

Pre-Med Overview

The following information provides an overview of the pathway to medical school as a Northwestern student. For more information, see our other handouts and meet with your health professions advisor.

Pre-med coursework:

Complete the following (coursework timing varies depending on application plan)

- 1 year of general chemistry (with labs)
- 1 year of organic chemistry (with labs)
- 1 year of biology (with labs) + biochemistry
- 1 year of physics (with labs)
- Requirements may vary among medical schools, talk with you advisor

Clinical experience & Service: Valued and required by all medical schools

Volunteering: Steady experience over a long period of time

- Review the “Importance of Clinical Experience” handout for more information
- Visit the Experiences section of our website for a list of recommended experiences.

and

Shadowing: Multiple experiences; can be sporadic

- Northwestern University Clinical Apprentice Program (NU-CAP)
- Northwestern Externship Program (NEXT)
- Personal network: family/friends of physicians
- Northwestern Network Mentorship Program: <https://mentor.northwestern.edu>

Research: Valued by all medical schools, required by some medical schools

Office of Undergraduate Research: www.undergradresearch.northwestern.edu

- Research opportunities
- Undergraduate Research Grants (URG) & Summer Undergraduate Research Grants (SURG)
- How to approach a professor for a research opportunity
- Grants and Opportunities search engine

Extracurricular activities: Valued by all medical schools

What will set you apart from other medical school applicants?

- Interests, leadership, and involvement in the community
- Check out the Center for Civic Engagement, Engage Chicago, Chicago Field Studies
- Keep pursuing your passions and interests
- Find groups that share your interests on Wildcat Connection

Questions to ask yourself

- How have I explored my interest in medicine?
- What experiences have reinforced or challenged my decision to become a physician?
- What qualities does a good physician possess? How have I demonstrated these?
- How am I developing my application components (page 2) and AAMC Competencies (page 3)?

Medical school application components

Academics

- Do you know how to calculate your science GPA for MD and DO programs?
MD = All biology, chemistry, physics, and math courses; DO = all biology, chemistry, and physics
- Is your science GPA > 3.3? If not, talk with an advisor about ways to improve it.

MCAT

- Do you plan on taking the MCAT by spring of the year you want to apply?
- Are you planning on devoting 3-4 months to study for the MCAT? Have you reviewed the [Official MCAT site](#)?

Clinical experience & Service

- How have you tested the decision to go into medicine?
- Have you volunteered consistently for more than a year?
- Have you shadowed physicians? (This can be sporadic)
- Have you reflected on both kinds of experiences in order to understand what it means to be a physician and what traits/qualities you are demonstrating through your service?

Research

- Do you have an understanding of how good research is conducted?
- Did you engage in research that was interesting to you? Medical schools have a broad view of research, and non-lab research will “count” for most medical schools.
- If you plan on applying for MD/PhD programs, have you had multiple years of research experiences?
- For some MD only or DO only programs, summer experiences are sufficient. Some schools may not require any research experience.

Recommendation letters

- Have you developed good professional relationships with at least two science faculty members and one non-science faculty member who have taught you in class?
- Have you developed good professional relationships with others who know you through your non-academic experiences?

Interests / Organizations / Advocacy

- What are your interests? What are you passionate about? What sets you apart from others?
- Have you worked with others in a team/organization?

Awareness of [Social Determinants](#) of Health/Structural Inequities in Healthcare

- How have you learned about the social determinants of health?
- How have you learned about structural inequities in healthcare -- through your own education, experiences, and/or working with under-served populations?

Reflections / Personal statement / Interviews

- Have you thought about why you want to be a physician?
- Have you written your personal statement by the spring of the year you plan to apply?
- Do you feel comfortable talking about this decision and your qualities and experiences in interviews?

Timing

- Do you plan on submitting your primary application in June?
- Have you communicated your application timeline to your recommenders?
- Do you plan on returning secondary applications between July to mid-August?

AAMC The Premed Competencies for Entering Medical Students

Professional

- Commitment to Learning and Growth
- Cultural Awareness
- Cultural Humility
- Empathy and Compassion
- Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others
- Interpersonal Skills
- Oral Communication
- Reliability and Dependability
- Resilience and Adaptability
- Service Orientation
- Teamwork and Collaboration

Thinking and Reasoning

- Critical thinking
- Quantitative reasoning
- Scientific inquiry
- Written communication

Science

- Living systems
- Human behavior

HPA Advising Tip: Use the [AAMC Anatomy of an Applicant](#) to develop and reflect on these competencies.

When to apply

Students should consider applying only when they feel they are at their strongest. Waiting a year or two to become a more competitive applicant is better than rushing to apply just because you want to stay on a certain timeline. The timeline **on the last page** is just a guide. **Talk with your HPA advisor and reflect on the** questions within this handout **to assess your application and decide when it's best to apply.**

Good reasons to extend your timeline (take time off before going to medical school):

- Need to improve GPA (senior year courses, advanced science courses, post-bacc programs)
- Need to improve MCAT score and/or want more time to study for MCAT
- Need to gain more experience in a health care setting
- Not sure if you want to be a physician or unsure why you want to be a physician
- Want to pursue other opportunities first (fellowships, travel abroad, other graduate work)

Know your options

There are many pathways and timetables to becoming a physician. We are happy to talk with you about your options in an appointment. You can also review our website for information on other health professions.

- Northwestern Undergraduate Premedical Scholars Program (NUPSP)
 - Early acceptance program to Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine
 - Talk with your advisor for more information and eligibility.
- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine
 - Physicians with a DO degree have all the responsibilities and rights as those with an MD
- Post-baccalaureate premedical programs
 - Career changer programs and academic enhancement programs
- MD-PhD programs
 - Require extensive research experience
 - Dual application/acceptance process for most programs

Application year timeline:

Note: Students wishing to go straight to medical school after graduation will apply in June of their junior year. Students interested in taking one or more gap years will apply senior year or later.

Fall

- Continue clinical experience, research and extracurriculars.
- Take September MCAT or sign up for upcoming spring MCAT in October.
- Decide which professors you will approach for recommendation letters.
- Research medical schools using the Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) and the Choose DO Explorer.

Winter

- Draft personal statement.
- Begin conversations about letters of recommendation with professors.
- Continue study schedule for MCAT.

Spring

- Finalize personal statement.
- Take spring MCAT.
- Access primary application for medical schools (available first week of May).
- Finalize list of medical schools.
- Monitor letters of recommendation; check in with recommenders.

Summer

- Submit primary application early (June for AMCAS, July/August for AACOMAS, May for TMDAS) to take advantage of rolling admissions process.
- Check to make sure letters of recommendation are submitted.
- Complete secondary applications from individual medical schools.

After application submission:

Late Summer / Fall / Winter

- Interview at medical schools and send thank you notes to interviewers.
- Complete financial aid (FAFSA) application in late fall/early winter.
- Make final decision by April 30th (you may hold multiple acceptances until this date).
- Consider alternative plans (post-bacc programs, graduate school, work experience etc).