations.

The new exam will be 7 hours and 30 minutes long (including instructions time and breaks) with an actual 6 hours and 15 minutes of “seat time”. The test schedule will run from April through September with about 30 testing dates per year.

Medical school admission’s officers use the exam to predict success in medical school, determine a student’s strong and weak areas and to compare students from different colleges and universities. In addition to testing knowledge of natural science concepts and skills in critical analysis and reasoning, the new MCAT will also cover concepts from the behavioral and social sciences.

What is different about the new exam? (from “The Preview Guide for MCAT²⁰¹⁵”)

The natural sciences sections of MCAT2015 reflect recent changes in medical education. They test the concepts in biology, general and organic chemistry, biochemistry, and physics that medical school faculty rate as most important to entering students’ success. Though undergraduate course offerings differ by institution, these concepts are covered in many undergraduate schools in introductory sequences in biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics and in first-semester biochemistry courses.

MCAT2015 includes a section on the social and behavioral sciences: *Psychological, Social and Biological Foundations of Behavior*. This section tests your knowledge of important introductory psychology and sociology concepts, as well as the introductory biology concepts that relate to mental processes and behavior. The addition of this

section to the exam recognizes the importance of socio-cultural and behavioral determinants of health and health outcomes.

The *Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills* section is also new. This section asks you to analyze, evaluate, and apply information provided by passages from a wide range of social sciences and humanities disciplines. It does not require specific knowledge of these disciplines, but it tests the analysis and reasoning skills you need for medical school, and may prompt you to read broadly as you prepare. Along with many others, passages about ethics and philosophy, cross-cultural studies and population health are included.

The following table offers a broad overview of the content areas, number of items, and allotted time for the four sections of MCAT 2015:

Summary of MCAT2015

Content	Number of Questions	Approximate number of minutes
<i>Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems</i>	59	95
<i>Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems</i>	59	95
<i>Psychological, Social and Biological Foundations of Behavior</i>	59	95
<i>Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills</i>	53	90

Additional information for preparing for the MCAT can be found at AAMC website. Much of the information is available for free:

The Official Guide to the MCAT Exam: www.aamc.org/officialmcatguide

Information on practice tests for MCAT2015 is available at:

The Official MCAT Self-Assessment Package – www.aamc.org/mcatsap
E-MCAT Practice Tests – www.aamc.org/mcatpracticetest

How is the MCAT Scored?

Each of the four sections of the MCAT is scored separately from a low of 118 to a high of 132, with a midpoint of 125. There is also a total score which shows the combined score for the four sections. The total score can range from 472 to 528 with a midpoint of 500.

Many forms of the MCAT exam can be given on the same day. Each form is structured to be equal in difficulty to the others. The new 2015 MCAT is equated or adjusted to compensate for differences in each exam so that the scores reported to medical schools are comparable in meaning.

When should I take the MCAT?

You should take the MCAT when you are ready. As a general rule, students take the test in late spring or early summer during the same year they are applying to medical school. For example if you plan to enter medical school in 2017, you should plan on taking the MCAT in 2016. The test is administered about 25 dates per year from April till September.

The decision on when to take the test should be discussed with the Pre Health Professions Advisor. It is advisable to take the MCAT when all of the pre-med prerequisites have been completed and as early into the application process as possible for two reasons. First, applications to most medical schools are reviewed on a rolling admissions basis. When completed applications are submitted to medical schools, they are reviewed on a “first come, first served” basis. If you take the MCAT early into the admissions cycle, your scores will be reported to the medical schools in June. This can make your application complete in the beginning of the cycle and ready for review. This increases your chances of acceptance because, as an early applicant you are vying for one in many available seats, compared to later in the cycle, when you are competing for one of the few remaining seats. It is also advisable to take the MCAT as early as possible in the event that your scores are lower than anticipated. This way you will have time to retake the exam to improve your score.

For some students, taking the exam after the summer session is the preferred choice. The summer provides extra time to study or to complete the pre-MCAT classes. If you do decide to take the MCAT later into the admission cycle it is strongly advised to still submit your AMCAS application in June. This will allow schools to create your file and process your application materials. When your MCAT scores are reported, your admissions file will be ready for review without any delay. Although your application will be behind those that took an earlier MCAT, it is still better to submit all application materials as early as possible.

How do I prepare for the MCAT?

As stated earlier, think of the MCAT as a final exam covering the material from all of your science classes. It should not be taken lightly. You are required to have a broad knowledge base for the exam. The questions are not all common sense, nor can you find the answers in the reading passages provided. This is obviously true for the discrete questions. In addition, the MCAT is weighted very heavily by admission committees. Think of it as being almost equal to your GPA. With this said, the MCAT must be taken seriously. Study and give it the time it deserves. When you decide to take the MCAT, you should go in with the mindset that this is the only time you will take it. Do not take it to “see how you score.” MCAT provides admissions committees with the scores from all of your attempts. Medical schools do not look favorably on whimsical attempts at the exam because it may appear you did not approach it in a serious way. If you would like to take a full practice test, the AAMC has released several full length exams. These can be ordered with a form in the MCAT registration booklet or through the AAMC - www.aamc.org.

There are a variety of study methods for the MCAT. The method you choose depends on how you study and the amount of money you plan to spend. It is not

recommended you only study old class notes and textbooks. For example, the biology section does not require knowledge of photosynthesis, although this is a large section covered in Biology 1. Also the material covered in your college classes might not have been presented in the same manner required to do well on the exam. Be selective about the topics you review by first consulting with the free MCAT information available online through the AAMC. Get a copy of the MCAT Student Manual www.aamc.org/mcat2015 which contains a general syllabus of what topics you should master before taking the exam.

There are a variety of MCAT review books available in bookstores and in the Pre-Health Professions Advising Office. Although these books offer a review of the required science material, they vary in the amount of detail they cover. Choose a book that will prepare you properly.

The use of practice tests is very important. These will give you an idea on how the questions will be phrased on the real exam. They assist in finding out your strengths and weaknesses as well developing the stamina and pacing required for taking an exam that lasts 6 plus hours. It is helpful to know how long you have per question since this will prevent you from running out of time or rushing through the exam unnecessarily.

Do I need to enroll in a prep course to do well on the MCAT?

In deciding whether or not to take a review class, there are a few factors to consider. These courses can be quite expensive but some students find them very helpful. The courses generally have in-class instruction or review of the material. They also offer many practice questions that they have created based on previous MCATs. These “MCAT-style” questions and exams range from short tests on specific topics and full length exams and offer good preparation. Generally, students who have used the private test courses say you get out of them what you put into them. Simply going to the class will not help you as much if you use the study guides offered by the courses. Many other students feel that they do not need these courses to get motivated or to help structure their time. Keep in mind that no test prep course can prepare you for the exam if you not put the time and effort into studying and using practice exams. In Tallahassee and on-line there are many MCAT prep tutoring classes. Always check to see if any financial aid is available.

By far, the most important factors in preparing for the MCAT are to begin early (8-10 mos. before the test date) and to take many practice exams.

How do I register for the MCAT and is there a way to receive financial aid?

Registration for the MCAT is done online at aamc.org/mcat. Students should consider signing up for the exam at least 3-4 months before the test date to make sure they can find a seat in their area. Taking the MCAT earlier in the calendar year will give you a better chance of getting a seat again if you decide to retake it. The 2015 MCAT will cost \$300.

The AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP) assists students who without financial assistance would be unable to take the MCAT exam or to apply to med schools that require the AMCAS application service.

FAP is not retroactive. If you paid an MCAT or AMCAS fee prior to receiving your FAP reward, you will not receive a refund. Make sure that you apply for a reward before you pay fees. The cost of the MCAT for student receiving the FAP award is \$115. More information is available at aamc.org/fap

How will medical schools receive my score?

Most medical schools belong to a central application processing agency called the American Medical School Application Service (AMCAS). When you apply through AMCAS the application asks you to designate the schools where you would like the application sent. AMCAS verifies your application and forwards it, along with your MCAT score to the designated schools. By registering for the MCAT you are automatically granting release of your scores to the AAMC.

For students applying to non-AMCAS schools such as osteopathic, podiatry or veterinary medicine, MCAT scores can be sent without an additional fee. After the MCAT score is received, go to the AAMC website:

www.aamc.org.students/MCAT/start.htm and go to MCAT Testing History (THx) and Online Score R. An AAMC login user name and password can be set up and the score sent without a fee to a non-AMCAS participating institution.

Should I release my scores to the Health Professions Advisor?

Yes, we encourage you to release your scores so it can be used in advising you as well as compiling data on FSU premedical students.

When do I get the results?

With the introduction of MCAT 2015 it may take 5-6 weeks for the test results. Previous MCAT scores were often available within 30 days.

Should I retake the exam if I do not do well?

Deciding to retake the MCAT can be a difficult dilemma and should be discussed with the Health Professions Advisor. All scores of students applying to medical school will be sent to the medical schools by the testing service. Different schools look at multiple MCAT scores differently. They may look at both equally or look for improvements. If there is a big difference between your grade in a subject and your score on that particular section of the MCAT or you did not feel well on the day of the exam, or if you score well below the confidence level (125) in the four sections; a retake is well worth considering.

The Admissions Process: Questions and Answers

How do I apply to medical school?

Applying to medical school is not an easy process. There are quite a few steps, many essays, and even more forms. Obviously the more schools to which you apply, the more forms and essays there are to juggle. However, if you made it through the last three years of college to get to this point, it should not be too bad.

Most medical schools belong to an application service called AMCAS, American Medical College Application Service. This is a centralized application service where

you complete a computerized application and submit it to AMCAS along with a designation form listing where you would like the application sent. AMCAS then sends it to these designated schools. The schools review the content of the application and make a decision whether to send you a secondary or supplemental application. Most schools have a loose cut-off for GPA and MCAT scores and send the majority of the applicants a secondary application. Upon receiving your secondary application, the schools will reevaluate your entire application and will then decide if you appear to be a match for their program. If you fall within the top group of candidates you will be invited for an interview. If offered an interview, your chances for acceptance rise significantly.

The fee for applications for the 2013 entering class is \$160 for the first designated school and \$35 for each additional school. Those unable to pay this fee may apply for a waiver through the AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP). Information about this program can be found at www.aamc.org/fap.

How do I know which schools are non-AMCAS schools and how do I apply to these schools?

Most allopathic U.S. medical schools use the AMCAS. All of the non-AMCAS medical schools are in Texas. To apply to any of the allopathic medical schools in Texas, except Baylor College of Medicine, students should contact the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS) at:

www.utsystem.edu/tmdsas//medical

The list of the AAMC member non-AMCAS schools in Texas include:

Texas A&M University System Health Science Center College of Medicine
College Station

Texas Tech University Health Services Center, Paul L. Foster School of
Medicine, El Paso

Texas Tech University Health Science Center School of Medicine, Lubbock

University of Texas Southwester Medical Center at Dallas Southwestern
Medical School, Dallas

University of Texas Medical School at Galveston

University of Texas School of Medicine at Houston

University of Texas School of Medicine at San Antonio

When should I apply to medical schools?

The AMCAS applications can be accessed through the AAMC website at www.aamc.org, in the beginning of May and can be submitted from the beginning of June until the deadline set by the individual school. Different schools have different deadlines, ranging from October through January, so it is important that you know the deadline for the schools where you will be applying. The AAMC's book, *Medical School Admission Requirements* (MSAR) includes the schools' addresses, phone numbers, and deadlines. For non-AMCAS schools, be sure you contact the schools early (in the late spring or early summer) to give them sufficient time to send you the application without missing their deadline.

For most schools, though, it is important to apply as early as possible. Many schools have a rolling admissions application process. This means schools begin

evaluating, interviewing and accepting applicants as the applications arrive. You can't assume the medical schools will receive your information as soon as it is postmarked, however. When you first submit your application to AMCAS, it can take from four to six weeks for AMCAS to process your application and forward it to your designated schools. As previously stated, it is relatively less competitive early in the application season when you are vying for a position in a class of many with few people already accepted, than later when you are trying for one of the few spots left. Some schools have filled all their interview spots by December.

I heard about an Early Decision program. Can you tell me more about it?

If you are certain of the school you wish to attend and are a competitive applicant, you can apply Early Decision. This option allows you to apply to your first choice medical school in the summer and be considered for admission before the majority of the applications are reviewed. You can only apply to one school through Early Decision and if you are accepted you must attend that school. For AMCAS schools, you complete the AMCAS application and designate Early Decision. Submit these as early as possible to when the AMCAS application process opens. You should also contact the medical school directly for special instructions for Early Decision candidates. You are not eligible to apply to other schools through the normal application process until your school's Early Decision process is over. If you are accepted through Early Decision, then the application process is completed for you. If you are not accepted, then AMCAS will release you to apply to other medical schools.

The advantage of early decision is that you save yourself time, effort, and money by applying to your preferred school. If you are not accepted, the disadvantage is that your regular application cannot be sent to other schools until AMCAS releases you, which can happen as early as mid-summer and as late as early fall when the early decision admission program is completed. Before you choose this option, be sure you carefully evaluate the timing of the admissions process and be certain you are ready to commit yourself to that one school. Not all medical schools offer early decision programs so be sure to check the AAMC Medical School Admissions Requirements book for more information on the AMCAS and non-AMCAS Early Decision programs.

Where should I apply to medical schools?

The highest percentage of Florida State University students who matriculate into medical school attend one of the seven Florida allopathic (MD) medical programs or two osteopathic (DO) schools. These are: Florida State University College of Medicine, University of Florida College of Medicine, University of Miami School of Medicine, University of South Florida College of Medicine, University of Central Florida College of Medicine, Florida International University College of Medicine, Florida Atlantic University College of Medicine, Nova Southeastern College of Osteopathic Medicine and Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine. The six public allopathic schools primarily accept applicants from the state of Florida. Most students will apply to all of the Florida public medical schools. Beyond Florida schools, there has been no consistent pattern of matriculants to other medical schools to offer you a recommended list. You should do your research and consider many factors when looking at medical schools. In fact, an entire handbook could be written on this topic alone. You must decide what factors are important to you.

Can you tell me more about letters of evaluation for medical school?

As part of the medical school application, you are required to provide letters of evaluation. The numbers and types of letters of evaluation required by each medical school may vary. For most schools, you will need to obtain two sciences letters from biology, chemistry, physics or mathematics faculty and an additional non-science letter from another professor outside these areas. You may also need two or three character letters (employers, physicians, volunteer coordinators, community leaders, etc., as well as a peer letter if you apply to UF). It is important to select individuals who know you well enough to write you strong, personal letters. Also remember, Teaching and Graduate Assistants are not faculty and some schools will not accept letters from TAs as a substitute for faculty letters. Even if these letters are accepted, they are almost never given the weight of a letter from a professor.

As a service to premedical students, evaluation letter files can be established in the FSU COM Prehealth Professions Advising Office. By setting up the letter of evaluation file, you simplify the process for yourself and your evaluators. To establish a file in the Advising Office, you must make an advising appointment, complete a waiver granting permission to keep and duplicate your letters, and to receive information on the letter processing service.

All letters of evaluation should be signed and typed neatly on formal letterhead.

Choosing a Medical School

Teaching Style

Traditionally the first two years of medical school are spent in large classroom lectures. Recently, however, there has been a trend to change the method of teaching. Instead of the usual lecture style of teaching, some schools incorporate Problem Based Learning (PBL). In PBL, the class is divided into small discussion groups. A patient case is presented to the group and students learn by researching the patient's medical problems. Many medical schools use a combination of PBL and lecture - some relying on one style more than the other.

Another new approach to learning is the integrated curriculum. In this format, your courses cover the major organ systems concurrently. In other words, when you are studying the anatomy of the heart in Gross Anatomy, you are also studying the biochemistry of the heart and the development of the heart in Biochemistry and Embryology, respectively.

Emphasis on Research or Clinical Aspects of Medicine

Some medical schools have a stronger reputation as a research facility while others are known for producing top-notch clinicians. Some research oriented schools have research as a component of the medical school curriculum. If you are interested in participating in research, an MD/Ph.D. program might interest you. At the other extreme, clinically oriented schools might offer more opportunities for patient contact in the first two years (see Clinical Exposure below). For more information on individual schools, the Health Professions Advising Office has current medical school catalogues that you can compare.

Clinical Exposure in the First and Second Years

As stated earlier, traditionally in medical school during the first two years, students are engaged in course work and the second two years are spent seeing patients in rotations in the hospital. It was a common complaint among medical

students, however, that the first two years were “dry” and they wanted more contact with patients in these years. Now, many schools offer students a break from the traditional first and second year classwork although the amount and setting vary among schools. Some schools include physical diagnosis classes to learn the basics of patient examination. In addition, at some schools, students have the opportunity to examine “real” patients, not just fellow medical students.

Rotation Emphasis

During the third and fourth years, students rotate through the various medical areas. During the third year, most schools have required rotations for students. However, the amount of time spent in each area varies by school. For example, some schools stress primary care and might require students to spend more time in rotations through these areas. The content of the fourth year also varies among schools. Some have specific rotation requirements the entire year while others allocate the entire year for elective rotations depending on individual students’ interest areas.

The Florida State University College of Medicine (FSU COM) provides a unique rotation experience designed to offer students both diversity in clinical training and the opportunity to relocate to a “regional campus” closer to home. This community-based model has students taking their basic science courses at the central Tallahassee campus and then transfer to one of the regional medical campuses for their third and fourth year. Regional campuses are now located in Orlando, Pensacola, Sarasota, Daytona Beach, Fort Pierce and Tallahassee, along with a third year rural program in Marianna.

Residency Placement Rate

Information about where the students are going for residency is available from the individual medical schools, usually on their websites.

Reputation

Some premedical students are interested in the reputation of certain medical schools. This can be difficult to determine since there is no official ranking. *US News and World Report* determines their own ranking of graduate schools, which is usually published in March. When considering these rankings, though, investigate what factors they used to rank the schools. Sometimes the factors they use to rate schools (e.g., research funding) are not equally important to every student and may not directly impact medical education as other more important characteristics. It is difficult to quantify a medical education so be aware of what factors are used in the rankings.

Hospital Affiliation

Medical schools vary in their association with different types of hospitals. Often private hospitals are better staffed and offer more instruction to medical students. Public hospitals offer students more hands-on training. There are advantages to each type of hospital and many schools are affiliated with both types of hospitals. Also, medical schools with urban medical centers have more trauma cases than smaller cities.

Tuition and Cost of Living

The least expensive medical tuition will be at a public medical school in the state of which you have residency. If you attend a private medical school or a state school

as an out-of-state resident, tuition will be much higher. In addition, you must also add in the cost of living expenses (rent, food, entertainment, etc.). If you are planning on securing loans, this could be an extra \$20,000 a year you assume in debt.

Nevertheless, if you would like to attend a school with higher than average tuition and cost of living expenses, most schools state that you should not have a problem finding loan sources to pay for your education.

Scholarships and Grants

Some schools offer scholarships and grants to help students with the high cost of a medical education. You should contact individual schools for more information. Some are need based while others are academic based.

There are scholarships offered through different branches of the U.S. military as well as the National Health Services Corps which offer paid tuition and a living expense stipend for a commitment of equal amount of time served in that service.

Location

You should consider such factors as distance from family, if you prefer to attend school in an urban or rural environment, and perhaps the climate of the state.

I heard it costs a great deal to apply to medical school. How much should I budget?

Each step of the application process costs money. The AMCAS application costs \$160 plus \$35 for each additional school. Secondary or formal applications can cost from \$0 to \$150 depending on the individual school. Also, interviews can drain the wallet. If the school is within driving distance you can save money by not flying. Most schools give you at least two weeks' notice when they schedule the interview so, if you must fly, the cost of the airplane ticket can be reduced. Many schools are willing to reschedule your appointment, especially if you are traveling from a distance. To bring down the costs of the interviews for you, some schools have medical students who have volunteered to let you stay at their homes to avoid the cost of a hotel. This can be a benefit by allowing you time to talk to a student, especially one that is not associated with the admissions committee. Also for the interviews, you will need to buy a nice business suit and have money for daily expenses such as parking and food. One more note - unfortunately, the interview requests do not arrive in any particular order. In other words, you might get asked to an interview at a long shot school quite a distance away or your last choice school before you hear from your state schools or your first choice school. You might have to spend the money to interview at the less favorable school just because you have not yet heard from your top choices.

What should I write in the Personal Comments section of the AMCAS application?

The personal comments section is a one-page essay on any topic you choose. This essay is your opportunity to let the admissions committees see who you are and what you think. There are no instructions given about the topic. Some people use it to explain why they want to be a doctor, while others tell about meaningful life experiences. It can include anything you want them to know about you and your motivations for a career in medicine. If you would like to see some sample essays,

you can find examples in books on the application process to medical school. You can also visit the Prehealth Professions Advising Office where samples of actual essays from former FSU students. The FSU Reading/Writing Center, with offices in 222 Williams Building and ground floor of the Johnson Building, offers help to students writing the personal statement. Their contact phone number is 644-6495.

Remember, this is the most significant essay you will write up to this point in your academic career! It will be read by every admissions committee and can be the deciding factor in whether or not you receive an interview. Because this essay is so important, you should give yourself plenty of time to write it. Get advice from your parents, friends, relatives, professors and advisor. Have it proofed for mistakes and also ask for honest feedback on their impressions of you from the essay. Nothing looks worse to an admissions committee than a poor essay, especially one with grammatical or spelling errors. The personal essay is your opportunity to set yourself apart from other applicants.

How will I know if AMCAS received my application?

Once your letters of evaluation and your secondary application have been sent, you might want to call the school to make sure your file is complete. Some schools will send you a postcard or email stating either that your file is complete or incomplete.

Once you send off your secondary application (which should be returned as quickly as possible) you must sit and wait to hear from the schools. If they are immediately interested in you, they will ask you to come for an interview. However, they might hold your application to compare you with other applicants before deciding to ask you to come for an interview. Although this can be a very stressful waiting period, it is important that you do not hassle schools by continuing to call and check on the status of your application. The contact person may remember who has been a nuisance and may mention this to an admissions committee member.

Once your application has been submitted to AMCAS, acknowledgement of its receipt will be sent to you by e-mail. This does not necessarily mean that all of your materials are complete or that the deadline requirements have been satisfied. The next step is "verification" which can take 4-6 weeks. When your application and transcripts are on file, AMCAS verifies your course work against your official transcripts. After the application is verified, your AMCAS GPA is calculated. If there are no errors found in the verification process, AMCAS will send you an e-mail stating that the application process is complete and will forward the message to your selected school.

PLANNING AHEAD

A 4 YEAR GUIDE

Part VI:

SENIOR YEAR

What You Should be Doing Senior Year

- Make an appointment and check in with the Health Professions Advisor.
- Attend prehealth and premedical organization meetings and consider taking on a leadership role.
- Commit your time to at least one or two extra-curricular, medical and community service activities.
- Collect final group of letters of evaluation.
- Start or continue with research opportunities.
- Submit all application materials as early as possible (as soon as you receive them).
- Attend an Interview Workshop in the Health Professions Advising Office.
- Select the medical school you wish to attend.

What Every Premed Senior Should Know

Senior year is a year filled with many ups and downs. The beginning of the year brings heavy time pressures. It seems that all the secondary applications are due on the same day coinciding with your first big biochemistry exam. In spite of these stressful conditions, it is still critical that you turn everything in as quickly as possible. Most schools follow a rolling admissions application process. Again, this means they begin evaluating, interviewing and accepting applicants as the applications arrive. It is relatively less competitive early in the application season when you are vying for a position in a class with few people already accepted, than later when you are trying for one of the few remaining slots. Thus, any delay on your part will put off the review of your application. After the many years you have worked toward this goal, it would be a shame to risk your chances for acceptance because of procrastination.

Once you have returned all the application materials to the medical schools, you enter a waiting period. For many students this period is even more difficult than the crunch period at the beginning of the application process. Your application to medical

school is completely out of your hands and you must wait. Depending on the time of application, you could hear from medical schools as early as August and as late as the following summer.

You will eventually hear from each school and may be forced to choose among several offers or be thankful for the one. You may not get accepted this year and will be faced with the decision of applying next year. There will surely be many questions during this period. We at the Prehealth Professions Advising Office would like you to know that even though you may be finished with planning your classes, we are here to discuss any issues that may present themselves this year. We wish you the best as your last year as a premedical student unfolds.

Questions and Answers

I applied to several schools and have only heard that my application is complete. Does this mean I will not be granted any interviews and should I call to ask?

It is normal to submit your AMCAS and secondary application materials and wait anywhere from several weeks to several months before hearing from a medical school. Most medical school admissions offices receive thousands of applications with few personnel to process these applications.

Once you receive notification (usually in the form of an email) that your application is complete, you must then wait to hear from the school regarding an interview. Again, this may be anywhere from several days to several weeks.

Calling in regard to an application or a possible interview is not recommended unless a long period of time has passed since submitting application materials. It can be viewed as pushy and may work against you in the admissions process.

I received a letter today inviting me for a medical school interview - should I take this as a good sign?

Congratulations - once a school offers you an interview they believe, based on all the information you have submitted, you are a qualified candidate for their medical school. Once you receive an interview, your chances for acceptance rise dramatically. The interview is the opportunity for the medical school and you to determine if you are a match for one another. You should take the interview very seriously, prepare well and dress for success (both men and women should wear suits).

How is an interview day set up?

Most interview days begin with a general information session on the school itself. It is important to listen closely and key in on the speaker's message about the mission of the medical school program. You may want to include these points when asked why you chose their medical program. Most likely you will be given a tour of the medical school facility and affiliated hospital(s) and will be offered a sit-down lunch.

Interviews will take place with representatives from the selection committee, usually comprised of faculty members, program administrators, physicians and medical students. You must convince your interviewers you are the right match for their medical school program.

How should I best prepare for my interviews?

You should plan to spend some time in preparation for your interviews. Many students make the mistake of assuming that interviews are a minor aspect of the

application process. They also believe there is really nothing they can do to prepare. There is a great deal you can do and if you prepare well and practice, we guarantee you will have a significantly better interview than your competitors. In addition, the Health Professions Advising Office offers interview workshops during the fall semester and the FSU Career Center offers mock interviews in both fall and spring semesters. Information can be found at www.career.fsu.edu/mock_interview.html. The following is a list of steps to help you better prepare for your interviews:

Step 1 - What are your motivations and reasons for pursuing a career in medicine?

You will undoubtedly be asked why you have made this decision. It is important you look at the key events or relationships that have influenced this decision and give a great deal of thought to how they have affected you. Have you wanted to be a doctor since your first game of “Operation” years ago, or did the illness of someone close to you inspire your decision? Medical school admissions committees want to know these details, so it is important you have thought about them before you are required to explain them to a medical school selection committee member. Typical questions you may be asked in regards to your motivations for a career in medicine include:

Why do you want to become a doctor?

When did you decide you wanted to enter the medical field?

Who has had the most influence in your making this decision?

If you do not get accepted to medical school this year, what will you do?

Step 2 - Analyze yourself in light of specific qualities and significant events that have shaped your life.

The committees are very interested in getting to know you on a personal level. They are interested in learning about your upbringing, your family and important events that have shaped you as a young adult. They want to know how you spend your free time, what issues are important to you and how you see the world. Set aside some time to think about these topics. It is often difficult because these are topics we usually take for granted. Each of us is a unique individual and this is your opportunity to show your qualities to the selection committee. Typical questions you may be asked include:

Tell me about yourself.

How are you similar and different from your parents?

What do you do for fun?

How would your friends describe you?

How have you changed since you started college?

Describe your biggest strength and weakness.

Step 3 - What have been your experiences in the medical field?

This is your chance to talk about your hands-on knowledge of the medical field. You should recount specific examples from your time spent observing volunteering or working in medicine. This is the time to go back and review your journal entries

describing your volunteer work from the past few years. Talk about aspects of medicine you enjoyed or did not enjoy, doctors you look up to and ways you feel you can make a difference. Also, you can use memorable, relevant experiences from your own or a family member's medical treatment, influential books or movies and friends or relatives who have worked in medicine. Finally, this is the time the interviewers will be looking for your understanding of the medical field so your answers should be realistic and mature. Typical questions you may be asked in regard to your knowledge of the medical field include:

How have you gained insight into the medical field?

What has been your most positive experience in medicine?

What was the most difficult experience and what would you do differently if you were in control of the situation?

Have you read any books on the medical field?

Is there a particular area of medicine that interests you at this point?

Step 4 - How have you demonstrated responsibility and commitment up to now?

Medical school is known for presenting students with many challenges and hardships. It is important you be equipped to handle these. The best way to demonstrate your commitment is to give examples of when you were faced with difficulties and overcame them. For some, the biggest challenge could have been a difficult course and for others it could be a personal tragedy. Regardless of the actual event, it is important to ponder the lessons you learned and how you will apply these to future difficult situations.

Typical questions you may be asked include:

What was your most difficult class in college and why was it a difficult class?

What is your biggest accomplishment and why are you most proud of it?

Give me two examples where you faced challenges but did not give up.

How do you handle stress?

Outside of school, describe a time where you made a commitment to something and followed through.

Describe a time when you helped someone who really needed your help.

Step 5 - Brush up on the school itself.

It is very important you are knowledgeable about the medical school where you are interviewing. You should review the catalogue and pay particular attention to the mission of the school, how each year's curriculum is set up and the unique elements of the program. Based on this information, you should sit down and comprise a list of specific questions regarding the information you uncovered. Most interviews end with, "Do you have any questions about our school?", and it helps to prepare beforehand a well thought out question or two. Typical questions you may be asked in regard to your knowledge of the school include:

Why do you want to attend this medical school?

What do you think you will gain from this type of curriculum?

Summary on Interviews

The interview is a very important element in the application process and should be taken seriously, however, it is important to relax and be yourself. The interview is an opportunity for the admissions committees to confirm you are an interesting person who is pursuing medicine for all the right reasons. Take time to think about how all the pieces fit together. Beyond that, all you can do is look at the interview process as an opportunity to talk about what you have worked hard for all this time.

I received a letter in the mail telling me I was on hold at my first choice medical school. What does this mean?

Within a week following the interview she school contacts the students they want to offer acceptances to. Not being contacted means that you are on the hold list. Many students go from the hold status to acceptance within weeks or months and other students are never accepted. If you are placed on hold, it is important you periodically update your file with new information such as an updated transcript or a list of new honors and awards. All contact should be in writing so that any admissions personnel reviewing your file will have access to this new information.

I had been placed on hold at a medical school and received a letter telling me I was now on a waiting list. What is the difference between hold and the waiting list?

These terms are often used interchangeably. If you were not accepted following the interview; you are on hold. Many times students give up an acceptance at one medical school to attend another that notified them later in the process. This frees up a seat and goes to the first person on hold list. Medical schools rarely tell the student where they are ranked on the hold list; however may will give this information to the Health Professions Advisor.

Do you know of any medical school scholarships?

There are many federal, state and local scholarship programs for medical students and the Prehealth Professions Advising Office resource area has some information on these programs. When you interview at medical schools, you will be informed of financial aid information available to you. It is important that you do your own research as well. The STAR Center located in the University Center has financial aid information for all students.

What should I do if I am not accepted?

If you are not accepted to medical school you have a great deal to consider and several decisions to make. You must first decide if you will apply again and how you will spend your time during the next year. You may wish to pursue another health profession or change your direction altogether.

You should consult with the Health Professions Advisor and perhaps admissions representatives from some of the medical schools where you applied, to help you determine if you are a candidate for re-application. If you do decide to reapply, you must find the weak area in your first application and do everything you can do to make it competitive. For example, you may need to show stronger grades, raise your MCAT score or gain more medical experience. Some students are ready to reapply the next cycle and for others, it may take a few years out of the application cycle before they are ready to reapply. Regardless of when you reapply, you should not submit the same application. You must write a new essay, submit new letters of evaluation and update the admissions committees on how you are now a better applicant.

This can be a very difficult time. If you need assistance please do not hesitate to make an appointment with the Health Professions Advisor. The Career Center at Florida State University also welcomes students who need assistance with any aspect of career planning.

Part VII:

POST-BACCALAUREATE YEAR

What Every Premed Post-Baccalaureate Student Should Know

Students who make the decision to pursue undergraduate premedical course work beyond their bachelor's degree come to this point from so many different places. Some have made previous attempts for admission to medical school and need additional upper-division courses to strengthen their application. Others have been out of school for several years, are making a career change and must start at the basic level. Regardless of where you fall in this range, it is important to stress that as a post-baccalaureate student you have a unique past and must follow an individualized plan in order to reach your goal of medical school. The Prehealth Professions Advising Office offers assistance to all post-baccalaureate students at Florida State University and you are strongly encouraged to work closely with the Health Professions Advisor to create a personalized pathway to medical school.

The first section of this handbook describes the profile of a successful medical school applicant and pertains to all applicants including post-baccalaureate students. It should be closely followed when setting up your plan for acceptance to medical school. For post-baccalaureate students the time and context may be different compared to the traditional four-year premedical student, but the advice regarding each step of the application process described in this handbook is relevant to all applicants to medical school. Strong grades and MCAT scores demonstrate the ability to handle the academic rigors of medical school and licensing examinations. Medical experience and community service show your genuine interest in the field of medicine and your commitment to serving others. Research gives you the opportunity to experience first-hand how scientific discoveries unfold.

The Prehealth Professions Advising Office has helped many post-baccalaureate students reach their goals for medical school. We have witnessed several success stories including students from both strong and weak academic backgrounds. We have seen applicants succeed from unique previous careers including the military, another healthcare field or a completely different professional career. Regardless of your personal history, once you make the decision to apply to medical school, take advantage of every opportunity available to you as a premedical student at Florida State University and leave no stone unturned as you embark upon this exciting journey.

Questions and Answers

How much course work do I need to prepare for admission to medical school?

If you are getting started in the basic sciences, you must focus on completing the required premedical classes needed for the MCAT which include courses in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Organic Chemistry and Physics. For most students, this takes two full years and should be completed on a full-time basis. Medical school admissions committees must be convinced you can handle heavy science course loads similar to what you will be taking in medical school, which is why it is critical you attend as a full-time student.

If you have recently been in college, yet need additional course work to demonstrate your ability to handle the medical school curriculum, it is again advised you take full-time course loads. In order for a student to demonstrate solid academic ability you must show at least four consecutive semesters of excellent academic performance while completing a full load (12-16 hours) of science-based courses.

I heard that the Organic Chemistry sequence is tough. Can I take these courses at the local community college?

It is not recommended you attempt any of the premedical courses at a community or junior college. Medical school admissions committees prefer the course work be completed at a senior institution where the environment is more similar to a medical school environment. It is also important you obtain strong letters of evaluation from senior level faculty at the senior institution.

I did not do well in my previous undergraduate work. What must I do to prove I can succeed in medical school?

Poor performance in previous academic work is never a great starting point when pursuing a medical education. Some schools are forgiving of previous work because they consider it to be a separate time in your life before you became committed to a medical career; however other medical schools average your previous grades with your current grades in evaluating your academic abilities. If your grades were weak before, it is important you seek out advice from admissions administrators from the medical school(s) you are most interested in and receive an honest assessment of your chances for acceptance.

If you make the decision to proceed with your goal, again you must demonstrate at least four consecutive semesters of excellent academic performance while completing a full load (12-16 hours) of science-based courses. Regardless of your previous performance, if you have made the decision to pursue post-baccalaureate course work, your grades must be excellent in order for your application to be considered.

I have a professional degree in another discipline, will that affect my chances for acceptance to medical school?

Applicants who have spent years preparing for another profession (i.e., a law degree or a Ph.D. in a non-medical area) must have very clear intentions for making the serious decision to now pursue a career in medicine. Medical schools are cautious of “professional students” or individuals who are more interested in obtaining another degree than actually becoming a physician. If you have another professional degree and are now pursuing medicine, you must clearly explain your reasons for now pursuing a medical degree and describe in great detail how you came about this decision in your AMCAS and secondary application essays.

As a post-baccalaureate student should I just take the premedical requirements or should I obtain a second degree?

Regardless of your plans to actually complete a degree, it is important you become enrolled in a degree program - preferably in a science discipline (i.e., biological sciences, biochemistry, etc.). This enables you to register early and obtain the courses you need each semester. Most applicants will first focus on completing the pre-MCAT courses which are included in the requirements for most science degrees. If additional course work is required because of a weaker academic background or an unsuccessful first attempt at medical school, it is usually best to enroll in the degree program and obtain the second degree.

Can I work full-time and take my premedical courses?

Because it is recommended post-baccalaureate students take a full load of courses each semester, and required they perform extremely well, it is not recommended you try and work in addition to taking classes. You may wish to continue working another year and save enough money to attend school as a post-baccalaureate student or visit the financial aid office and learn about financial aid programs available to post-baccalaureate students.

It is not uncommon for a post-baccalaureate student to get over-committed with school, work and family obligations, often requiring a student to withdraw from a course. Admissions committees view withdrawals as the student's inability to handle the rigors of school and are taken into account when evaluating the student's abilities. Before you make the decision to begin a post-baccalaureate program, it is important to include all of your personal, financial and family commitments in assessing if now is the right time to pursue this goal. Once you make this decision, give it your all and don't look back!

MEDICAL SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

JUNIOR YEAR

January

Begin preparing for the MCAT and check testing schedule.

Establish file for letters of evaluation.

- 3 Academic Letters
- 2 Character Letters

May

AMCAS applications are available on-line from the AAMC website.

February

Submit registration for the MCAT, available on the AAMC website.

June

Submit AMCAS.

March

Create of letters of evaluation file. Finalize your list of medical schools.

July

Make sure letters of evaluation have arrived. Return secondary applications ASAP

April

Follow up on requested letters of evaluation.

August

Early Decision applications due August 1. Supplemental information due Aug. 15th.

SENIOR YEAR

September

Interviews for early decision and regular admissions begin.

November-May

Interviews continue for regular admission.
Notification is made on admission status.-

October

Medical school can begin offering acceptances.

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