

Study Abroad

and the Pre-health Student

Future health professionals will need to be broadly-educated, mature, adaptable citizens who have significant experience in the world beyond the classroom. Study abroad is an ideal vehicle for developing some of the skills and attitudes that are valued in the practice of medicine—flexibility, self-reliance, and sensitivity to other cultures. Studying abroad can offer pre-health students a unique chance to observe diverse health care systems, explore different cultural attitudes towards health and healing, and often, to gain volunteer experience in a unique healthcare setting. In recent years, students have studied in South Africa while participating in AIDS education campaigns, and pursued biochemistry research at Oxford, for example. Such experiences can enhance your knowledge of health issues as they impact people in a range of settings, making you better prepared for the future—not only in terms of medical school applications and interviews, but also in terms of the perspective you will have in your medical education, and ultimately in your professional life. Many Princeton pre-health students have studied abroad.

If you want to have the grades for your work on study abroad computed into your health professions applicant GPA, you must be sure to have your coursework recorded on a U.S. transcript. This is possible if the study abroad program is sponsored by an American college or university. Note: You should plan to take all your pre-requisite requirements in the U.S., as science curricula abroad may vary widely, and most medical schools refuse to accept pre-requisite sciences taken abroad.

The courses at Princeton that meet the pre-requisites for most medical schools are:

General Chemistry:	CHM 201 (or 207) + CHM 202
Organic Chemistry:	CHM 303 + CHM 304
General Biology:	EEB 211 (Life on Earth: Chaos & Clockwork, offered in Fall) + MOL 214 (Intro to Cellular & Molecular Biology, offered in Fall/Spring) ¹
General Physics:	PHY 101 + PHY 102/108 or PHY 103 + 104
Biochemistry:	MOL 345
Math:	2 semesters (see “Preparing” handout from HPA for specifics)
English:	2 semesters literature/writing (WRI counts as one of these)

Students interested in other health professions (e.g., veterinary, nursing, dental, physician assistant) should consult with HPA advisers regarding their course planning.

Students with AP credit in biology, chemistry, physics, or math: Refer to the HPA handout, “Planning for a Career in the Health Professions,” and then consult with an HPA adviser. AP credit allows a student to skip certain introductory courses in biology, chemistry and physics for health professional school, but upper-level coursework in those subjects will be required. If you have AP in Math, no additional coursework is required.

When to study abroad? Taking a summer abroad will not affect your pre-health pre-requisite planning, but one semester abroad in the academic year is also quite doable with careful course-planning. To go abroad for an academic semester, fall of junior year will cause the least logistical issues in terms of preparing your health professions school application, including taking the required standardized test (MCAT for medical school). Sophomore spring, junior spring and senior fall are other possibilities. Consult with an HPA or study abroad adviser to discuss pros and cons of each, depending on your curricular plans as well as your pre-health plans. Following are three possible timelines that take into account your pre-health courses, MCAT, applications, and study abroad.

¹ MOL 215 may be taken instead of MOL 214 if student has AP credit in biology, physics and calculus; MOL 215 is a more quantitative approach and is not to be taken by those without the AP credit. It is offered in the Spring.

Glide Year Study Abroad Plans, No AP: For students who wish to study abroad for 1-2 semesters and apply for matriculation with a glide/gap year, here are two possible schedules:

	Fall	Spring	Summer
Fr	CHM 201 or 207 MAT WRI/FRS	CHM 202 WRI/FRS	
So	EEB 211 CHM 303 or PHY	MOL 214 CHM 304 or PHY	CHM or PHY
Jr	Abroad	Abroad	
Sr	MOL 345	MCAT (April/May) Graduate	Apply
Glide Yr	Interviews, work/fellowship		
	Matriculate at health professions school		

	Fall	Spring	Summer
Fr	CHM 201 or 207 MAT WRI/FRS	CHM 202 WRI/FRS	
So	EEB 211 CHM 303	MOL 214 CHM 304	
Jr	PHY MOL 345	PHY	MCAT
Sr	Abroad	Graduate	Apply
Glide Yr	Interviews, work/fellowship		
	Matriculate at health professions school		

A year off? It is important to note that *about two-thirds* of Princeton applicants to health professions school in recent years took at least one year off before matriculating (often called a glide year or gap year). There are many benefits to taking time off—all four years of your Princeton experience will be reported to your schools, your letters of reference will be stronger, and you will gain professionalism and maturity in “real world” experience in your glide year ([see more information on the HPA website](#)). If you take a glide year, you have senior year in which to complete requirements, and summer coursework may not be necessary. Or, should you choose to complete your requirements during the first three years, you have the fall of senior year to study abroad.

Direct Entry Study Abroad Plan, No AP: For students who wish to study abroad for a semester and apply for matriculation directly following graduation, we often suggest the following schedule:

	Fall	Spring	Summer
First-Year	CHM 201 MAT	CHM 202	
Sophomore	EEB 211 CHM 303 or PHY	MOL 214 CHM 304 or PHY	CHM or PHY
Junior	Abroad	MOL 345 MCAT (if premed)	Apply
Senior	Interviews	Interviews Graduate	
	Matriculate at health professions school		

This timeline can be very challenging, since it compresses your pre-requisite course work, and you'll have to manage some of the logistics of preparing your health professions school application from abroad.

Summer Courses: Students should work with their Director of Studies/Dean for pre-approval of summer courses taken at another institution. There are a numbers of pros and cons involved in deciding whether or not to take summer courses. Please consult with HPA if you are considering this option.

Other Abroad Opportunities: Many students pursue volunteer or internship experiences abroad in the summers. Some students take advantage of Princeton and national fellowships to study/work abroad during glide years. Explore these options with HPA and Office of International Programs advisers.

Do not hesitate to see one of the advisers listed below if you have questions about setting up your schedule. For undergraduate students on their way to becoming health professionals, studying abroad can be a once-in-a-lifetime chance to become fully immersed in another culture for an extended period of time. We, in both International Programs and Health Professions Advising, would like to help you reap the benefits of this exciting opportunity.

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