



Medical and Dental School Preparation at Penn State Advising Notes



The health-care delivery system in this country is undergoing dramatic changes. These changes are having profound effects on how doctors and dentists practice their professions, and they also will undoubtedly influence the interest of undergraduate students in pursuing these professions. Also, the cost of medical and dental schools continues to rise at an extraordinary rate, affecting the ability of some students to afford professional school. Nevertheless, the number of students applying to medical and dental schools continues to be high and, consequently, acceptance to these schools is very competitive. For all these reasons, students should think carefully about why they wish to pursue a career in medicine while gaining practical exposure to the profession. In turn, they should plan carefully for applying and possible admission.

To prepare for medical or dental school, you can enroll in a variety of University majors. Most students, because of interest, find themselves in the Eberly College of Science, majoring in such majors as Premedicine, Biology, Microbiology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Forensic Science, or Science. A number of students also enroll in majors in the College of the Liberal Arts, including Psychology or Anthropology or the College of Agricultural Sciences majoring in Immunology and Infectious Disease. In the College of Health and Human Development, majors such as Nutritional Sciences, Kinesiology, or Biobehavioral Health might be attractive choices. It is up to you to find a major that you will enjoy and that will still provide you with the courses that medical and dental schools require. Most medical programs require the following courses:

- Two semesters (8 credit hours) of general biology with lab
- Two semesters (8 credit hours) of general chemistry with lab
- Two semesters (8 credit hours) of physics with lab
- Two semesters (8 credit hours) of organic chemistry with lab
- Two semesters (6 credit hours) of English
- Note: some schools require biochemistry (3 or more credit hours)

The Division of Undergraduate Studies is a unit within Undergraduate Education.

This publication is available in alternative media upon request.

Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunity, and the diversity of its workforce. U.Ed. DUS 09-31

These are only minimum requirements. Some schools also require math (including calculus), social sciences, humanities, or advanced biology and/or biochemistry. You will need to familiarize yourself with specific entrance requirements of schools that particularly interest you and contact a knowledgeable health professions adviser for answers to specific questions about course work.

It is difficult to generalize grade qualifications, but certainly academic performance is one of the most important criteria in evaluating an application. To be a competitive applicant for medical school, you should have a grade-point average of at least 3.6; for dental school, your grade-point average should be 3.4 or better. In addition to completing course work with good grades, you must plan to take the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) or the Dental Admissions Test (DAT) as part of the application process. The usual time to schedule these exams is during spring of or early summer after your junior year. It is important to be optimally prepared for the MCAT or DAT, and not take the exam prematurely.

As part of your application, letters of recommendation must be forwarded to the professional schools. For most professional schools, a Committee Letter of Evaluation, which includes individual faculty letters, is preferred. All Osteopathic Medical schools either require or strongly recommend that applicants acquire a letter by a D.O. You can arrange for committee letters through the Health Professions Advising Office in the Eberly College of Science, 213 Whitmore Lab. Details can be found at our Premedicine Web site: www.science.psu.edu/premed.

Both medical and dental schools require that you apply for admission one full year before you plan to begin your studies. Therefore, the application process generally begins the summer between your junior and senior years. In most cases, you can apply through a central application service rather than directly to each individual professional school. All materials, including applications, admission test scores, and letters of recommendation should be submitted no later than October of your senior year. The earlier you can complete and mail the material, however, the better.

After you have submitted your application and had all appropriate records forwarded to the medical or dental schools, you might be invited for an interview. Based on the interview and the quality of your academic records, the medical or dental schools will notify you regarding acceptance or rejection. Most students know by February or March of their senior year whether or not they have been accepted.

For more information about applying to medical or dental school, contact the departments mentioned above, review information at the Health Professions advising site (science.psu.edu/premed/healthprofessionsadvising.html), or visit the Health Professions Advising Office, 213 Whitmore Lab, 814-865-7620.

Source: Ronald A. Markle, Professor of Biology and Director, Premedicine and Science majors, Eberly College of Science.

May 2010