



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

For Premed/Prehealth Students

WHAT IS "PREHEALTH"?

Prehealth is an umbrella term for the diverse careers in the health professions that students may pursue, from acupuncture to veterinary medicine. Although most Princeton students are interested in medicine, we encourage open-mindedness around the diverse career paths in the health fields and beyond.

WHAT COURSES DO I TAKE TO PREPARE FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL?

To meet the prerequisites for most medical and dental schools, we advise students to take one year each of lectures and labs in general chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, and physics; two semesters of English (Writing Seminar counts as one); and one semester each of calculus, statistics, and biochemistry. Many students take psychology classes to prepare for the medical school entrance exam (MCAT). Other programs' requirements differ, especially for vet school; contact HPA early to explore these requirements.

CAN I USE AP CREDIT TO FULFILL MY PREHEALTH REQUIREMENTS?

If you use AP credit to place out of a science course, you should supplement it with an upper level course (ideally with laboratory) in that discipline. HPA advisers work closely with students to be sure that their course work plans will fulfill their prerequisites for health professions schools.

DO I HAVE TO MAJOR IN A SCIENCE?

No. Beyond the required science courses, a broad liberal arts background is encouraged and expected, as is majoring in the field that most interests you.

ARE THERE OTHER CLASSES RELATED TO MEDICINE?

Yes! Some favorites include Race and Medicine (AAS 403); Medical Humanities (ANT 235); Ancient Greco-Roman Medicine (CLA 345); Comparative Physiology (EEB 314); Critical Perspectives in Global Health (GHP 350); Literature and Medicine (SLA 368); and Modern Genetics and Public Policy (WWS 354).

CAN I STUDY ABROAD AS A PREHEALTH STUDENT?

Yes, it's a wonderful experience that shouldn't be missed if it interests you. An international experience can complement and enhance both your general program of study and your prehealth interests. Moreover, fluency in a language other than English and cross-cultural experience can enhance your application to health professional school. Generally, students work with the Study Abroad advisers to plan their abroad experience and with HPA advisers to plan their prehealth prerequisite courses around it.

WHAT CO-CURRICULARS DO PREHEALTH STUDENTS DO?

Your activities should reflect your interests and values; if you're drawn to medicine in order to help others, engage in service activities during college that reflect that interest. Also choose activities that help you develop competencies that you'll use as a future physician, such as teamwork and leadership skills, oral communication, and cultural competence. Choose a few things to do meaningfully and well, and always focus on your academics first.

POPULAR MAJORS FOR PREHEALTH STUDENTS

MOLECULAR BIOLOGY
ECOLOGY & EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY
CHEMICAL & BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING
WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL
CHEMISTRY
NEUROSCIENCE
PSYCHOLOGY
ANTHROPOLOGY (MEDICAL TRACK)

DO I NEED MEDICAL EXPERIENCE?

It is important that you involve yourself meaningfully in a medical setting, to show medical schools (and yourself!) that you have observed medical practice first-hand and have a realistic understanding of the career to which you're committing. Students often do this through volunteer work in hospitals and clinics, summer jobs, internships, formal prehealth summer programs, and shadowing physicians.

PRINCETON DOESN'T HAVE A MED SCHOOL. HOW DO STUDENTS GAIN MEDICAL EXPERIENCE?

Some students volunteer at the local hospital, as EMTs on the local rescue squad (PFARS), and with student groups through the Pace Center Student Volunteer Corps (SVC), including a hospice program and suicide hotline. Students shadow local physicians and do "Princeternships" to shadow or create Breakout trips to explore health care settings during short breaks. Some students devote summers to the medical environment and focus on classes and other activities during the academic year. We strongly encourage some hands-on, in person work that involves interacting directly with patients and their families (beyond shadowing).

WHAT IF I VOLUNTEERED AND SHADOWED IN HIGH SCHOOL?

Use your time in college to build on and diversify your exposure to health care settings. If you spent a lot of time in a suburban community hospital, for example, consider a summer internship in a large urban trauma center. Your perspective on the world will change during your college years, and you should seek to develop your understanding of healthcare and how you want to engage in the health setting concurrently.

DO I NEED TO DO RESEARCH TO GET INTO MEDICAL SCHOOL?

As with any other experience, try it if you think you would enjoy it, but don't do it just because you think it'll give you an "edge." Health professional schools want you to engage in activities that interest you, while helping you develop the skills and values that will improve your practice as a health care provider. That said, working in a faculty member's lab or in summer research internship can provide you with insight into the world of research, hands-on skills, and ideally a strong recommendation letter.

WHEN AND HOW DO I APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOL?

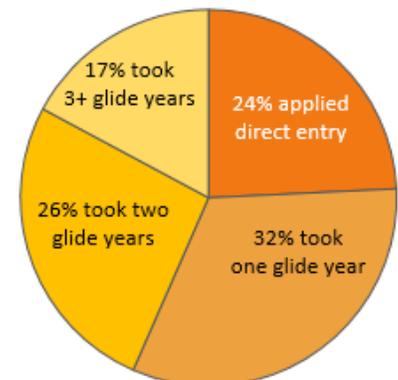
This is nothing to worry about as a first-year student! But we know that sometimes having a timeline can help you stay organized and motivated. We advise students to apply when 1) they are certain that they're ready to make a lifetime commitment; and 2) they have developed the evidence of academic preparation and personal competencies required to merit serious consideration by schools of interest. Pragmatically, you should have:

- Completed prerequisite courses.
- Prepared comprehensively for the MCAT.
- Gotten to know enough faculty and others to garner 4-6 strong letters of recommendation.
- Gained meaningful experience with patients and exposure to your chosen profession.

If you want to go directly to med school after graduating, you'll apply in the June following your junior year, but few Princeton students (or others nationally) follow this timeline.

IS IT OKAY TO TAKE TIME OFF BETWEEN GRADUATING FROM PRINCETON AND STARTING MEDICAL SCHOOL?

Yes! Over 70% of Princeton applicants opt to take at least one "glide" or "gap" year before health professional school. This allows students to avoid taking MCAT during the school year, to have stronger letters of recommendation, to have more flexibility to study abroad and engage in co-curricular activities, to gain maturity and perspective in the "real world", and to recharge between two rigorous academic endeavors. The average age of a medical school matriculant is 24. All of the services that Princeton HPA offers are available to students after graduation.



WHAT IS THE MCAT?

The MCAT is a full-day, multiple-choice standardized test required by medical schools. It tests critical analysis and reading skills, biological and physical sciences content knowledge, and concepts from psychology and sociology that address the importance of socio-cultural and behavioral determinants of health and health outcomes. You will be best equipped to take the MCAT when you have completed general and organic chemistry, biology, biochemistry and physics, and have gained familiarity with statistics, psychology and sociology. Learn more on the AAMC website: www.aamc.org/mcat. Similar tests are administered for most health professions.

WHAT GPA & MCAT SCORE DO I NEED TO APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOLS?

Admission to medical school is holistic and based on a number of academic and non-academic factors. Rather than focus on GPA and MCAT scores now, focus on learning how to adjust to Princeton, setting a reasonable course load to give yourself a chance to make a smooth transition from high school, and refining your study strategies and time management so that you are confident that you are putting in your best work.

The range of metrics achieved by our accepted applicants is wider than you may guess: the middle 80% of our accepted applicants achieved cumulative GPAs between 3.21 and 3.91 -- ten percent were higher, and ten percent were lower. Many students with lower GPAs engaged in additional coursework after graduation to enhance their academic credentials. MCAT scores for our middle 80% ranged from 509 to 523.

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PRINCETON APPLICANTS GET INTO MEDICAL SCHOOLS?

Nationally, Princeton's acceptance rate for students to allopathic medical (MD) schools in recent years has been about double the national average (85-90% vs. 41-44%), and enjoy similar success with osteopathic medical (DO), dental, and veterinary schools. More importantly, our students feel well-prepared for their professional school and do well once they're accepted.

WHERE DO THEY GO FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL?

Many Princeton alums choose to attend public medical schools in their home states, where financing options are favorable and support networks are close at hand. Many also choose urban areas with diverse patient populations. The med schools where we have the most students right now are Columbia, U Penn, Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson, Weill Cornell, Harvard, NYU, UCSF, Stanford, Case Western, and Yale.



2018 Med School Acceptances

WHY SHOULD I MEET WITH HPA ADVISERS?

HPA advisers have worked with hundreds of students who have each taken their own unique paths to their chosen professions. We can help you figure out your best path based on our past experiences. When you're applying to professional school, we write a committee letter of recommendation on each applicant's behalf, so becoming familiar with us and our office early in your college career can result in a more nuanced and personalized letter based on a relationship developed over time.

WHEN SHOULD I MEET WITH HPA ADVISERS?

Come and find us early and often! We are available at course registration during orientation to answer initial questions, then we invite you to attend a Prehealth 101 Info Session in the fall and bring follow-up questions to an individual appointment or to drop in hours. We look forward to meeting all of you, and the earlier we get to know you, the more we'll be able to help you set and reach your goals.