Greetings from Health Professions Advising (HPA)! Producing this newsletter around Reunions means both taking stock of the academic year that just wrapped up while simultaneously gearing up for the next professional school application cycle. Thinking back on all of our seniors’ and applicants’ successes while also providing encouragement to those just getting started with their personal statements and school lists is always an exciting time of year!

We have enjoyed the relative stability afforded to us by the dedicated physicians, researchers, public health experts, and other health professionals who brought us through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Doing our work with pre-health students feels even more meaningful knowing you’ll be leading the charge through future health challenges! We did welcome and celebrate an interruption in the stability with the birth of Sherise’s baby boy this March! We’ve enjoyed getting to know him on Zoom meetings as she returns from maternity leave. We’ll also be sad to bid farewell to Sachiko, who is moving back to California this summer. HPA won’t be the same without her.

We could not do our work without our dedicated student leaders. Thank you for gently guiding our first and second-year students and for freely sharing your wisdom. We wish our graduating HPA Peer Advisers – Samantha Chin, Allison Chou, Ashley Chung, and Maryam Kamel, and graduating Jock Docs – Weston Carpenter, Julia Cunningham, Genevieve Fraipont, Jayme Leschly, and Annie Robinson, all the best.

Our favorite part of the Newsletter is highlighting the success of our recent applicants to professional schools, who offer their advice to our current students. We hope that their words provide some inspiration and motivation to you on your prehealth journey– they inspire us in our work! As always, we wish our readers a great summer, and we look forward to another fantastic year with you. Stay cool and stay safe!
At the end of each application cycle, we invite successful applicants to share their advice with younger students through a series of Accepted Applicant Panels and these profiles. Many thanks to all of our amazing applicants!

**Toyosi Oluwole ’21, Anthropology with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy**

**Pursuing an MD/MPH at the University of California San Francisco School of Medicine**

**Significant college activities:** Pace Center Purposeful Partnership Associate, Service Focus Fellow, Forbes College Peer Academic Advisor, HPA Peer Adviser, IIP internships in Tanzania and Ecuador, DoroBucci Vice President & Social Chair, Princeton Club Soccer, Katz Summer Scholar at Lurie Children’s Hospital, and Senior Thesis Research (on the experiences of caretakers of children with rare neurological conditions)

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** If I could give one piece of advice, it would be to not give up and believe in yourself throughout this whole journey. I often had imposter syndrome at Princeton, thinking I didn’t belong in a space with so many brilliant thinkers. However, I learned over time that I belonged at Princeton and understanding material at my own pace was okay. Try not to compare yourself to others and remember that you’ve done all the work to get here. You belong as well!

I will also say don’t pay attention to negative or scary things people may say about certain pre-med courses at Princeton. Go with an open mind and be patient about the learning process. I ended up really enjoying the classes I was initially scared of, and I made sure to attend office hours frequently to understand the material well. I also formed great relationships with my professors who all really wanted to see me succeed. Additionally, I would encourage you to study and explore what truly interests you. As an Anthropology major and pre-med student, I had a well-balanced course load, and my major allowed me to understand health and illness through a unique lens. I even took some exciting courses on African art, music, and religion, which allowed me to embrace my multifaceted interests and explore my passions for music and art. Furthermore, I took advantage of the great opportunities Princeton offered and pursued my love for traveling and service through the International Internship Program (IIP), which added another rich layer to my Princeton experience.

My next biggest piece of advice would be to make mentors early. I went to McGraw tutoring one day and met someone who fit my picture of a great mentor. During my freshman year, we met and planned my whole course schedule for my four years at Princeton. She was integral to my journey at Princeton, and she is still my mentor to this day. Also, HPA is the absolute best! I stopped by the office at least once a semester to check in, and I am so grateful for the encouragement I always received. All in all, don’t be too hard on yourself, and utilize your mentors and support networks to carry you along the way. Lastly, whenever you feel discouraged just remember to go back to your anchor. Ask yourself why are you on this journey and what does it mean to you? That answer for me has always motivated me to keep going. Good luck and feel free to send me an email: toluwole@alumni.princeton.edu.

**Career Spotlights**

HPA supports students interested in many health careers and seeks to educate students about all of their options. Here are some of this year’s Careers of the Month. Find more in the Career of the Month Archive.

 Healthcare Consulting  
 Clinical Dietitian  
 Dentistry
Juliet McGowen ’20, Molecular Biology
Pursuing an MD at Harvard Medical School

Significant college activities: Matriculate Advising Fellow, IIP at the KIHEFO Clinics in Uganda, Senior Thesis Research in the Burdine Lab, AP Chemistry Tutor, SAT Math Tutor,

Glide year activities: MPhil in Genomic Medicine with Master’s thesis research in the Hearn Lab, Senior Patient Advocate with the National Health Corps, Assistant Research Scientist in the Wong Lab at NYU Langone

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: The premed track is difficult—from balancing challenging STEM courses to participating in research and service opportunities to finding time for your interests/extracurriculars outside of medicine, your schedule will likely be packed! The best advice I can offer premed students is to plan your premedical journey with HPA early in your college career to make the most of the premed experience. But at the same time, chart your own premedical path and enjoy the journey. My freshman year, I struggled to find classes/extracurriculars that I genuinely enjoyed because I was caught up in choosing the “right” activities for my future medical school application. But when I prioritized the activities, classes, and even another degree that I genuinely enjoyed I found it so much easier to balance and merge my premedical activities with the rest of my interests/hobbies.

Just know that there is no blueprint for the perfect applicant. We all have our own reasons behind “Why Medicine?” We have our own experiences that shape our values and perspectives. We are all on our own timeline (this one was tough for me to learn as I decided to take multiple gap years!). The experiences you cultivate during your premedical journey will help shape you into the physician you are striving to become!

Feel free to reach out at juliet.v.mcgowen@gmail.com if you would like to chat about anything premed related!

Weston Carpenter ’23, Molecular Biology with a certificate in Neuroscience
Pursuing an MD at University of Connecticut School of Medicine

Significant college activities: Varsity Lacrosse, 3x Outdoor Action Leader, HPA Jock Doc, Student-Athlete Wellness Leader, Emergency Department Scribe

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: Being premed at Princeton is definitely challenging, but also incredibly rewarding. You’ll take a lot of classes that teach you concepts that you are passionate about and will be applicable for the rest of your life as a healthcare professional. Choosing a major should be a balance between what course load you are interested in and what you think you can reasonably take on during your four years at Princeton. I chose MOL because of my positive experience in MOL 214, but have met premed students in SPIA, REL, POL, and other non-traditional majors! Don’t forget that HPA is always around to help you make the most of your college experience and to prepare you for your eventual med school applications. Even if you don’t have anything pressing, make an appointment to just go in, introduce yourself, and be a friendly face. Finally, my biggest piece of advice is to make sure you plan well in advance for the major hurdles: MCAT, application cycle, etc. There’s never a downside to being prepared. Good luck to all of you reading this, and I hope to meet you all sometime later in the future!
Gabrielle Sudilovsky ‘22, Chemistry
Pursuing an MD at Pritzker School of Medicine at the University of Chicago

Significant college activities: Clinical Research Coordinator at CHOP Leukodystrophy Center (Gap Year), Muir lab member (JP/Thesis Lab), J-Lats Co-President, Judaism through a Queer Lens Head Intern, Jewish Biomedical Ethics Intern, Penn Medicine Princeton Health Volunteer, Child and Family Health International Oaxaca Internship (IIP, virtual), IsraAID Humanitarian Fellowship in Puerto Rico (CJL, Service Focus), Students vs. Pandemics Engagement Chair and Treasurer, PACE COVID-Response Grant Summer Project (Racial Equity Literacy Training in my hometown), Service Focus,
CONTACT, Murray Dodge Cafe, Organic Chemistry Undergraduate Preceptor, Princeton University Synchronized Skating Team, Princeton University Figure Skating Club Marketing Chair and Alumni Outreach Chair.

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: :) First off, being premed at Princeton is hard. Staying afloat with classes and research alone is difficult, not to mention volunteering, finding clinical opportunities, and doing other extracurriculars. Give yourself grace—Princeton, and the application cycle is a marathon, not a sprint.

My biggest advice is to take everything one step at a time. When you first come to Princeton, focus on settling into classes, making friends, and finding community. The extracurriculars and leadership opportunities will come, I promise. Once you feel settled, start doing what you are interested in! If you like something that isn’t particularly “premed” you should still pursue it! (Whether it is a major/certificate, club, or non-Princeton affiliated activity). Odds are, it will: 1) Make you happier and do better overall but 2) Make you a more interesting applicant! My most talked about activities for med school interviews were J-Lats and Judaism Through a Queer Lens—two clubs that don’t really have a direct correlation into medicine.

At the same time, once you have the bandwidth, start getting some of the prerequisites of applying out the way. You will need some (key word some not an overwhelming amount) shadowing/clinical experience and research under your belt to be seriously considered, regardless of your grades/activities. I waited, and didn’t really shadow until senior year. While it ended up being okay, it was stressful to shadow 85 hours in one year on top of thesis, classes, extracurriculars etc. If you can get a few hours of clinical experience a month early on, senior/post grad you will thank you. But don’t overdo it! Once you get >100 hours (in my onion) of shadowing, it all blends together and isn’t going to be as interesting as say, starting your own club or completing an impactful project. Bottom line, get the shadowing, research, and clinical volunteering that you need, but don’t focus on it too much unless you really enjoy it.

Take classes in different departments and give yourself the opportunity to find new interests. I decided to take a few classes in as many departments as I could instead of doing a certificate and I do not regret it one bit. For example, I took a health equity class senior spring that truly defined how I see myself practicing medicine. It influenced my personal statement, secondaries, and even the qualities I looked for in a medical school and is what made me choose Pritzker over other institutions. If I did not take that class, I can only guess how this application cycle would have gone, so I really encourage you to take random classes and explore.

When it comes to application season, start early! Think about who will write you good letters and what your story is as soon as you know you are applying in the upcoming cycle. The more time you give yourself to reflect on your journey, the more time you will have to find your story. And have fun with it! The application cycle actually helped me learn more about myself and define my values as I decided what I did/did not like at certain schools and learned more life outside the orange bubble. Apply when you feel ready—if you need to take a gap year, or two or ten…take the time now to find your passions. Not only will you be a better applicant, but you will be a better doctor because of it.

I am always happy to answer any questions or chat about the path to medical school! Feel free to email me at gms4@alumni.princeton.edu ;)
George Rettaliata ‘21, Philosophy with a certificate in Values in Public Life
Pursuing an MD at Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth

Significant college activities: Outdoor Action; El Centro; Ultraviolet Recording Studio Audio Engineer / Manager; Academics Committee

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: My best pearl of wisdom is that your premed courses are not who you are. You are whatever it is that wakes you up in the morning and motivates you to keep going. For me, the idea of attending medical school has been founded on becoming a rural primary care physician who will serve an underserved region and emphasize safer use methods and harm reduction for those who need it most. Whatever it is that drives you to continue this path will get you there. It is just about finding that thing and clinging to it. I promise that you are more than intelligent enough.

Being premed at Princeton was incredibly challenging for me. That being said, I did everything in my power to emphasize my life outside of premed coursework and chose a major I was actually interested in. Your major has no bearing on if you can become a physician. I chose to take two gap years after college to finish my premedical coursework and join the working world. Though it may add two years of my life until I can start my career, I am certain that the wisdom and independence I have gained will never be something to regret.

Wait until you truly know that medicine is for you, and once you feel that inkling, you will be more than ready to apply. Please reach out to me with any questions you have: georgerettaliata@gmail.com

Sophia Marusic ‘21, English with a certificate in Creative Writing
Pursuing an MD at Duke School of Medicine

Significant college activities: Member of Princeton Women’s Swimming and Diving Team, Trenton Arts Fellow, Lewis Center Peer Arts Advisor, Poetry@Princeton Social Media Manager, Summer internship at the Los Angeles Review of Books through the John C. Bogle Fellowship, Summer senior thesis research through the A. Scott Berg Fellowship

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: I would encourage all premed students to take advantage of their time at Princeton to explore their passions and interests beyond medical school prerequisites. There is no other time in your life when so many diverse and enriching opportunities will be available to you. Everyone’s premed path is different, and pursuing something outside of your comfort zone can expose you to new ways of thinking and problem-solving. Studying things you find fun and interesting will keep you energized on the long road to medical school and beyond; opportunities do not have to be directly related to medicine to help you understand what motivates you to become a physician. As a freshman, I wasn’t sure if I was going to pursue medicine. I balanced my premed coursework with humanities classes and decided to major in English. Though it was often challenging, I loved being a premed in the English department and writing a creative thesis. Broadly exploring writing and medicine helped me understand how the two could be integrated into my future career. Further, having exposure to other fields made me confident (and you want to be completely confident) in my decision to apply to medical school when the time came.

My other advice is to build your support network. Make time to connect with your peers and professors and to check in with HPA (if you’re following my advice above, definitely work with HPA to make sure you’re still meeting all of the medical school requirements). This process is difficult and confusing and can often feel isolating, but it doesn’t have to be. Being able to reach out to my friends and mentors when I needed encouragement or another pair of eyes on my personal statement was incredibly helpful during my application cycle. Please feel free to reach out to me as well with any questions: smarusic@alumni.princeton.edu!
Mansi Totwani ‘22, Molecular Biology with a GHP certificate
Pursuing an MD at Harvard Medical School

Significant college activities: Class Government (Treasurer), Princeton First Aid & Rescue Squad (Volunteer EMT), Ploss Lab, Peer Academic Advisor, SIFP mentor, Core Lab UCA, Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer (CDEIO) for Princeton Theta, El Centro (Substitute Volunteer), Various Other Jobs on Campus (East Asian Library, McGraw Tutor, Summer Orange Key Tour Guide), LEACH Summer Research with Dr. István Pelczer

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: The medical school application process was incredibly overwhelming and full of uncertainty. Looking back, I have realized that what ultimately got me through the process (and honestly, through my four years at Princeton as well) was the support system I built here. My biggest piece of advice is to constantly nurture the relationships you build here (and those you build throughout your life). Don’t be afraid to lean on your friends and family to get you through this time. Reach out to alumni and mentors to ask questions and hear what their experience was like. This process can feel isolating at times, but there is no need to go through it alone! I had nearly every single close friend of mine look over my personal statement and secondaries. I spoke to dozens of Princeton alumni and followed as much of their advice as I could. I met with my recommenders and HPA repeatedly to understand and clarify the themes that were present in my path toward medicine.

Most of all, both throughout this process and your journey in medicine, always continue to do the things that make you happy. When secondaries started coming in (and trust me, they literally all come in at once and it’s a bit terrifying), I tried to stop everything, like spending time with my friends, working out, etc... but I got burnt out within a few weeks. Soon, I realized that the quality of my essays was suffering because of this and I readjusted to a more balanced approach. In retrospect, I wish I budgeted more time than I thought I needed and started working my gap year job a bit later in the year. Nevertheless, please don’t stop living your life during application season. Of course, please give it your all and it will inevitably consume your thoughts for much of the application season, but remember that the people reading your essays and interviewing you are still people! At the end of the day, they are looking for future doctors who will form legitimate connections with their peers and patients. So my advice is to try to portray your most authentic self - the process is arbitrary and frustrating, but I say just make sure when you hit submit, you’re proud of what you send and you feel as though it represents you well. Please feel free to email me (mansitotwani@gmail.com) if you have any questions or just want to vent about this process.

You’ve got this and good luck!!

Program Highlights: Discovering Series

Our Discovering Series crafted events for students just discovering their interest in the health professions. Access select recordings of our presentations from this year on our website.

Prehealth Academics Part 1
A Conversation about Navigating Midterms & other Mid-Semester Demands
Alison Herman ‘19, Neuroscience
Pursuing an MD/PhD at University of Michigan Medical School

Significant college activities: McGraw Tutor, Organic Chemistry TA, Princeton University Preparatory Program, Mental Health Initiative Board, English Language Program Conversation Partner, International Internship Program (Partners In Health-Liberia), junior and senior independent work in Ilana Witten’s lab

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: My path to medical school has been nontraditional, with four glide years of clinical and translational research at Yale prior to matriculation, but I never felt "off track" because I was building important skills and relationships for my life and career and taking advantage of unique opportunities when they arose. Therefore, my central piece of advice is to stay grounded in knowledge of yourself and your vision of your own path in medicine; it is tempting to look around at others and make choices based on a traditional premed track and what fits well within that narrative. More than anything, though, your authenticity and genuine sense of self will come through in your essays and interview conversations when you have made class, activity, and research choices based on your curiosity and unique perspective.

Next, try to form your own opinions about each milestone in the premed journey and not be swayed too much by the general reputation of organic chemistry or the MCAT, for example. I remember feeling hesitant to take orgo and start studying for the MCAT (and thus may have put it off a bit), but when it came time to actually do them, they weren’t so bad! I ended up really liking orgo, in fact, and became a TA for the course my final two years at Princeton. The advice of others is extremely useful along this path, but realize it may not always apply to you, so don’t avoid forming your own impressions!

Lastly, take advantage of the unique opportunities and programs available to you at Princeton. Attend “The Doctor Is In” at the HPA office and meet alumni farther along in their medical journey, apply for international internships, meet with the wonderful HPA advisers. I am extremely grateful for the way the people and programs at Princeton helped me develop a clearer sense of the kind of physician and person I aspire to be.

If you want to talk about MCAT studying (I’m currently an MCAT tutor), deciding to apply MD/PhD, glide years, or anything else, please reach out to me at alisonh@alumni.princeton.edu—I’m happy to chat!

Program Highlights: Planning/Experiential Learning Series
Our Planning/Experiential Learning Series crafted events for students planning to apply to health professions schools. Access select recordings of our presentations from this year on the HPA website.
Seth Walensky ‘22, Chemistry with a certificate in Hebrew Language
Pursuing an MD/PhD at Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania

Significant college activities: Princeton First Aid and Rescue Squad, Cap and Gown Club, Center for Jewish Life, Cava Solid State Chemistry Laboratory, Princeton Running Club, Princeton Peer Nightline, Orange Key, National Suicide Hotline, Outpatient Pediatric Shadowing

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: It was not until I spoke to my medical school applicant peers from other universities that I realized how much harder it was to be pre-med at Princeton. We are unique in the Ivy League and among other schools of similar caliber in that we do not have an affiliated medical school, which typically provides built in resources for pre-medical students such as medically focused bench research, direct access to patient samples, an integrated clinical shadowing program featuring inpatient and outpatient experiences, and a wealth of medical faculty from whom to receive mentorship. There are so many resources at Princeton that it is sometimes hard to recognize what you do not have, and I wish these factors were pointed out to me earlier or compensated for in some fashion. All my clinical experiences in college came from opportunities outside of the University, something I that thought was a coincidence at first, but in retrospect realize was a consequence of Princeton's legendary undergraduate focus. This is all to say that it is entirely possible to gain a wealth of clinical experiences while at Princeton, but it requires creativity and looking beyond what there is to offer at present within the Orange Bubble.

Most importantly, you do you! Spend your extracurricular time doing the things that truly enrich your college experience, both academically and socially. If you find yourself bogged down by the “resume building” process required for of the medical school application process, perhaps this path is not for you. It is certainly better to learn that now than after four more years of intensive education. Yes, there will be late nights and early mornings (particularly if you become a Princeton EMT – I highly recommend), but just know that if by the end of each week, month, and semester you are still happy, chugging along with gusto, and as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed as you were during Frosh Week, then everything will work out and soon you will be at the medical school of your dreams! My takeaway: strive to achieve balance between academic excellence, research accomplishment, clinical exposure, leadership on campus, other-oriented activities, and a genuine passion for helping others through medical care and research.

Please feel free to reach out to me at swalensky@alumni.princeton.edu if you have any more questions about the process!

Program Highlights: Applying Series

Our Applying Series crafted events for students and alums beginning or in the process of applying to health professions schools. Access select recordings of our presentations from this year on the HPA website.
Princeton Med School Applicants: Facts and Figures

**ALUMS ADMITTED TO MEDICAL SCHOOL IN THE LAST 5 YEARS**

- **559**
- 42% from race/ethnicity underrepresented in medicine and/or "disadvantaged" backgrounds*
- 64% female
- 36% male
- <1% trans/non-binary/genderqueer
- From 43 home states
- 10 different countries
- **157** different med schools

**Popular schools:**
- Rutgers RWJMS
- Jefferson SKMC
- Icahn, Mt. Sinai
- U Penn
- Weill Cornell
- Harvard
- Case Western
- Columbia
- Wash U St, Louis
- Johns Hopkins

*Last year 81% of Princeton med school applicants were accepted vs. 43% nationally

*applicants may self-identify as socially, economically, or educationally disadvantaged on the professional school application

Prehealth Life at Princeton

**PREHEALTH ACADEMICS AND STUDENT LIFE**

- 34 majors represented among accepted applicants
- 30+ local civic engagement opportunities including volunteering with Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center
- Hundreds of internship, research, and study abroad opportunities

[Bar chart showing area of study by number of accepted applicants 2018-2022]

[QR code for diverse health-related courses offered]

[QR code for 20+ health-related student groups]
Lauryn Spinetta ‘22, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology  
Pursuing an MD at University of Texas, Southwestern

**Significant college activities:** Princeton Women's Club Soccer, Peer Health Advisors, Princeton International Internship Program (IIP) at the Levolosi Health Centre in Tanzania, Thesis with the Rubinstein Lab, Tower Club, Princeton High Meadows Environmental Institute summer research, OA Support and OA Leader, summer internship with Cardiothoracic & Vascular Surgeons (CTVS), summer research with an alum at Dell Children’s Hospital

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** The biggest words of wisdom that I have about being premed at Princeton is first that you should never, ever, give up if you believe medicine is the right path for you. Second, don’t be afraid to be adaptable and make the most out of every opportunity! Like most of us, I did really well in high school and I thought that I was prepared for Princeton. But arriving at Princeton, I realized I was under-prepared and quickly became overwhelmed. After a tough first semester, I had to seriously reevaluate how I studied, managed my time and stress, and my sleep habits, etc. It was a difficult year and there were many times I didn’t know if I would succeed.

Yet, throughout it all, I didn’t give up. I actively pursued opportunities to learn more about medicine that were also interesting to me in other ways, such as doing an IIP at a health clinic in Arusha, Tanzania the summer after my freshman year. The next year, when my summer plans to research viruses in Madagascar were canceled due to the pandemic, I reached out to one of my professors I really liked and ended up doing research work for him (he then became my thesis advisor which, by the way, had nothing to do with medicine!). The next summer when my thesis research abroad was cancelled *again* due to covid, I cold-emailed two physician Princeton alums in my hometown who were doing things I found cool. I ended up working for both of them and their recommendations were a huge part of my getting accepted into several medical schools. I also took advantage of the opportunity offered to senior EEB majors to take field study classes in Kenya for the 1st half of my final semester which was awesome! Finally, in my junior I realized I needed to take a gap year to have the strongest possible medical school application, so early in my 4th year I applied for and was accepted as a Princeton in Africa Fellow. It’s been amazing to spend time in a different part of Africa and really understand what it is like to live here, especially since I would like to continue working as a medical volunteer in Africa throughout my medical career.

My four years at Princeton were crazy and hectic but I also learned so much about where my passions are and developed great habits that I know will only help me in medical school and as a physician.

Take charge of the opportunities that Princeton gives you but also don’t be afraid to make those opportunities for yourself. Speak with friends and professors and alums, and seek out mentors! Most important, don’t forget to enjoy the journey. Princeton will be done in the blink of an eye!

If any of this rings true for you, don’t hesitate to reach out: spinetta@alumni.princeton.edu :)

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**SUMMER 2023**

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Mayowa Oke ’22, Neuroscience with a certificate in Global Health & Health Policy
Pursuing an MD/PhD at Harvard Medical School

Significant college activities: Senior Thesis Research in the Peña lab, Resident College Advisor (RCA) in First College, The Wesley Foundation Member, SVP American Red Cross (President & donor recruitment chair), GHP Health Scholar, Students vs Pandemics Princeton Co-Founder and Co-President, Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center Volunteer, Research Assistant in Social Stigma and Perception Lab

Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton: Over the years, I came to realize that the premed journey is more like a choose-your-own-adventure than a set path. I think sometimes, as premeds, we fall into the trap of thinking that we need to do X, Y, and Z-specific extracurriculars to get into medical school. While there are various “soft” and “hard” requirements in the admissions process (clinical experience, research, service, etc…) and that they can occasionally feel stifling, there is still plenty of room for you to customize your own experience so that it is in line with your interests. Research need not take place at the laboratory bench—it can also occur in the local community or amid stacks of bioethics books. Clinical experience can look like wheeling patients through the hospital or playing cards with patients at a hospice center. While class requirements may feel cumbersome (especially for those of us who aren’t particularly fond of drawing hexagons), your coursework outside of the sciences can offer up a unique perspective to your science classes, and vice versa. The best thing you can do throughout this process is to stay true to who you are and what your interests are rather than check a bunch of boxes.

One thing that is so challenging about the premed years is that it is all too easy to judge your candidacy based on what your peers may be doing. But it is so important to remember that not only is comparison the thief of joy, but it can make you lose yourself in the process. In many ways, I was a pretty unconventional pre-med student. I applied as an MD-PhD applicant in neuroscience despite having significant research experience in the social sciences. My most meaningful clinical experience took place in a harm reduction center instead of a hospital and despite my love for science, I hold deep passions for social justice and health equity work. However, many of the things I thought were weaknesses as a premed student were actually some of my strengths. My past work in social science research instilled in me a societal perspective that I bring to the laboratory bench. My time volunteering at a harm reduction center nurtured my growing interest in psychiatry and my passion for social justice led me to view research as a tool that both progresses biomedical knowledge and social equality. Had I dampened these parts of me in pursuit of becoming the picture-perfect medical school applicant, I likely would’ve lost my passion for medicine years ago. The “perfect” medical school applicant does not exist. We all come to medicine with our own unique perspectives, backgrounds, interests, and values. So why not lean into those idiosyncrasies and oddities that make you, you? The premed journey is so much more fun that way anyways.

Student Organization Spotlight: Princeton Blood Drive

HPA supports health-related student organizations around campus in an effort to build a strong and connected pre-health community. Find out more about our health-related student organizations here.

The Princeton Blood Drive is focused on raising awareness about the importance of donating blood to improve community and global health. Our highlight of the academic year was hosting six blood drives in conjunction with the Red Cross, in which we were able to collect enough units of blood to save 100+ lives each drive.

Contact: hv8628@princeton.edu
Carla Dias ’21, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Pursuing an MD at Weill Cornell Medicine

**Significant college activities:** Princeton Music Outreach, Sailing Team, Working at Frist, PHY TA, Gould Lab, Summer Research Internships at Stanford and Princeton, Thesis on disease modeling with Andy Dobson, Volunteering for clinics serving low-income patients, COVID testing volunteering

**Words of wisdom about being prehealth at Princeton:** Be creative with your activities and summer internships! There are so many ways to incorporate lessons and skills that are relevant to medical school. One of my favorite parts about being a student at Princeton was the support that the school offered to fulfill varied goals that students set. There are so many different funding options, even outside of your senior thesis, to pursue creative projects. Use the summers and breaks to visit cool places and have interesting experiences. I know a lot of people have interests outside of medicine. I think it is really important to make time for these other learning opportunities as well. Even if your idea is far removed from something that you would consider clinically relevant, undergrad is a great period to do things that will make you an interesting person. There are always ways to shadow or meaningfully volunteer, so don’t stretch yourself too thin, but also don’t be scared to join a club because you feel like you need to prioritize the pre-med track. On the other hand, there are many ways to combine your interests, so don’t be afraid to get creative. During my gap-year job interviews and med school interviews, I got more specific questions pertaining to my "cool" activities than I did about things like my research participation.

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**Student Organization Spotlights**

HPA supports health-related student organizations around campus in an effort to build a strong and connected pre-health community. Find out more about our health-related student organizations [here](#).

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The Women in Medicine club aims to create a supportive, inclusive environment for female-identifying pre-health Princeton students. Our highlights from this past year included hosting our first study break and welcoming three inspiring alumna, Dr. Elaine Barfield, Dr. Jessica Kahn, and Dr. Ellen Kim, to speak at our physician panel in March.

Contact: ptonwim@princeton.edu

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FACTUAL, the Food Allergy and Celiac Team For University Advocacy and Living, is Princeton’s first organization dedicated to supporting students with food allergies, celiac disease, or other medical dietary restrictions. A highlight from this past year was hosting a trail mix pop-top in Yeh/NCW Dining Hall, where students could learn and select ingredients free from the top 9 allergens and gluten. FACTUAL provided educational materials on food allergy, celiac disease, and connecting with Campus Dining staff.

Contact: factual@princeton.edu

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Photo by Ella Morgan ’24
2022-23 Alumni Speakers

Our thanks to alumni who joined us for our different panel series this year. You’re a constant source of inspiration to our current students.

**The Doctor Is In**

Alexis Colvin ‘98 MD  
Jessica Kahn ‘86 MD, MPH  
Robert Kahn ‘86 MD, MPH  
Joe Perno ‘87 MD, PhD

**The Doctor To Be Is In**

Sahana Jayaraman ‘16  
Alina Spiegel ‘15

**Aspiring Docs Special Guests**

Jaeyoon Cha ‘21  
Danielle Newton ‘20

**Additional Panelists (Accepted Applicant Q&A, Glide Year Opportunities, MCAT Panel)**

Ares Alivisatos ‘21  
Adam Boukind ‘22  
Dominique Fahmy ‘17  
Emma Hergenrother ‘20  
Ali Herman ‘19  
Nardeen Khella ‘21  
Bryan Kim ‘20  
Sophia Marusic ‘21  
Juliet McGowen ‘20  
Kennedy Miller ‘21  
Levy Nathan ‘21  
Marisela Neff ‘20  
Mayowa Oke ‘22  
Toyosi Oluwole ‘21  
George Retaliata ‘21  
Ellie Shapiro ‘21  
Jacob Shteingart ‘20  
Gabriele Sudilovsky ‘22  
Mansi Tottani ‘22  
Seth Walensky ‘22  
Andrew Wu ‘21  
Alex Zhu ‘21
HPA By the Numbers

HPA RESOURCES BY THE NUMBERS

3 professional advisers
15 HPA Peer Advisers/Jock Docs trained to support prehealth students
50+ advising appointments available each week
120–150 medical school applicants annually
90+ group info sessions, workshops, and events yearly on academic success, career exploration, the application process, and other topics

*with comprehensive application support, including a committee letter of recommendation

Question of the Week: HPA Summer Hours

Q: Does HPA meet with students in the summer? Is the office open?
A: The HPA office is generally open Monday through Friday from 8:30am-4:30pm; any exceptions will be listed on our website. We welcome you to come by and use the resources available (e.g., data binders, materials from individual health professions schools, access to the MSAR online), borrow books from our HPA library (including MCAT/DAT prep materials), grab stickers, eat candy, enjoy the air conditioning, etc.

The advisers focus most of their time working with this year’s medical and dental school applicants, including writing their committee letters, but we can schedule a limited number of appointments. Please reach out with your questions by email and we’d be happy to schedule an appointment for follow-up if needed.

The summer is also a good time to catch up on all of the information we share on our website, including recordings of information sessions, admissions statistics, profiles of alums (which will be updated with this year’s group soon!), and even the (hundreds of) past questions of the week to see what past prehealth students have had on their minds. Enjoy your summer and we’ll see you in the fall!

About Health Professions Advising

The Office of Health Professions Advising (HPA) provides support to Princeton students and alumni by many means as they consider careers in the health professions, and prepare for admission to medical, dental, veterinary, and other health professions schools. HPA seeks to help students make informed decisions about the choice of a health professions career; to promote academic excellence by providing accurate guidelines for completing prehealth coursework, for understanding admission requirements, and for using all available resources; and to encourage student involvement in the health care community, primarily through clinical work, service, and research.