

Guide for Premedical Students

Gettysburg College



2008-2009 Academic Year

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PART I: PREPARING TO APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide covers preparing for and applying to both allopathic (i.e. becoming a physician with an MD degree) and osteopathic (i.e. becoming a physician with a DO degree) medical school. It was written by Dr. Kristin Stuempfle, Health Professions Advisor and Chair of the Health Professions Committee, and reviewed by the members of the Committee and other individuals on campus. It includes “hard facts”, such as courses you must take in order to apply to medical school, as well as “friendly advice”, such as what to do during your summers. We hope that this guide will give you some of the information you need to engage fully in your Gettysburg education, while also preparing successfully for admission to medical school and for a career in medicine.

WHO'S WHO IN HEALTH PROFESSIONS ADVISING AT GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

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SOME UP-FRONT ADVICE

No single formula guarantees acceptance into medical school. However, there are several trends that we have noticed over the years about successful Gettysburg applicants:

- 1. They engage wholeheartedly in their undergraduate education.**
They choose a major that interests them, and they choose challenging courses both within and outside the major that also interest them. Because they are interested in their courses and enjoy learning, they do well in their courses. Their professors get to know them and can write strong letters of evaluation.
- 2. They do well in the required courses for medical school admission.**
Whether they are a science or non-science major, they have the ability and genuine interest to understand science, which is apparent in the required premed courses.
- 3. They perform well on the MCAT.**
They understand the importance of MCAT scores, and make a serious commitment to engage in proper MCAT preparation.
- 4. They show accomplishment and leadership outside the classroom.**
They get involved in a sustained way with something worthwhile that they love (i.e. mastering a musical instrument, playing a sport, volunteering, doing research, etc.)
- 5. They have experience with physicians and hospitals.**
During the years prior to applying to medical school, they volunteer, shadow, intern, or work with various physicians and/or in hospitals.
- 6. They may apply to medical school for admission later than the fall immediately after graduation.**
Some students arrive at Gettysburg College prepared and motivated to plunge right into the required premed courses. However, other students may not be so prepared and motivated at first, and they wait to take the required premed courses until they *are* prepared and motivated. This means that they will not attend medical school in the fall immediately after they graduate from Gettysburg. Applying for admission after graduation often enhances their qualifications, and they are not behind in their careers, since the average age of first year medical students in the US is 24.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL

All medical schools require the following courses:

- 1 year of general biology with labs
- 1 year of general chemistry with labs
- 1 year of organic chemistry with labs
- 1 year of general physics with labs

Some medical schools may also require math and/or English courses. A few schools also require other specific courses.

Information about the requirements for specific allopathic medical schools can be found in the *Medical School Admission Requirements* (MSAR), a publication of the Association of American Medical Colleges that is updated annually (www.aamc.org/msar).

Information about the requirements for specific osteopathic medical schools can be found in the *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book* (CIB), a publication of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine that is updated annually (www.aacom.org).

It is important that students identify the medical schools to which they plan to apply, so that the required courses can be incorporated into their four year schedule of courses.

GETTYSBURG COLLEGE COURSES THAT SATISFY PREMED REQUIREMENTS

Biology

- BIO 101 or BIO 111 (General Biology I)
- BIO 112 (General Biology II)

Chemistry

- CHEM 105 or CHEM 107 (General Chemistry I)
- CHEM 108 (General Chemistry II)
- CHEM 203 (Organic Chemistry I)
- CHEM 204 (Organic Chemistry II)

Physics

- PHY 103 (General Physics I)
- PHY 104 (General Physics II)

ADVANCED PLACEMENT CREDIT

Acceptance of AP credit varies greatly from one medical school to another and many do not accept it at all. Schools that do accept AP credit either require or strongly suggest that applicants take another course(s) at the same or higher level of difficulty in the discipline. Therefore, you should plan to take two lab Biology courses, four lab Chemistry courses, and two lab Physics courses in college.

If you have AP credit in the sciences, you should speak with the Health Professions Advisor or the appropriate department chairperson before you make a decision on whether to bypass an introductory level course in the sciences.

CHOOSING A MAJOR

Gettysburg College does not have a premedical major. You may major in any discipline as long as you satisfy the premed requirements. You should major in a discipline that interests you because you will enjoy it and achieve better grades. However, regardless of your major, you must do well in the premed requirements.

The following statement is published by the Association of Medical Colleges and is a philosophy that is maintained by most medical schools:

“Medical schools recognize the importance of a strong foundation in the natural sciences – biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics – and most schools have established minimum course requirements for admission. These courses usually represent about one-third of the credit hours needed for degree completion. This approach deliberately leaves room for applicants from a broad spectrum of college majors, including those in the humanities and social sciences. No medical school requires a specific major of its applicants or matriculants. Admission committee members are aware that medical students can develop the essential skills of acquiring, synthesizing, applying, and communicating information through a wide variety of academic disciplines.” (Medical College Admission Requirements, 2009-2010, p. 11)

In recent years, successful Gettysburg applicants have had the following majors:

- Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- Biology
- Biology/Psychology Double Major
- Biology/Spanish Double Major
- Chemistry
- Chemistry/Religion Double Major
- Classics/Computer Science Double Major
- English
- Health Sciences
- Individual Major
- Music
- Psychology
- Religion

SCHEDULING PREMED REQUIREMENTS

At Gettysburg College there are almost as many different paths through the premedical requirements as there are premedical students. There is no single recommended sequence of courses. Two possible schedules are presented below.

Suggested Schedule #1

This schedule is for a student who comes well-prepared in science and who wants to complete the premed requirements by the end of the junior year in order to enter medical school in the fall right after graduation.

YEAR	FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER
First Year	BIO 101 or 111 CHEM 105 or CHEM 107	BIO 112 CHEM 108
Sophomore	CHEM 203	CHEM 204
Junior	PHY 103	PHY 104 MCAT Exam
Senior	-	-

Suggested Schedule #2

This schedule is for a student who would benefit from easing into the premed requirements. This schedule enables a student to focus on one premed science course at a time, thus maximizing the chance for success. This student would complete the premed requirements by the end of the senior year, and would enter medical school one year or more after graduation.

YEAR	FALL SEMESTER	SPRING SEMESTER
First Year	BIO 101 or 111	BIO 112
Sophomore	CHEM 105 or CHEM 107	CHEM 108
Junior	CHEM 203	CHEM 204
Senior	PHY 103	PHY 104 MCAT Exam

SUMMER SCHOOL COURSES

Students sometimes ask if they may take premed requirements in summer school in order to lighten their load at Gettysburg, to catch up if they decided late that they wanted to go to medical school, or to improve their grades.

In principle, medical schools will accept summer school premed requirements and they will let you include the grades when you calculate your science GPA for your application. Gettysburg College students have been accepted to medical school with summer school premed requirements on their record.

However, in general, we believe that taking premed requirements during summer school is detrimental to your application. Remember that the first two years of medical school include many science courses, and the pace is much more intense and concentrated than you will experience even while taking two lab courses simultaneously at Gettysburg. You must show medical schools that you can handle a heavy science load well, and taking summer courses may raise questions in this area. Medical schools want to see that you can succeed in the premed requirements at Gettysburg College while carrying a full load of courses. In addition, it is important to take your premed requirements at Gettysburg so that Gettysburg science professors will be able to write letters of evaluation for you.

STUDY ABROAD

Study abroad is almost always a very rewarding experience. It is an experience that students say changes their lives. Medical schools generally view a study abroad experience very favorably. With careful planning, it is definitely possible for Gettysburg College premedical students to study abroad.

There are several important factors to consider:

- Generally, studying abroad is a junior year experience. However, for certain students, the sophomore year or the fall of the senior year may be preferable.
- While studying abroad, most students do not take the premed requirements. This is because it is logical to study the culture and possibly the language of the country you are visiting. In addition, it is difficult to find courses at foreign universities that fulfill exact science requirements for US medical schools.
- Non-science majors may have more study abroad options. For example, it is easier for English majors to find courses required for their major than it is for chemistry majors.
- Careful thought must be given to when to take the MCAT and when to apply to medical school. For example, many students take the MCAT in the spring of their junior year, and then apply to medical school that June for admission in the fall after graduating from Gettysburg. For these students, it is not possible to study abroad during the spring of the junior year, unless the MCAT is taken at one of a few international test sites.

Gettysburg College has an affiliation with the Denmark International Study (DIS) Program in Copenhagen. DIS offers the Medical Practice and Policy program that is specifically targeted at US premed students. Coursework includes Human Health and Disease: A Clinical Approach, Health Care in Scandinavia, and Biomedical Ethics. Several Gettysburg students have had extremely positive experiences in this program in recent years.

Be sure to stop by the Office of Off-Campus Studies (http://www.gettysburg.edu/academics/study_abroad/index.dot) for more information about study abroad opportunities.

MEDICALLY-RELATED EXPERIENCE

It is absolutely essential that you acquire medically-related experience before you apply to medical school. This enables you to clarify and confirm your career choice, and it shows medical schools your commitment to the medical profession. Even students with high grades and MCAT scores are not admitted to medical school if they have had minimal or no contact with physicians and hospitals.

There are many ways you can obtain medically-related experience, including shadowing physicians, enrolling in a medically-related internship, volunteering or working in a health care facility, or doing a service-learning project with a medical theme.

Be sure to stop by the Center for Career Development (http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/college_life/career_development) and the Center for Public Service (http://www.gettysburg.edu/about/offices/college_life/career_development) for more information about obtaining medically-related experience.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Your accomplishments and leadership outside the classroom are of great interest to medical schools. It is important that you show sustained commitment and leadership in one or a few worthwhile activities, such as music, sports, theater, volunteer work, or other pursuits. You should participate in these activities because you have a genuine interest in them, not because you want to impress medical schools. Participation in extracurricular activities demonstrates that you are well-rounded and that you have good time management skills.

POSTBACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS

Postbaccalaureate programs are designed to help individuals who already have a bachelor's degree prepare to apply to medical school. For some individuals, the decision to pursue a career in medicine is made after they have received their bachelor's degree. They may not have taken the required premedical courses, and need to do so before taking the MCAT and applying to medical school. Other students may need to improve their GPA or MCAT scores before applying to medical school. For these reasons, many schools are now offering formal postbaccalaureate programs to assist students in preparing for a medical career.

Postbaccalaureate programs differ markedly in their entry requirements, length, curricula, and costs. Some programs only accept minorities, women, state residents, or graduates of particular schools. Several programs admit only science majors, while others only accept nonscience majors. There are some programs that require minimum GPA's or MCAT scores, while others are less rigid. Some programs are only for students who have tried and failed to enter medical school, while others are for students who have not yet applied to medical school. Programs vary in length from one year to more than two years. The curricula vary from the four required premedical courses to the course load of a first year medical student. The costs range from nothing (due to scholarships) to the normal cost of a year of medical school. It is essential to carefully review all aspects of a postbaccalaureate program before making the decision to apply.

A useful article about postbaccalaureate programs can be found at the following website:

- NAAHP article (http://www.naahp.org/resources_Postbac_Article.htm)

The following website maintains a list of postbaccalaureate programs:

- AAMC list (<http://services.aamc.org/postbac/>)

“WHAT ARE MY CHANCES?”

Applying to medical school is a challenging and competitive task. In recent years, acceptance rates to allopathic medical school have been falling:

2002:	49%
2003:	48%
2004:	47%
2005:	47%
2006:	47%
2007:	42%

When considering these numbers, one must understand the factors that weigh in during the medical school admission process. In large part, acceptance hinges on quantitative factors, such as total GPA, science GPA, and MCAT scores. Generally, medical schools look for students with approximately a 3.50 total and science GPA, and a 30 on the MCAT.

Beyond quantitative factors, medical schools look for students with a strong interest in medicine (demonstrated through medically-related experience), extracurricular activities, research experience, strong letters of evaluation, a well-written personal statement, and a successful interview.

In the 2002-2007 application cycles, well-qualified Gettysburg applicants (total GPA \geq 3.50, total MCAT score \geq 30) had a 100% acceptance rate to medical school. Less qualified applicants (total GPA \leq 3.50, total MCAT score \leq 30) had a 46% acceptance rate. If only total GPA is considered, students with a total GPA \geq 3.50 had a 88% acceptance rate, students with a total GPA between 3.30 and 3.50 had a 38% acceptance rate, and students with a total GPA $<$ 3.30 had a 35% acceptance rate.

In addition to the factors discussed above, the timing of your application is extremely important. Most medical schools have rolling admissions, so the earlier you apply, the better your chance of being accepted. You should plan to take the MCAT in the spring, and then apply on approximately June 1. If you take the MCAT in the summer, you will not be able to apply until late summer or fall, critically diminishing your chance of acceptance. If you feel you must take the MCAT in the summer, you should seriously consider waiting until June 1 of the next application year to submit your application.

There is no doubt that applying to medical school and being accepted is a demanding undertaking. Gettysburg College offers an engaging and challenging environment that fosters success. In addition, we are dedicated to helping you develop as a student and person, and to providing the necessary support to assist you through each step of the process.

PART II: APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

OVERVIEW

Applying to medical school is a complex and rigorous process. In 2007, 42,315 students applied to allopathic medical school. 17,759 students were accepted. 24,556 students were rejected. This Part II of the Guide aims to place you among the 42% of successful students. In order to be successful, you will need to adhere to many details and deadlines.

By now you will have read and followed the advice of Part I of the Guide. You will have completed the required courses for admission to medical school. You will have prepared for and taken the MCAT exam. It is time to follow the advice of this Part II of the Guide, and start the application process.

IMPORTANT ADVICE

Our most important advice is to apply only when your record is strong enough to have a decent chance of success, and when you have the time and energy needed for the application process. To help you decide if your record is strong enough, you should critically evaluate your record for risk factors. As risk factors build up, so do the chances of rejection. Here are some of the important risk factors that will reduce your chance of being accepted:

- Having a total GPA below 3.50
- Having a science GPA below 3.50
- Having a total MCAT score below 30
- Having any individual MCAT score below 9
- Taking the MCAT in the summer you are applying
- Applying to the wrong schools (state schools outside your state, only very selective schools)
- Taking premed science requirements during summer school
- Submitting your application after June 30
- Not having sufficient medically-related experience
- Taking only the minimum number of science courses to fulfill premed requirements (2 biology, 4 chemistry, 2 physics)
- Never taking more than one science course in a semester
- Submitting secondary applications after Labor Day (if they were received before then)

The first five risk factors listed above, referring to grades and MCAT scores, are very important in determining success in admission to medical school. Even the most sterling personal qualities will not substitute for low grades and MCAT scores.

Once you have honestly evaluated your risk factors, consider the following additional advice:

1. ***Be realistic.*** Do not say “Even though my record is weak, I guess I will go ahead and apply this year to see if I get in. If I don’t make it this time, I will try again next year.” This is a recipe for frustration and failure. Often what happens in this situation is that the student lives in hope through the application cycle, until final rejections are heard in late spring or summer. By then it is too late to do anything to remedy the weaknesses in the student’s record. So, the student must delay applying until another year has passed so that grades and MCAT scores can be improved, or submit a rushed, late application with a weak record a second time, which of course is a recipe for another failed attempt.

2. ***Consider delaying your application.*** Although not a risk factor for everyone, applying at the end of the junior year for admission right after graduation is sometimes a mistake. Students who apply at the end of the senior year or later almost always have a stronger record, usually with a higher GPA and more experience and accomplishments. Remember, the average age of first year medical students in the US is 24, and those 24-year-olds used that time after college graduation to enhance their records. Many acquired medically-related experience or gained other valuable experience (Peace Corps, for example), making them more attractive to medical schools. Many Gettysburg students with strong records are successful when they apply at the end of the junior year. However, some who were not accepted to the schools they were hoping for and others who were rejected would have been well-served by waiting a year or two before applying.

3. ***If you do apply, apply early.*** Applicants who take the MCAT in the summer and others who apply late are at a disadvantage. Even if a late applicant has a strong record, the applicant may be placed on a waiting list or rejected because seats have already been filled by applicants who applied early. The brutal reality is that applicants who apply early in the admissions cycle are judged by less stringent criteria than those who apply later in the cycle. So, plan ahead and apply early!

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Use this application timeline as a rough guideline for the application process.

Fall Semester of Junior or Senior Year

- Meeting to overview application process
- Distribution of relevant materials
- Prepare resume
- Start planning for the spring MCAT

January

- Pick up packet “Applying to Medical or Dental School” from Judy Jones.
- Work on materials for the Health Professions Committee
 - Information Form
 - Autobiographical Narrative
 - Request, Waiver, and Inspection Form
- Request letters of evaluation
- Begin serious MCAT preparation
- Review the student section of the AAMC website at www.tomorrowsdoctors.org
- Buy the current edition of the *Medical School Admission Requirements* (www.aamc.org/msar)
- Review the student section of the AACOM website at www.aacom.org
- Obtain the current edition of the *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book* (www.aacom.org)

February

- Continue working on materials for the Health Professions Committee

March

- Material for the Health Professions Committee due to Judy Jones
- Send “thank-you” notes to individuals who wrote your letters of evaluation

April

- Interview with the Health Professions Committee
- Take the April or May MCAT
- Review the AMCAS website at www.aamc.org/amcas
- Review the AACOMAS website at <https://aacomas.aacom.org>

May

- Take the April or May MCAT
- Begin completing the AMCAS application at www.aamc.org/amcas
- Begin completing the AACOMAS application at <https://aacomas.aacom.org>

June

- Early AMCAS submission (after receipt of MCAT scores)
- Early AACOMAS submission (after receipt of MCAT scores)
- Submit a copy of your AMCAS or AACOMAS application to Judy Jones

July

- Complete secondary applications

August

- Complete secondary applications

September and on

- Interviewing season

YOUR GETTYSBURG COLLEGE RECOMMENDATION

THE ROLE OF THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COMMITTEE

Medical schools either require or strongly encourage applicants to submit a composite evaluation from the relevant committee at their institution. Therefore, the purpose of the Health Professions Committee at Gettysburg College is to write composite evaluations for students applying to medical school.

The Committee process is as follows:

- Review applicant's academic record
- Review materials submitted by applicant
- Review letters of recommendation solicited by applicant
- Interview applicant
- Decide whether to recommend applicant to medical school
- If the decision is positive, write composite evaluation (with excerpts from individual letters of evaluation) and send composite evaluation to medical schools once the student has applied through the appropriate centralized application service
- If the decision is negative, offer suggestions to the applicant for improving his or her record so that a recommendation is possible in the future

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT

1. Obtain the packet “Applying to Medical or Dental School”

The packet “Applying to Medical or Dental School” is available from Judy Jones, the Health Professions Committee Office Administrator (Master’s Hall Room 111; jujones@gettysburg.edu; 337-6020; campus box 405).

2. Return all completed materials to Judy Jones by the designated date

- *Information Form for Health Professions Applicants*

Included in the packet is a form for submitting basic information about you to the Health Professions Committee. This form also includes space for you to list the names of the people from whom you have requested letters of evaluation.

- *Resume*
- *Autobiographical Narrative*

The packet includes specific guidelines for writing your autobiographical narrative.

Your autobiographical narrative has two important uses:

1. It helps the Health Professions Committee get to know you better in preparation for your interview with the Committee and for writing your composite letter of evaluation. It is particularly important to include information that is not revealed by your academic records and test scores, but which health professions schools would like to know about you.
 2. It helps you to get in touch with your own feelings about your health profession career, clarify your thinking about your health profession career, and give you ideas for the various personal statements/essays you will have to write during the application process.
- *Request, Waiver, and Inspection Form for Health Professions Committee Composite Letter of Evaluation*

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (Buckley Amendment) enables you to have access to your letters of evaluation. You have the option to either waive or retain the rights to read your letters. However, admissions committees prefer to receive confidential letters assuming that a more candid and helpful evaluation will usually be written if the recommender knows the confidentiality of the evaluation will be respected. Therefore, it is generally advisable to waive your Buckley Amendment rights.

In order for the Health Professions Committee to consider your request for a composite evaluation, it is necessary that you grant permission to the Health Professions Committee to inspect your academic records (including Honor Commission proceedings) and disciplinary records (including Student Conduct Review Board proceedings) at Gettysburg College.

A form is included in the packet which enables you to waive your access to your composite letter of evaluation, grant the Health Professions Committee access to your academic and disciplinary records, and formally request a composite letter of evaluation from the Health Professions Committee.

- *Letters of Evaluation*

Each applicant must solicit four letters of evaluation from Gettysburg College faculty members to be submitted to the Health Professions Committee. Three of these letters should be from faculty members in the natural sciences, and one letter may be from a faculty member in the humanities or social sciences. If the applicant wishes, he or she may request a fifth letter from a member of the Gettysburg College community who is not a member of the faculty (for example, a coach, work-study supervisor, or a director of a Service Learning project).

To assist those who write letters, the Health Professions Committee has prepared a set of guidelines. Five copies are included in the packet. You should fill out and give a copy of the form to each person from whom you are requesting a letter of evaluation. On the form, you must sign to waive or not waive your right of access to the letter.

You should choose with care the people whom you ask to write letters of evaluation. Faculty members who know you well write the best letters. Good letters do not simply restate your academic performance (this is a matter of record) but, rather, discuss your unique attributes. So, choose faculty members who know you well on a personal level.

All letters of evaluation must be submitted to the Health Professions Committee via Judy Jones as a hard copy (campus box 405) and electronically (jujones@gettysburg.edu).

3. Interview with the Health Professions Committee

It is important to the members of the Health Professions Committee that we know each student we consider for a recommendation. For this reason, the Health Professions Committee will schedule an interview with each applicant. This interview will give the applicants an opportunity to discuss their motivation for the study of medicine, to describe their hopes for their future careers, and to clarify any issues concerning their records or letters of evaluation.

The interviews typically occur after Spring Break (dates and times TBA).

4. Take the MCAT

Applicants to allopathic or osteopathic medical school must take the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).

More information about the MCAT can be found in the MCAT section of this Guide.

Please note: All students taking the MCAT are asked to release their scores to the Health Professions Advisor at Gettysburg College. This information is important for advising future students.

5. Apply to medical school via the appropriate centralized application service

Applications to medical schools in the United States are commonly handled by a centralized application service. *The American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS)* (www.aamc.org/amcas) is the centralized application service for allopathic medical schools. *The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS)* (<https://aacomaas.aacom.org>) is the centralized application service for osteopathic medical schools.

More information about the centralized application services can be found in the Centralized Application Services section of this Guide.

6. Copy of Your Centralized Application

If the Health Professions Committee recommends a student, a composite evaluation will be sent to the appropriate medical schools once the student has applied through the proper centralized application service. Therefore, it is essential that each student provide the Health Professions Committee with a copy of your centralized application, which includes a list of schools to which you are applying. Please send a copy of your centralized application to Judy Jones (campus box 405) as soon as you have submitted your application.

THE MCAT

INTRODUCTION

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is a 5 hour standardized examination sponsored by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). It measures your knowledge of the biological and physical sciences, your ability to read and interpret information, and your ability to write coherently. The test is also designed to predict how well you will do in medical school. It consists of multiple choice questions and a writing assessment.

WHEN TO TAKE THE MCAT

The MCAT is administered approximately 28 times a year from January to September. Many students take the test in the spring of their junior year or in the summer before their senior year. Medical schools and the AAMC recommend taking the MCAT in the spring, about 18 months before you plan to enter medical school. This enables you to know your scores (which may affect your choice of schools) and have a complete application in the early summer. If you take the MCAT in the summer, you will not know your scores and have a complete application until the late summer or fall. This puts you behind in the application process and decreases your likelihood of acceptance.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MCAT

The MCAT consists of four sections:

1. Biological Sciences

This section covers information contained in introductory undergraduate courses in general biology (~75%) and organic chemistry (~25%). It consists of science problems and may include data presented in graphs, tables, or charts. It is designed to evaluate knowledge of basic biological concepts and the ability to interpret data and solve problems.

2. Physical Sciences

This section covers information contained in introductory undergraduate courses in general chemistry (50%) and general physics (50%). Questions consist of science problems and may include data presented in graphs, tables or charts. It is designed to assess knowledge of basic concepts and the ability to interpret data and solve problems.

3. Verbal Reasoning

This section tests your ability to read and comprehend information and to reason and think critically. It consists of long passages drawn from the natural sciences, social

sciences, and humanities. The subject content itself is not tested; all the information needed to answer the questions is contained in the passages.

4. Writing Sample

In this section, you are given 30 minutes to write an essay on an assigned topic, then another 30 minutes to write an essay on a second assigned topic. This section assesses critical thinking, the ability to organize ideas, and writing skills.

WHY YOU NEED TO PREPARE FOR THE MCAT

The MCAT is a high stakes examination. Your scores will be carefully evaluated by medical school admissions committees. It is absolutely essential that you set aside time over many months to prepare for the MCAT for several reasons:

- You need to be familiar with the format of the test and the types of questions it contains.
- You have to work up the stamina required to concentrate for the duration of the test.
- You need to relearn material from your introductory science courses that you may have forgotten.
- There may be topics on the MCAT that were not covered (or not covered in sufficient detail) in the introductory science courses that you took.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE MCAT

Most people can do well on the MCAT if they develop a sound study plan and begin preparing as early as possible. You can prepare for the MCAT on your own, but many students also choose to take a commercial review course (Princeton Review or Kaplan).

1. Preparing on your own

A wide variety of self-study materials are available to help you prepare for the MCAT. Perhaps the most important are those produced by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the organization in charge of the MCAT. These include the following:

- MCAT Essentials (www.aamc.org/students/mcat; free)
This annual publication contains all the information you need to know about registering for, preparing for, and taking the MCAT. It is required reading!
- Preparing for the MCAT Exam (www.aamc.org/students/mcat; free)
This website is intended to familiarize you with the MCAT and to provide you with the information necessary to prepare for the test. It contains information about the testing experience and the sections of the test.
- MCAT Practice Tests (www.aamc.org/students/mcat; 1 free, then fee)

These full-length practice tests are composed of previously administered MCAT questions and provide you with an accurate estimate of your likely MCAT scores, given your level of preparation at the time you take the test. Solutions are provided, as well as examples of scored writing samples. Free access to a single full-length MCAT with all the features of MCAT Practice Online is available. Additional tests are available for a fee.

Several other useful MCAT preparation books are available. Search www.amazon.com for “MCAT”. These books usually contain practice tests, but they are not tests that have actually been given, like the ones available from AAMC.

2. Commercial review courses

Commercial review courses do not replace your personal study plan. They only help structure and supplement your preparation. The best use of such courses is to help you map out your study schedule and to supplement your weak subject areas. Remember, you are the key ingredient in doing well on the MCAT. Unless you put forth the time and effort, no commercial review course will help.

Both Princeton Review (www.princetonreview.com) and Kaplan (www.kaplan.com) offer MCAT review courses. The courses are very similar in structure and cost (\approx \$1,700). The courses offer a series of classes, study guides, and practice tests. If you are willing to spend the money and want a structured study plan, you should seriously consider taking a MCAT review course. Each spring semester, Princeton Review offers a MCAT review course at Gettysburg College. Remember, a review course only succeeds if you are willing to put in the time and effort to attend the classes and do the assigned work!

REGISTERING FOR THE MCAT

Register for the MCAT on-line at www.aamc.org/students/mcat. Registration becomes available approximately 12 weeks prior to each test date, and closes approximately 14 days prior to each test date. There may be limited space available at the test site nearest to you, and spots are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, so it is wise to register early.

MCAT SCORES

The AAMC releases MCAT scores to examinees, AMCAS, and health professions advisors approximately 30 days after each test date. At the same time, MCAT scores are posted on the AAMC’s Testing History (THx) System at www.aamc.org/students/mcat. Examinees can access their own scores and designate who, other than AMCAS, should receive their scores. Please release your scores to the Health Professions Advisor at Gettysburg College so that we will have data on which to base our advice for future students.

The scores on the Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Verbal Reasoning sections of the MCAT are reported on a scale ranging from 1 to 15. The national average for each section is approximately 8. The score for the Writing Sample section is reported on a scale ranging from J to T. The national average for this section is P.

Students often wonder what scores they need to have in order to be accepted to medical school. In general, successful applicants average 9's and 10's for allopathic medical schools, and 8's and 9's for osteopathic medical schools.

RETAKE THE MCAT

Some students think they should take the MCAT once for practice, and then again “for real”. This is not a good idea. Medical schools see all your MCAT scores, not just the most recent ones. Different medical schools use multiple sets of scores in different ways. Some schools use all sets of scores equally and note improvements. Others consider only the most recent set of scores. Still others take an average of all sets of scores. Finally, some schools use only the highest scores. Of the four methods, the first (using all sets of scores equally and noting improvement) is the most common.

The AAMC recommends retaking the MCAT only if:

- There is a significant discrepancy between your college grades and your MCAT scores
- You took the MCAT prematurely (i.e. without adequate preparation or prior to completion of all premed requirements)
- Serious illness at the time of the test
- A medical school recommends that you retake the test

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Applying to medical school can be daunting. You can reduce your stress and increase your chance of being accepted by learning the steps of the application process and developing an effective strategy to complete all of them on, or ahead of, time.

TIMING

Medical schools use rolling admission systems, in which applicants who submit their materials first get the earliest interviews. The schools then select candidates for admission from those interviewed, and this process continues until their incoming classes are full. Many individuals are admitted to medical school before other applicants are even interviewed. Therefore, it is to your advantage to submit your application early. Do not decrease your chances by waiting to submit your application until just before a school's official deadline. This is often too late.

CENTRALIZED APPLICATION SERVICES

Applications to medical schools in the United States are commonly handled by a centralized application service. You submit a single copy of your application to the service. This is known as the "primary application". The centralized application service ensures the application is complete and correct, and then distributes the verified application to the medical schools that you designate.

The primary goal of the centralized application services is to provide the participating medical schools (a few schools do not subscribe to these services) verified and uniform information on applicants. The major sections of the primary application include general information, the academic record, and the personal statement.

The American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) (www.aamc.org/amcas) is the centralized application service for allopathic medical schools. The on-line application becomes available on ≈ May 1 and can be submitted on ≈ June 1.

The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS) (<https://aacomas.aacom.org>) is the centralized application service for osteopathic medical schools. The on-line application becomes available on ≈ June 1.

You should plan to submit your centralized application on, or as soon after June 1 as possible! Be sure to make two copies of the application. You need one copy for your records and one copy to submit to Judy Jones since your application includes the list of medical schools to which you are applying.

TRANSCRIPTS

In order for your application to be processed by the centralized application service, you must have your official transcripts sent to AMCAS or AACOMAS using a form that you will download from their websites. You must request official transcripts from all colleges or universities that you have attended. You are permitted to have your transcripts sent to AMCAS or AACOMAS prior to submitting your application.

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Personal statements cause more anguish among some applicants than any other part of the application process. Many applicants spend a great deal of time and effort polishing these comments, and their hard work often pays off, since admissions committee members carefully scrutinize personal statements.

If admissions committee members read your statement, it means that they have determined by your GPA and MCAT scores that you can handle the academic rigors of medical school. They use your personal statement to decide if you will be a good physician. So think about what qualities a good physician should have, and then show that you possess these qualities with stories from your life. This is your opportunity to speak directly to the admissions committee members in your own words.

The task of writing your statement can be daunting. Begin the process early, so that you have time to think about your statement and write several drafts. Be sure to carefully proofread your statement for content, grammar, and spelling.

SELECTING MEDICAL SCHOOLS

It is important that you carefully research and select the medical schools to which you will apply. The best sources of comparative information are the AAMC's *Medical School Admissions Requirements* (MSAR) for allopathic medical schools (www.aamc.org/msar), and the AACOM's *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book* (CIB), for osteopathic medical schools (www.aacom.org).

Because of the competitiveness and unpredictability of medical school admissions, you need to apply to a fairly large number of carefully selected medical schools. Most students apply to about 15 schools, with the range being 10 to 20 schools. Applying to too few schools will decrease your chance of acceptance, but applying to too many schools will limit your ability to complete your secondary applications well and promptly.

You should apply to schools based primarily on where *you have a reasonable chance of being accepted*. All medical schools prepare you to pass national boards and become a licensed physician. If you are admitted to several medical schools, then you will have the luxury of selecting which one has the curriculum, size, atmosphere, location, etc. that you

prefer. Do not apply to any school that you are not prepared to visit for an interview and attend if it is the only school that accepts you.

Here are several factors you should consider when selecting medical schools:

- There are no safety schools. Be realistic.
- Apply to the state medical school(s) in your home state because your chance of acceptance is usually best at this school(s). Most state schools provide an excellent medical education at a cost significantly lower than private schools.
- Add private schools in your home state or region. Many private schools are state-supported to some extent, and will give preference to applicants from their state or region of the country.
- Add state schools from outside your home state that consistently accept out-of-state applicants.
- Add private schools from outside your home state where you are a viable candidate based on your grades and your MCAT scores.

As you can see, your state of residency is the primary factor in selecting medical schools! Remember, careful research and selection of medical schools that match your qualifications will increase your chance of acceptance!

SECONDARY APPLICATIONS

After receiving the primary application from AMCAS or AACOMAS, individual medical schools may then request additional materials from you. These additional materials are known as the “secondary application”. These can vary significantly in their content, some consisting of a simple form to fill out, and others requiring answers to one or more essays. Do not procrastinate in submitting your secondary applications! Like the primary application, timing is critical! It should be your goal to return your secondary applications within a few days after you receive them. Note that some medical schools will not consider secondary applications that are returned more than three weeks after they were sent to you.

RECORDS

The complexity of applying to medical school should be evident to you by now. It is important that you maintain accurate records of the application process, because failure to meet even one requirement can stop the review of your application. You should keep a hard copy of *everything* that you submit to the centralized application service and to individual medical schools. It is best to have a separate folder for each school to which you apply. On the outside of the folder, maintain a chronology of each step in the application process. Inside the folder, keep copies of everything the school has sent you, everything you have sent to the school, communications between you and the school, and any other relevant materials.

MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

The interview is a very important component of the medical school application process. Interviews are by invitation only. If you are invited to interview, it generally means that you have passed the first screening and are academically qualified to be admitted. However, medical schools cannot accept all those who are qualified, so admissions committees use the interview to take a further look at you and to determine if you have the personal qualities that the school is looking for in its students.

Before the Interview

The key to a successful interview is preparation! Do not go to an interview unprepared! The interview will be a two-way street. It is both a chance for the interviewer to evaluate you, and a chance for you to learn more about the school. Your interview should be a conversation, during which you both answer and ask questions.

As you prepare for your interview, think about and be prepared to answer questions that revolve around the following four areas:

1. You

Know yourself and be able to articulate your experiences, your goals, your approach to life, and your motivation for medicine. Reread your application so that you remember what you wrote. The interview will give you another opportunity to tell your story and convey who you are to the admissions committee.

2. The Medical Profession

The interview provides an important opportunity to explore your motivation for a career in medicine and your knowledge of the medical profession. Medical schools want to enroll students who will be happy and successful in school and in their careers. It is important that you reflect on your own motivation, as well as spend time reading, discussing, and experiencing the medical profession. Health care issues are always in the news, and many physicians are more than happy to discuss their work and the issues that they face in their profession.

3. The School

Although you want to ask questions about the school during your interview, you need to do your homework in advance. Be sure you have carefully read the school's website and any written materials that are available. If possible, talk with current students or recent alumni of the school. The questions that you ask about the school should reveal that you have already done some research and are excited about the school.

4. Current Issues

You should have a general knowledge of what is going on in the world around you. Be ready to discuss, at least superficially, current news and events.

The Interview Itself

If you have prepared adequately, you should feel confident to be yourself while also acting professionally and learning about the school you are visiting.

Here are some tips for the day of the interview:

- Be well-rested and well-nourished
- Dress professionally
- Arrive early, locate the designated room, and read bulletin boards and campus publications
- Treat all individuals with whom you come in contact (admissions deans, interviewers, students, secretaries) with courtesy
- Make eye contact with your interviewer, and be relaxed and poised
- Be sincere and genuine in your conversation with your interviewer

After the Interview

It is appropriate for you to write a thank-you note to your interviewer. It can be either a short hand-written note or an e-mail. Your thank-you note should be sent immediately after the interview. Also, you should write down your impressions of the school for future reference.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Ok, you made it to the end of the Gettysburg College Guide for Premedical Students! If you follow all of the advice offered here, you will maximize your chances of achieving your goal of becoming a physician. We wish you success!