**Table of Contents**

Careers in Healthcare 1
Academic requirements for admission to medical schools 2
   - Choosing a major
   - Required courses
   - Recommended courses
   - Introductory courses
Academic preparation for the MCAT 4
   - Recommended courses
   - Preparing for the exam
   - When to take the MCAT
Extracurricular activities 7
   - Demonstrating the “core competencies”
   - Social and athletic activities
   - Community service activities
   - Professional organizations and conferences
   - Research
   - Clinical experience
   - Paid employment
Letters of recommendation 10
   - Identifying potential evaluators
   - Earning strong recommendation letters
   - Requesting letters
When to apply 12
   - Deciding on a target application year
   - Gap year(s)
   - Assessing the competitiveness of your application
   - To how many schools should you apply?
   - Obtaining financial assistance from AAMC
Personal statements 14
Interviewing 16
Resources used in the preparation of this handbook 17
Appendix 1: Average GPA and MCAT scores of matriculants at TN Medical Colleges 18
Careers in Healthcare

While you probably picked up this handbook because you want to be a doctor, you need to be aware that there are many careers available in healthcare and you shouldn’t feel limited to becoming an M.D. Nationwide, the majority of students that start out on a pre-med path wind up going on to great careers as something other than a doctor. Our very successful football coach, Mike Radar, started out as a pre-med. Give yourself the opportunity to explore all of your options so you find a career that is fulfilling to you. Below is a list of careers in healthcare and related fields that you may want to consider. Your advisor or the staff at the Center for Calling and Career can help you to explore other careers (outside healthcare) that suit students who enjoy science courses and want to help people.

Career (Degree required)
Athletic trainer (B.S. or M.S.)
Audiology (M.S., Ph.D.)
Cytopathology (M.S.)
Dental Hygienist (B.S.)
Dentist (D.D.S.)
Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)*
Doctor of Podiatric Medicine (D.P.M.)
Genetic counseling (M.S.)
Healthcare administrator (M.H.A. or M.B.A.)
Health Informatics/Information Management (varied)
Health Psychologist (Ph.D.)
Medical Doctor (M.D.)*
Medical Laboratory Scientist (B.S.)
Medical/Science Writer (B.A. /B.S. or higher)
Nurse (L.P.N., R.N., B.S.N.)
Nurse Practitioner (M.S.N. or Ph.D.)
Occupational therapist (M.S.)
Optometrist (O.D.)
Pharmacist (PharmD)
Physical therapist (D.P.T.)
Physician’s Assistant (M.H.S., PA-C)
Psychiatrist (M.D.)
Psychologist (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)
Public Health (M.P.H.)
Rehabilitation Therapist (M.S.)
Research, assistant or associate (B.A, B.S., or M.S.)
Research, principle investigator (Ph.D.)
Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (B.S., RDN certification)
Therapist (M.A., M.S., M.S.W., M.S.S.W., M.F.T., L.C.S.W.)
Veterinarian (D.V.M.)

*Physicians can be trained in either M.D. programs or D.O. programs. While D.O. programs focus on training students to be primary care/family physicians, some graduates of D.O. programs go into specialties, so these programs should be given careful consideration regardless of your career goals. D.O. programs are generally less competitive than M.D. programs, but graduates of both programs practice medicine.
Academic requirements for admission to medical school

Choosing a major:

Students interested in pursuing admission to medical school can choose any undergraduate major. The “pre-med” program is not a major, but rather a set of courses completed and actions taken to prepare for the medical school admissions process. Historically, the most popular majors chosen by pre-med students at Maryville College are Biochemistry, Biology, and Chemistry. The new Neuroscience major (biochemistry or psychology track) also aligns well with the pre-requisites for medical school and is becoming increasingly popular. Regardless of what major you choose, you will work closely with your academic advisor to make sure that you meet all of your major requirements while concurrently taking all required pre-requisites for medical school.

Required courses

Most medical schools require the following courses as pre-requisites for admission:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>MC course code(s)</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Biology with lab*</td>
<td>BIO 113 and BIO 115</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Chemistry with lab</td>
<td>CHM 121 and CHM 122</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Chemistry with lab</td>
<td>CHM 223 and CHM 224</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Physics with lab+</td>
<td>PHY 101 and PHY 102</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or PHY 201 and PHY 202</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/Literature</td>
<td>CMP 110, CMP 130, LIT 270</td>
<td>6 credits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Biochemistry students have gained admission with BIO115 and additional upper level biology courses (they do not typically take BIO 113).

+ MTH 115 or placement into MTH 225 is a prerequisite for PHY 101.

Some medical colleges do not have any required courses, while others require additional courses such as introductory psychology (PSY101), calculus (MTH125 and MTH225), and upper level biology and biochemistry courses.

It is highly recommended that you look at the pre-requisites for admission to several medical schools you are interested in early in your undergraduate career so that you can plan accordingly. You can find this information by looking at the admissions websites of each school or by purchasing access to the MSAR guide available through the AAMC: [https://services.aamc.org/30/msar/home](https://services.aamc.org/30/msar/home) (this is currently $22 for 1 year of access).
**Recommended courses**

Recommended courses vary by school, but may include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommended course</th>
<th>MC course code</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>CHM 316 / CHM416</td>
<td>4 credits each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Cell &amp; Tissue</td>
<td>BIO 301</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Physiology</td>
<td>BIO 412</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Biology</td>
<td>BIO 414</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetics</td>
<td>BIO 221</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunology</td>
<td>BIO 357</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td>BIO 355</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIO 217 / BIO 218</td>
<td>4 credits each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology (any)</td>
<td>PSY 101, etc.</td>
<td>3 credits each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology (any)</td>
<td>SOC 101, etc.</td>
<td>3 credits each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No one individual is likely to complete all of the recommended courses, so don’t feel pressured to take 18 hours per semester plus summer school to try to fit it all in!

**Introductory courses**

Some students do not arrive at the Maryville College campus academically prepared to take challenging courses such as general chemistry and pre-calculus mathematics in their freshman year. If you have been placed into CHM 111 of MTH 105/112 this is because your placement test scores indicated that you would be unlikely to earn a satisfactory grade in CHM 121 or MTH 115 without additional preparation. While this additional coursework may limit the amount of “recommended” coursework you can take during your four years at MC, it is essential to ensure that you are able to earn and maintain a competitive GPA. You will be much better off extending your medical school preparation through your senior year and then taking a gap year prior to beginning medical school than trying to cram it all into three years and having a low GPA and low MCAT score.
Academic Preparation for the MCAT

The MCAT tests prospective medical students on material from a wider range of courses than are required as pre-requisites for admission to medical school. Students are free to acquire this knowledge through coursework at MC, coursework elsewhere, independent study, MCAT prep courses, or any other suitable mechanism. Completion of the courses listed below would give you exposure to virtually all of the concepts covered on the MCAT, but will leave you with very little room for exploration and electives. You will need to decide, in consultation with your academic advisor, what coursework you want to complete to prepare for the MCAT, and what competencies you will gain through other mechanisms.

Recommended courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MC course name</th>
<th>MC course code</th>
<th>Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Cell Biology</td>
<td>BIO 115</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology I</td>
<td>BIO 217</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetics</td>
<td>BIO 221</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecology &amp; Evolution*</td>
<td>BIO 222</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Cell &amp; Tissue Biology</td>
<td>BIO 301</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td>BIO 355</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>BIO 414</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Chemistry</td>
<td>CHM 121 and CHM 122</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic Chemistry</td>
<td>CHM 223 and CHM 224</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>CHM316</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Physics+</td>
<td>PHY 101 and PHY 102</td>
<td>8 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or PHY 201 and PHY 202</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory psychology</td>
<td>PSY 101</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroscience</td>
<td>NSC/PSY 244</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory Sociology</td>
<td>SOC 101</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*BIO 113 is a pre-requisite for BIO222. Non-biology majors may want to study evolution concepts on their own rather than take BIO113 and BIO222.

+ MTH 115 or placement into MTH225 is a pre-requisite for PHY 101.
Preparing for the exam

The MCAT is a comprehensive exam that will require you to have in-depth knowledge of biology, chemistry, physics, psychology, and sociology, as well as strong analytical, reasoning, and test-taking skills. You should treat preparing for the MCAT like a 3 credit hour course, spending approximately 12 hours per week doing MCAT prep in the semester leading up to your exam date. Many students choose to take the exam at the end of the summer so they can study full time for several months before the exam.

Many different materials are available to aid you with MCAT preparation. The AAMC provides a free practice test online and offers additional practice tests for reasonable prices. They also provide in-depth information regarding the content of the exam. MCAT prep books, flash cards, CDs, and DVDs are widely available for purchase, and some are available in the Maryville College Center for Pre-Health Advising for your use. If you choose to study for the MCAT independently it is recommended that you take numerous practice tests (including some on the computer to simulate actual testing conditions), and you spend time working MCAT problems rather than just reading/listening to concept reviews. If you are self-motivated and have excelled in all of your science, math, psychology, and sociology courses then independent study may work well for you.

Students often find it hard to stay focused on MCAT preparation when they are not enrolled in an actual MCAT prep course. These courses are quite expensive, but are worth it if they allow you to score well on the MCAT and gain admission into medical school. Kaplan (www.kaptest.com/MCAT) offers MCAT prep courses at the University of Tennessee Knoxville starting at $2,000. Kaplan and many other test prep companies offer online prep courses as well, also typically starting at around $2,000. Some of these prep courses include access to numerous practice exams, practice problems and one-on-one tutoring sessions. Shop around and make sure you find a course that meets your needs.

When to take the MCAT

You will need to take the MCAT in the calendar year prior to when you hope to gain admission to medical school, so if you plan to start medical school in 2017 you need to take the MCAT in 2016. The MCAT is typically offered in January, March, April, May, June, July, August and September. Pricing and availability are typically best if you register 1 - 2 months in advance, but you should consult the registration and test administration schedule at https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/ for details.

All of your MCAT scores are reported to medical schools when you apply for admission, so it is best to take the MCAT only once. There is no restriction on how many times you can take the MCAT in your lifetime, but you can only take it 3 times in a testing period (a calendar year or a little longer) and you can only register for one test date at a time. If you think that you may want to take it multiple times than you should register for one of the early test dates (January, March, or April) so you will have time to get your scores and register for a later test date before your medical school application is due.
You should not plan to take the MCAT until you have completed coursework that covers most of the concepts featured on the MCAT. You should not try to “just see what you can do” on the MCAT without adequate test-specific preparation. Registration for the MCAT is currently $275 so you don’t want to take it if you aren’t prepared!

Some students, particularly those that need to take introductory coursework in their freshman year, will benefit from delaying the MCAT to the spring of their senior year or the summer following their senior year. In this case, you will not apply to medical school until after you have graduated from MC and you will take a “gap year” (see p. 12). This is a popular option with students at MC and nationwide, and may increase your chances of admission to medical school if you use the gap year wisely.
Extracurricular activities

Demonstrating academic achievement through a high GPA and a high MCAT score is essential for medical school admission, but you must also demonstrate personal and interpersonal competencies that would be hard to fully develop inside the classroom. The medical school admissions committee is likely to be just as interested in what you did during your time outside the classroom as they are in what you did in the classroom.

Demonstrating the “core competencies”

The AAMC lists 15 “core competencies” required of incoming medical students. While some of these competencies can be gained and demonstrated in the classroom, many must be developed and demonstrated outside of the classroom. The competencies and their descriptions, from the AAMC website, are:

Interpersonal Competencies

- **Service Orientation**: Demonstrates a desire to help others and sensitivity to others’ needs and feelings; demonstrates a desire to alleviate others’ distress; recognizes and acts on his/her responsibilities to society; locally, nationally, and globally.
- **Social Skills**: Demonstrates an awareness of others’ needs, goals, feelings, and the ways that social and behavioral cues affect peoples’ interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; treats others with respect.
- **Cultural Competence**: Demonstrates knowledge of socio-cultural factors that affect interactions and behaviors; shows an appreciation and respect for multiple dimensions of diversity; recognizes and acts on the obligation to inform one’s own judgment; engages diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work; recognizes and appropriately addresses bias in themselves and others; interacts effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.
- **Teamwork**: Works collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals; shares information and knowledge with others and provides feedback; puts team goals ahead of individual goals.
- **Oral Communication**: Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; listens effectively; recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.

Intrapersonal Competencies

- **Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others**: Behaves in an honest and ethical manner; cultivates personal and academic integrity; adheres to ethical principles and follows rules and procedures; resists peer pressure to engage in unethical behavior and encourages others to behave in honest and ethical ways; develops and demonstrates ethical and moral reasoning.
- **Reliability and Dependability**: Consistently fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; takes responsibility for personal actions and performance.
- **Resilience and Adaptability**: Demonstrates tolerance of stressful or changing environments or situations and adapts effectively to them; is persistent, even under difficult situations; recovers from setbacks.
- **Capacity for Improvement**: Sets goals for continuous improvement and for learning new concepts and skills; engages in reflective practice for improvement; solicits and responds appropriately to feedback.

**Thinking and Reasoning Competencies**
• **Critical Thinking:** Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems.
• **Quantitative Reasoning:** Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.
• **Scientific Inquiry:** Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems and formulate research questions and hypotheses; is facile in the language of the sciences and uses it to participate in the discourse of science and explain how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated.
• **Written Communication:** Effectively conveys information to others using written words and sentences.

*Science Competencies*

• **Living Systems:** Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.
• **Human Behavior:** Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, socio-cultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

**Social and athletic activities**

Social and athletic activities should be pursued if they interest you, but not for the sole purpose of gaining admission to medical school. Social and athletic activities can help you gain admission if you can demonstrate how they have helped you to develop some of the core competencies, such as cultural competence, teamwork, and resilience and adaptability. The depth of your involvement with an organization is far more important than the number of organizations you belong to. Aim to be a leader in one or two organizations rather than a participant in many.

**Community service**

Community service activities are looked upon favorably by medical school admissions committees because they help you to demonstrate your service orientation, social skills, and an ethical responsibility to others. As with social and athletic activities, depth of involvement is more important than breadth, and lengthy involvement with one organization/project is more impressive than numerous short stints at various organizations. Find something that you genuinely like to do in service to others, and stick with it. For assistance with locating community service opportunities, you can contact the MC Director of Community Engagement: [http://www.maryvillecollege.edu/campus-life/community-engagement-center](http://www.maryvillecollege.edu/campus-life/community-engagement-center).

**Professional Organizations and Conferences**

Being active in a professional organization can give you the opportunity to develop and demonstrate some of the core competencies while also meeting scientists and physicians who may be able to open doors for you to gain research or clinical experience. At Maryville College we have an active student chapter of the American Chemical Society (ACS) that organizes a Science Literacy Seminar series that brings scientists and medical professionals to campus on a regular basis. Attending scientific conferences can also allow you to meet scientists and medical professionals, and lets you gain some
experience talking to M.D.s and Ph.D.s in a more relaxed setting than an interview. Presenting your own research at a conference is a great way to demonstrate the oral communication competency. The Blue Ridge Undergraduate Research Conference, the ACA Summit, and several departmental conferences at UTK provide welcoming environments for undergraduate poster or oral presentations.

**Research**

Virtually all Maryville College students gain some research experience through their Senior Study. All students planning to go on to graduate or professional school are encouraged to seek additional research experience through a summer Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program. While not required for medical school admissions, research experience is looked upon favorably and gives you something to talk about in your interview.

**Clinical experience**

Clinical experience/exposure is essential for admission into medical school. At a minimum, you need to shadow physicians in a variety of settings. If you are interested in shadowing in the Maryville/Knoxville area you may contact Dr. Brigati (Jennifer.brigati@maryvillecollege.edu) to obtain contact information for a local physician who has agreed to let MC students shadow him or her. If you are interested in shadowing in your hometown you might start by inquiring with your family physician.

In addition to shadowing, it is recommended that you get some hands-on clinical experience. This might entail volunteering at a hospital or nursing home, participating in the Healthcare Coaching course and internship (Contact Dr. Mardi Craig for information), or getting a CNA license so you can work in a clinical setting part-time while completing your degree at MC. Maryville College offers Red Cross CPR and First Aid certification as part of several PHR courses, and a Wilderness First Responder course is offered in the January Term most years. Earning these credentials may help you to obtain positions in which you can do some hands-on care.

You can also obtain some clinical/shadowing experience through special summer programs, such as this one offered at ETSU: [http://www.etsu.edu/com/sa/admissions/medicalhorizons/](http://www.etsu.edu/com/sa/admissions/medicalhorizons/).

**Paid employment**

Many students have to work and medical school admissions committees recognize this. If you can find a job in a medical field that is ideal, but if not try to find a job that will help you to demonstrate or develop some of the core competencies. For example, to be a good childcare worker you will need to be reliable, adaptable, and ethically responsible, and you will probably have the opportunity to demonstrate growth, improvement, and knowledge of child development. If you already have a good (but not medically relevant) job, think about which core competencies you can say you have developed or demonstrated while working.
Letters of recommendation

Identifying potential evaluators

Maryville College does not have a pre-professional evaluation committee, and therefore we do not provide committee evaluations/letters unless they are an absolute requirement of a school. In most cases, medical schools ask for three letters from professors at your undergraduate institution; two from science professors and one from a non-science professor. They may also allow non-academic letters, often placing a cap on the number allowed (UTHSC allows three). The AMCAS will allow you to submit up to 10 letters, but it is unlikely that one school would look at all 10. They allow you to submit a large number so that you can select different letters from the group to go to each school.

Earning strong recommendation letters

From the moment you arrive on campus, all of your interactions with professors should be courteous and professional, because you never know who you might need to ask for a recommendation letter. Take another look at the personal competencies (see p.7), and make sure that in all of your interactions you display those characteristics. At Maryville College the two most obvious professors to write your recommendation letter are your academic advisor and your senior study advisor. For this reason, you should make sure that you choose someone other than your academic advisor to supervise your senior study.

In addition, be sure that you handle yourself professionally at all internships, research experiences, volunteer opportunities, and while shadowing. Show up when you are supposed to, be on time, dress appropriately, leave your electronic devices turned off, pay attention, act interested and engaged (even if you aren’t), and don’t ask to leave early. Address your supervisor as Mr./Ms./Dr./Professor as appropriate unless they tell you to call them something else. If you make a mistake, own up to it and apologize. Be very cautious with social media; you don’t want a potential evaluator to see pictures of you doing a keg-stand at a party, nor do you want them to find out you were lamenting how “boring” your internship is.

Requesting letters

Letters from potential evaluators should be requested at least one month in advance. If you are completing an internship or shadowing experience and it will be a year or more before you apply to medical school, you can ask your supervisor if they would be willing to write a letter when you are ready to apply. If an individual agrees to write a letter for you, be sure to send them an updated resume or CV as well as a copy of your personal statement so they have a more complete picture of your preparation for medical school. If you are applying to schools that require letters to be sent separately (not through AMCAS) be sure to provide your evaluators with addressed, stamped envelopes for each school and any required forms. If forms are required, you should fill out any portions of the form that you can (ie – your name, name of evaluator, address of evaluator, etc.) before giving the evaluator the form. If you are requesting a letter from a professor, remind them of the grade you earned in the courses that they
taught. You want to make this process as easy as possible for your evaluators because they are asked to write letters for many students every year.

When contacting potential evaluators, you should always ask them if they feel like they could write you a strong letter of recommendation, and provide them with an easy “out” in case they don’t (“I understand if you are too busy, so just let me know”). You don’t want any mediocre letters accompanying your medical school application. If you earned a poor grade, had a bad attitude, or didn’t have regular attendance in a professor’s course than you should not ask them for a recommendation letter. You should also avoid asking people that don’t know you very well for recommendation letters. You might have been the model of professional behavior while you were shadowing Dr. Smith, but if you only shadowed him for two days and you didn’t talk to him much than he probably can’t offer an honest evaluation of your suitability for medical school.
When to apply

Deciding on a target application year

One of the biggest decisions you will need to make during your undergraduate career is when to apply for medical school. If you want to begin medical school immediately after graduating, you will want to take the MCAT during the summer between your junior and senior year (or earlier), and complete the AMCAS application by the early decision deadline of August 1, or by the deadline set by the colleges to which you are applying (October-December). Since applications are submitted before any of your senior year grades are available, you may be at a disadvantage if you had a rough start to your college career. You may also find this schedule too tight if you needed introductory coursework or if you decided after your freshman year to pursue pre-medical studies. In this case you may be completing courses in your senior year that would help you significantly on the MCAT, and therefore you may want to delay testing and application until summer/fall after you graduate.

Gap year(s)

A “gap year” is the year that you will have “off” from school if you choose to wait until after graduation to apply to medical school. Taking a “gap year” is becoming a very popular choice, because it allows you to complete your course work and then focus on earning a high score on the MCAT and preparing a competitive application when you are not so stressed. It also gives you more time to complete courses that cover material found on the MCAT, and a chance to pull your GPA up with high senior year grades if you had a rough time in some of your freshman/sophomore science courses.

A gap year can actually improve the competitiveness your medical school application if you use it wisely. Gaining work experience in a clinical setting or in biomedical research is certain to improve your appeal to a medical school admissions committee, but other types of volunteer and work experience can also be advantageous.

Assessing the competitiveness of your application

Here are some things you want to consider when trying to determine if you are ready to apply to medical school:

How does my GPA compare to the GPA of students admitted to the schools to which I plan to apply? (see appendix 1)

How do my MCAT scores (or practice test scores) compare to the MCAT scores of students admitted to the schools to which I plan to apply? (see appendix 1)

How much health-related volunteer or employment experience have I gained? Be sure to consider both quality and quantity.

How thoroughly do my extracurricular activities demonstrate that I meet the intrapersonal and interpersonal core competencies as described by the AAMC?
Do I feel confident that I can get strong letters of recommendation from an array of evaluators (professors in and out of the sciences, physicians, employers, and/or volunteer supervisors).

**To how many schools should you apply?**

The average medical school applicant applies to 15 schools. You are strongly encouraged to apply to at least 10, even if you have a very competitive application. It is not uncommon for students to apply to 20 – 25 schools, particularly if their application is less competitive. Applying to multiple schools increases your odds of acceptance because different institutions may be looking for different qualities in their applicants. Be aware, however, that there are fees associated with each application through AMCAS, and additional fees required from individual schools if you are invited to submit secondary applications.

**Obtaining financial assistance from AAMC**

MCAT registration fees, MCAT preparation materials, and AMCAS application fees are costly, and the AAMC does not want this cost to be a barrier for future physicians. To be eligible for the AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP) your household income (your parent or guardian’s household income) must be less than 300% of the federal poverty level for your family size. This number is higher than you would think (in 2013 it was $70,650 for a family of 4), so you may be eligible for assistance. If you qualify, you get reduced MCAT registration fees, free MCAT prep materials, complimentary access to the MSAR, and an AMCAS application fee waiver that typically covers 6 schools. For more information visit [www.aamc.org/fap](http://www.aamc.org/fap).
Personal statements

On the AMCAS application you will have 5300 characters (including spaces) to explain why you are a better candidate for medical school than all of the other applicants with equally high GPAs and MCAT scores. Don’t wait until the last minute to write this, and don’t submit it without having at least two people (one of whom should be your academic advisor) critique it. Make sure you choose reviewers that will give you honest feedback; your Mom or your best friend might not be the best choice.

While the actual content of successful applicants’ essay may vary dramatically, your essay should generally focus on why you want to go to medical school, what experiences have prepared you for medical school, and/or who has influenced you to want to be a physician. This is also where you should include any information that you want the admissions committee to have that you did not include anywhere else in your application. The statement should be SPECIFIC and PERSONAL; it should not be superficial or generic.

John Hopkins University offers the following sound advice on what NOT to include in your personal statement:

- **Clichés**: How many times do you think admissions committees have read the phrase, “I want to become a physician because I like science and I want to help people”?
- **The “epiphany into medicine”**: Your pursuit of the health professions should be the result of a series of thoughtful, conscious, and reflective decisions, NOT an instantaneous realization.
- **Manifest Destiny**: You have not “always known” that you want to be a physician (or dentist, etc.). See above. Similarly, who cares if “everyone has always said that I would make a good physician.” What do they know?
- **The narrative resume**: Do not rehash all of your activities and achievements. Choose ONE or TWO significant and distinguishing experiences to elaborate upon.
- **“I know what it is like to be a physician from [shadowing, clinical volunteer experience, etc.]”**: No, you do not. That is why you are hoping to go to medical school – so you might be lucky enough to find out one day.
- **Grandiosity**: Claiming that you plan to cure cancer (or HIV, or healthcare disparities, or anything else) shows a grave lack of understanding of whatever problem you are planning to solve.
- **Negativity**: No one likes a complainer. In particular, do not be negative about Johns Hopkins, your professors, or your research mentors.
- **“I am special”**: Of course you are special. But claiming “you probably do not see many applicants like me” is not only arrogant but is also likely untrue. Admissions committees have seen it all.
- **Anything potentially inflammatory or controversial**: You do not know the values, beliefs, and background of the person who is reading your essay. Additionally, your beliefs are not the only “correct” beliefs. Furthermore, some people – including admissions officers – have personal biases and prejudices. For these reasons, it is advisable to avoid making any strong statements regarding politics, religion, and other polarizing topics. Be extremely cautious to avoid expressing any views that could be construed as derogatory to any group.
- **“I am a victim”**: Victims are never attractive candidates. If you have experienced difficulties, explain your experiences dispassionately and focus on how you overcame these difficulties, what you learned from your experiences, and how you are a stronger person because of your experiences.
- **Excuses**: In general, there are better uses for your personal statement than explaining away and justifying poor grades, incidents of misconduct, etc. However, if you choose to address these subjects, be sure to focus on what you have learned from those incidents and how your
experiences have made you a stronger person. Never, ever blame anyone else for your mistakes.

- **Lies**: This includes information that may be factually accurate but is presented in a misleading way.
- **Leading with a quotation written by someone else**: Admissions committees are interested in what you have to say.
- **Any unusual formats**: Do not submit artwork, photographs, collages, videos, etc. in lieu of a written essay. Likewise, do not write your personal statement in verse, limerick, haiku, etc.

You can find many examples on personal statements online. Here are links to a few:

[http://www.cmu.edu/hpp/apply-to-schools/personal-statements/samples.html](http://www.cmu.edu/hpp/apply-to-schools/personal-statements/samples.html)

[http://www.phikappaphi.org/web/Files/sample_personal_statements.pdf](http://www.phikappaphi.org/web/Files/sample_personal_statements.pdf)
Interviewing

Medical schools get applications from many candidates with excellent GPAs and MCAT scores, and yet they can only offer a small number of these highly qualified individuals admission each year. The interview is your chance to demonstrate to the admissions committee that you really are as bright and promising as you sound on paper. You should prepare for your interview much like you would study for a test, but this time the main subject matter is you.

To prepare for the interview, make sure you know how you will answer all of the common interview questions. There are some excellent lists of common questions available on the internet (links below), and you should practice answering each of the questions on these lists. Be aware that the admissions committee may also ask you about current events and newsworthy items, so your actual questions may not be listed. For example, it is likely that questions about the Affordable Care Act will be popular for the next few years.

You also need to make sure that you know as much as possible about the program you are applying to. What makes it unique? Why would you want to choose this program over other programs (hint: “because my girlfriend lives nearby” is not a great answer). The committee knows that you applied to more than one school; having some knowledge about their program makes it seem like you actually care about going to their medical school versus just anywhere you get accepted.

To perfect your interviewing technique, you need to practice. You will have the opportunity to participate in mock interviews numerous times in your coursework, but as the actual interview approaches you will want to schedule a time with your academic advisor, senior study advisor, or a CCC staff member to do a medical-school specific mock interview. Interviewing is a skill, and you can’t improve if you don’t practice.

Finally, be sure you dress professionally for the interview. A basic, well fitted suit in a dark or neutral color with minimal/understated accessories is always a safe bet. If you are considering something else, just be sure to run it past the CCC staff and/or your academic advisor to see what they think. Make sure your hair and facial hair are well groomed. Avoid perfume and cologne because your interviewer could be allergic that would not make a good impression.

Links to lists of common medical school interview questions:

http://gecd.mit.edu/sites/default/files/phinterviewquestions.pdf

http://www.colorado.edu/advising/sites/default/files/attached-files/Med_100%20intquest.pdf

http://www.salisbury.edu/careerservices/students/Interviews/MedSchool.html#top10

http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/pre-medhealth/applicants/interviewing-resources/
Resources used in the preparation of this handbook

www.aamc.org

http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/health/Applicants/personal.statement.html


APPENDIX 1: AVERAGE GPA AND MCAT SCORE OF MATRICULANTS AT TENNESSEE MEDICAL COLLEGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLEGE</th>
<th>BCPM AVE</th>
<th>AO AVE</th>
<th>CUM AVE</th>
<th>MCAT AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ETSU Quillen</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meharry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTHSC Memphis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderbilt U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BCPM = Biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics
AO = all other courses
CUM = cumulative GPA