



Career Center

Guide to Professional School-Medical, Dental, and Law School

Deciding to Go to Professional School

Engage in self-reflection and examine your reasons for pursuing a professional degree.

Positive reasons for going to a professional school:

- You have a definite academic goal and/or career ambition
- You have researched the discipline in your field and have weighed the costs of the degree against the benefits
- You are truly dedicated to learning and prepared for several years of intensive study

Negative reasons for going to graduate or professional school:

- You are going because you don't know what else to do
- You are going as a way of putting off entering the world of work
- You are going because you feel pressured by others (e.g., family, academic advisor)

Advantages to working first:

- Can recharge your batteries
- Can allow you to gain content-specific experience
- Can help you gain confidence
- Can spur motivation
- Can offer you the chance to investigate a field that interests you

Gather Information on Programs

Selecting a program is an important step that should be done carefully and with considerable thought. Your choice of program may impact your career path greatly, so it is best to look at all of the factors before selecting the best school. You will want to have enough details to make an informed decision about what program to attend before investing your time and money. Be sure to look nationwide; do not limit yourself geographically. Consider the following sources:

Professors Ask for suggestions from your undergraduate professors about what programs you should explore. They may know colleagues at some of the institutions you are considering.

Published Guides We highly recommend researching the professional association published guide or contact the schools that interest you to request more information.

Graduate Students in Your Field Ask your professors for the names of undergraduate alumni who have attended graduate schools in your field. Contact those alumni for their advice on programs. When you visit schools, ask to speak to currently enrolled students.

Professional Journals Note which faculty members are publishing in professional journals or textbooks in your area of specialization and the programs with which they are affiliated.

Published Ratings Periodicals such as *U.S. News and World Report* publish periodic ratings of colleges and universities. It is a good idea to consult several ratings for comparison. Also, be aware that these can be prejudiced toward research-oriented institutions.

Parents & Friends If your parents are paying for part or all of your tuition, they will probably want some input. Don't forget those closest to you when looking for suggestions.

Research and Compare Schools

Aside from the basics such as geographic location and admission requirements, you may want to consider the following criteria when selecting the program that is best for you:

Academic Reputation Investigate the reputation of the institution as a whole. Remember that the reputation of the specific department and individual faculty members of the program hold more weight than the reputation of the overall institution. Make certain you are applying to a program that has been accredited.

Academic Approach Does the department take a specialized or more generalized approach for their academic discipline? Which suits your needs better?

Teaching Methods Depending on your field, practical work experience in addition to classroom learning may be important. Is there an emphasis on research or on practical application?

Facilities Investigate the library resources available. What kind of accessibility will you have to original research? Check that the computer centers and labs are adequate for your research.

Time Commitment/Attrition How long does it take to complete the program and how many students drop out before completing? Be sure to ask students in the program for the realistic answer to this question.

Size of Department Can you get the attention you want from faculty members? How many faculty members are devoted to the department? Are they part-time or full-time? How many are tenured?

Size of the Institution Would you feel comfortable there?

Student Mix Consider the age, gender, and ethnicity of the student body. Would you be comfortable with that?

Cost & Financial Aid/Scholarships <http://www.collegescholarships.org/>. Do not rule out any program because of cost; if the program wants you, there may be additional funding of which you are unaware.

Post graduation plans Where have graduates obtained employment after graduation? Often, current students or faculty can tell you this.

Housing/Living Expenses Consider the cost of living in the area when weighing the total expenses: include housing, transportation and groceries. Investigate on-campus and off-campus possibilities.

Once you've considered all criteria, you can now rank your list schools. As criteria, use your personal interests and the relative likelihood of admission. Use three categories to rank: **reach schools**, "I don't think I have a good chance for admission but I am interested;" **possible schools**, "I have a fairly good chance for admission;" and **safety schools**, "I will definitely be accepted." You should apply to at least two schools from each category.

What Do Admission Committees Look For?

Three (3) general criteria

- *Intellectual ability*: assessed by GPA, reputation of undergraduate school, difficulty of courses taken, and overall performance in courses related to the field you want to study.
- *Work/field-related skills*: work experience (whether you have managed resources, people, projects, or portfolios).
- *Personal characteristics*: evidence of leadership, maturity, integrity, responsibility, and teamwork.

Tips & Recommended Timeline for Application Process

- Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)
<http://www.aamc.org/students/considering/msartimeline.pdf>
- ADA-Dental School Preparation Timeline
<http://www.ada.org/public/careers/beadentist/college.asp#timeline>
- Law School Application Process-<http://www.lsat.org/index.asp>

Required Admission Exams

- Law School:
LSAT: <http://www.lsac.org/>
- Medical School:
MCAT: <http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm>
- Dental admissions test:
DAT: <http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/index.asp>
- Professional program testing: KAPLAN: <http://www.kaplan.com/TestPreparation/>

FAQ's

FAQ For Pre-Medical and Pre-Dental Students

(Note: This Document has been Adapted from [University of Syracuse](#), [St. Mary's College in California](#), [Stony Brook State University of New York](#) and [Providence College](#) pre-Health Advising websites.)

Do I need to have a 4.0 GPA to get accepted to medical/dental school?

No. The average GPA for admitted students to medical school is approximately 3.5 and to dental schools are approximately 3.3. You should aim to get A's and B's in your courses. Remember too, that every grade you get in college will be looked at by medical schools, so any poor grades on your transcripts will also be taken into account when considering your application.

I know that admissions committees look at how much volunteer experience I have. How much time should I spend doing volunteer work?

Quality is more important than quantity. You should commit at least four to six hours each week for the year prior to application. You should select at least one activity where you are making an impact and the work is making an impact on you. It is important to take an active role in your volunteer work.

What does it take to enter and succeed in medical/dental school?

1. Motivation and intelligence
2. Well-rounded college education
3. Completion of college prerequisites for medical school entrance:
 1. Good academic performance
 2. High grade point average--usually, between 3.3 and 3.6 on a 4-point scale
4. Preparation for the medical college admission test (MCAT) or dental admission test (DAT)
5. Timely and successful performance on the MCAT or DAT. Competitiveness of MCAT and DAT scores varies with the institutions that you are applying to and the strength of your other credentials
6. Evidence of motivation for the profession
7. Evidence of interest in service
8. Evidence of leadership
9. Strong letters of recommendation
10. Well written personal statement
11. Timely applications to medical schools
12. Good communication skills

Do I have to major in science to become a competitive candidate for medical/dental school?

Many students planning to apply to medical school think they should major in science and they will be less competitive candidates as humanities or social science majors. This, however, is not the case. Premedical/pre-dental students should use the same criteria for choosing a major that other students use: What discipline is most interesting and most challenging? Which field draws best on your talents and abilities? Premed/pre-dental course work can fit into a non-science major with careful planning and advice from the premed adviser and program faculty advisers.

When deciding on a major, several points are worth noting:

- Medical schools are interested in applicants who are challenged in the sciences and have demonstrated their abilities in science. They also want to attract candidates who have a broad background. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, in the 2000-2001 entering class for medical schools nationwide, 43% of all Biology majors, 48% of all Physical Science majors and 49% of all non-science majors who applied to medical schools nationwide were accepted.
- Successful medical school and dental school applicants demonstrate both ability in science and that broader understanding through a strong academic record. Premedical students have majored in English, History, Engineering, and Psychology, as well as the more traditional science fields. Those with equally strong records have been equally successful in gaining admission.

I have heard Organic Chemistry is a “weed out” course for premedical/pre-dental students?

Organic chemistry is a very challenging class that covers a lot of material, and so it is similar to the kinds of classes you will encounter in medical schools and that is why the admissions committee will look closely at these grades. In addition organic chemistry is required before you take the MCAT/DAT.

What are the steps to applying to medical/dental-school?

The primary medical school application you will submit is through the **American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS)** for MD schools, American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS) for DO schools and for dental school it is the American Association for Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS). Your AMCAS/AACOMAS/AADSAS application will contain your personal information, college transcript, MCAT/DAT scores, volunteer work, awards, and personal statement. The same

information is sent to all of the schools to which you wish to apply. If you are applying to one of the non AMCAS/AACOMAS/ AADSAS schools it's best to contact the school directly for application details.

Complete required coursework:

1. Take the MCAT/DAT
2. Obtain strong letters of recommendation (including a letter from a DO if you're applying to osteopathic colleges)
3. Write your personal essay
4. Submit primary application
5. Submit secondary application (if requested)
6. Submit letters of recommendation (if requested)
7. Interview (if requested)

When do I take the medical school or dental admission test?

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) examinations are usually taken in the spring of the junior year. The admission test must be taken the year before the individual wants to begin attending medical or dental school. The MCAT is offered in April and August. It is recommended that you take the Spring MCAT because of the rolling admission nature of medical schools. Similarly, you should plan to take the Dental Admission Test (DAT) in the spring of your junior year or the summer before you apply to dental schools.

How do I select a medical/dental school?

Before you apply to medical and dental school, it is crucial that you do your research as it is time consuming and expensive to apply. Begin the process by narrowing down the list. Review the medical and dental schools admissions information. Some schools only accept in-state residents so if you are not a resident in that state then it is not worth your time and money to apply there. Your best chances of acceptance into medical or dental school are in the state schools where you claim legal residence. State schools are supported by tax dollars and, therefore, are obligated to accept students from that state. Some states do not have medical or dental schools. If you live in such a state, your state has a contract with public or private schools in other states that require them to treat you as an in-state student. Generally, out-of-state applicants to a state-supported medical or dental school need to present credentials superior to those of state applicants. Private schools place less emphasis on state of residency.

Since schools differ in their admissions requirements, you will need to determine those schools that you are qualified to attend. Competition to get into medical and dental schools is intense. You need to be realistic about your admission chances. Look at the average GPA and admission test scores of the people that are getting accepted to the various schools. Check to see where students from your college with your GPA and admission test scores have been accepted.

The Essay-Selected Tips

The essay or personal statement is intended to offer you the opportunity to express your goals, explain certain circumstances, and present yourself in a way that you cannot in a standard application. It should express your commitment to your chosen field of study and your motivation, creativity, maturity and personal individuality. Use the essay as an opportunity to match your personal and professional goals with both the field and the chosen academic program.

DO:

- Stay within any length limitation

- Write in an active voice
- Include real life examples
- Make sure enthusiasm shines through
- Show evidence of focus, dedication and awareness
- Be honest

DON'T:

- Make yourself out to be someone you are not
- Dwell on weak points
- Employ dull chronological histories
- Disregard length limitation or lie

The Interview *

Some important tips include:

- Always review your application before you interview to emphasize the points you want to highlight
- Prepare for the interview with questions of your own
- Always follow appropriate professional behaviors (be on time, dress appropriately, and write thank you letters)
- Be aware of your non-verbal behavior such as tapping a foot, playing with a pen, or general fidgeting
- Practice for the interview and anticipate questions designed to assess your appropriateness for the program.

*Obtain and review the guide: *Preparation for the Professional School Interview*

Online Resources for Pre-Professional Education
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Professional Organizations Related to Field

- **ADA**-American Dental Association-<http://www.ada.org/>
- **AMA**-American Medical Association-<http://www.ama-assn.org/>
- **AOA**-American Osteopathic Association-<http://www.osteopathic.org/>
- **ACA**-American Chiropractic Association-<http://www.amerchiro.org/>

Professional School Application Services

- **AAMC**-Association of American Medical Colleges-<http://www.aamc.org/>
- **AMCAS**-American Medical College Application Services-<http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/>
- **ADEA**-American Dental Education Association-<http://www.adea.org/>
- **AADSAS**-Associated American Dental Schools Application Service-www.adea.org/DAS/AADSAS
- **LSAT**-Law School Admission Council-<http://www.lsac.org/>

General Information Related to Field of Study

- Aspiringdocs-sponsored by AAMC-
<http://www.aspiringdocs.org/site/c.luIUL9MUjtE/b.2011035/apps/lk/content3.aspx>
- Student Doctors Network-www.studentdoctor.net
- Student Osteopathic Medical Association-<http://www.studentdo.com/>
- American Student Dental Association-<http://www.asdanet.org/>

How Can the Case Career Center Help?

- Conduct a mock interview with a career professional.
- Have your CV/resume reviewed.
- Have your personal statement or essay critiqued.
- Visit the Accenture Resource Library to access additional materials.

Case Career Center 206 Sears
<http://studentaffairs.case.edu/careers/> 216-368-4446