

PREPARING FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL – THE BASICS

1. Find out if this is what you want to do:

- Shadow or interview a physician or a medical student.
- Read all you can about the profession.
- Volunteer in a hospital or clinic.

2. Find out about requirements and procedures for specific medical schools:

- AAMC publishes Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) each year. You can purchase it directly from AAMC (<http://aamc.org/students/mcat/start.htm>.) On the right side, go to “Students Publications,” then “Applicants.”
- Look at specific medical schools’ web sites on the Internet; this is a great way to get information quickly. The premedical page: www.science.siu.edu/advisement/pre/pre-medical.htm, has links to schools and other premedical information.
- The Health Professions Information Office in the College of Science Advisement Office has a variety of reference materials, such as the Medical School Admission Requirements and the Premedical Advisor’s Reference Manual.

3. Make yourself a competitive applicant:

- GPA will be calculated both cumulatively and in the math/sciences (BCPM GPA). Both are important! In 2005 the mean GPA for admitted students was 3.63.
- MCAT scores are critical. Most medical schools expect at least 9 on each of the sections. Average overall MCAT scores for accepted students in 2005 was 30.2 (total of the 3 numerically graded sections).
- You should plan to take the MCAT in late spring of your Junior year, if possible. This means that you must have completed required coursework prior to this time. Even though the test is frequently given on computer, students must consider the application time frame, and the possibility of re-taking the test.
- Preparation for the MCAT should begin your Freshman year! To learn about the exam and test preparation at www.aamc.org/students/mcat/preparing/start.htm to obtain appropriate extra materials and practice tests. Take a practice test your Sophomore year to see where your weaknesses lie.
- Volunteer work, shadowing, independent studies, team-oriented activities, involvement in community or campus organizations – all of these are activities that get you around people and aid in your personal development.
- Take courses that help make you a “well-rounded” person, not just a scientist. Students often consider a psychology minor (5 classes) or foreign language.
- Work on your written, oral communication, and reading comprehension skills. Read *The New York Times* online or other more rigorous journals/newspapers.
- Be realistic. If your grades and/or MCAT scores are below acceptable levels, you must make a decision about what you are going to do – either pursue a course of

action that will lead to improvement or think about alternative careers. Sophomores should have at least a 3.3 GPA or better.

4. Apply to medical schools early and follow the rules:

- A. You will apply through a centralized application service – American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS – <http://www.aamc.org>) or American College of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS – <http://www.aacom.org>).
- B. Be sure that you have letters of recommendation from individual professors sent to the Health Professions Information Office early – by February of your Junior year. The Health Professions Advisor will compose a composite letter to be sent to medical schools after your Health Preprofessional Committee interview, which is held between February and April.

If you are invited for an interview, think about possible questions for the schools as well as questions they might ask you.

In all your interactions with application services and schools, conduct yourself professionally.

- C. Apply early! Applications are accepted in the beginning of June, and you should have yours in as soon as possible, certainly no later than August 1.
- D. Individual medical schools then have the option of sending supplemental applications to you. Be aware that, unlike SIU School of Medicine, most schools do not screen, and send you a supplemental regardless of whether you are competitive or not. You may want to complete supplementals only for schools for which you are competitive. (See your advisor for more information.) These must be completed and returned in a timely fashion. Your Committee letter is sent separately from your advisor's office at this time.
- E. The SIUC Health Professions Information Office now uses Virtual Evals, a secure online service for distributing LOE (Letters of Evaluation) to schools of allopathic medicine, osteopathic medicine, and optometry. Your Committee letter and checklist portion of the evaluation are made into a PDF file which is uploaded to the Professional Schools. The Professional Schools then download the PDFs and save them to the admissions office system. There is a flat \$10 fee for this service.