



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR PREMED/PREHEALTH STUDENTS

WHAT IS “PREHEALTH”? WHAT IS HPA?

Prehealth is an umbrella term for the [diverse careers in the health professions](#) that students may pursue, from acupuncture to veterinary medicine. Health Professions Advising (HPA) is the office that supports prehealth students. Although most Princeton students are interested in medicine, we encourage open-mindedness and career exploration / discovery.

ACADEMICS

WHAT COURSES DO I HAVE TO TAKE?

To meet requirements for most medical and dental schools, we advise students to take one year each of general chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, and physics (lecture and lab); Writing Seminar and one additional semester of English; and one semester each of calculus, statistics, and biochemistry (see [HPA website on Academic Preparation](#)). Many students take psychology and sociology classes to prepare for the medical school entrance exam (MCAT). Other programs' requirements differ, especially for vet school and Physician Assistant programs; contact HPA early to explore these requirements.

CAN I USE AP CREDIT TO FULFILL REQUIREMENTS?

Students who use AP credit to place out of an introductory science course are [advised to supplement the credit](#) with upper level coursework (ideally with laboratory) in the same discipline. Students are recommended to take at least 11-12 biology/chem/math/physics courses at Princeton prior to medical school application. HPA advisers work closely with students to be sure that their course work plans will fulfill their prerequisites for health professions schools.

POPULAR PREHEALTH MAJORS

MOLECULAR BIOLOGY
ECOLOGY & EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY
CHEMICAL & BIOLOGICAL ENGINEERING
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC & INTL AFFAIRS
CHEMISTRY
NEUROSCIENCE
PSYCHOLOGY
MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

DO I HAVE TO MAJOR IN A SCIENCE?

No. Beyond the required science courses, a broad liberal arts background is encouraged, as is majoring in the field of greatest interest.

ARE THERE OTHER CLASSES RELATED TO MEDICINE?

Yes! Some favorites include *Race and Medicine* (AAS 403); *Medical Anthropology* (ANT 240); *Comparative Physiology* (EEB 314); *Critical Perspectives in Global Health* (GHP 350); *Literature and Medicine* (SLA 368); *Diseases in Children* (MOL 460); and *Modern Genetics and Public Policy* (SPI 354).

CAN I STUDY ABROAD AS A PREHEALTH STUDENT?

Yes! International experience via [academic work, internships, or postgrad fellowships](#) can complement and enhance a student's program of study and their personal and prehealth interests. Students work with Study Abroad advisers to plan their abroad experience and with HPA to plan their prerequisite courses around it.

ACTIVITIES

WHAT COCURRICULARS DO PREHEALTH STUDENTS DO?

The activities that a student chooses should reflect their interests and values; students drawn to medicine in order to help others engage in service activities that reflect that interest. We also encourage students to choose activities that help them develop [competencies that are valued in future physicians](#), such as teamwork and leadership skills, oral communication, and cultural competence. Choose a few things to do meaningfully and well, and always focus on academics first! Balance is key!

DO I HAVE TO DO RESEARCH?

As with any other experience, try it if you think you would enjoy it, but don't do it because you feel like you "have to". If you might want to become a [physician-scientist](#) (MD/PhD), then prioritize joining a lab early (e.g., summer after first year). The senior thesis positions Princeton applicants to have more research experience than most undergraduates applying to medical school.

DO I HAVE TO VOLUNTEER IN A HOSPITAL OR SHADOW PHYSICIANS?

As someone considering a health profession, prioritize [experience in medical settings](#), to show medical schools (and yourself!) that you have observed medical practice first-hand and have a realistic understanding of the career. Even if you volunteered and shadowed in high school, keep building on that experience in your undergraduate years.

WITHOUT A MEDICAL SCHOOL, HOW DO PRINCETON STUDENTS GAIN CLINICAL 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 participate in “Princeternships” to shadow in other cities over vacations. Our alumni network is incredibly generous and often invite students to shadow or develop internships specifically for our students. Past students have created Breakout trips to explore health care settings during vacations. Some students devote vacations to the medical environment and focus on classes and other activities during the academic year. Three Princeton-specific internship programs ([Princeton Internships in Civic Service](#); the [International Internship Program](#), and the [Global Health Program internships](#)) provide medically-relevant, paid, hands-on experiences that are open exclusively to Princeton students. HPA strongly encourages some hands-on, in person work that involves interacting directly with patients and their families (beyond shadowing).

APPLICATIONS & ADMISSIONS

WHEN SHOULD I APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOL AND HOW DO I GO ABOUT IT?

Once you are certain that you’re ready to make a lifetime commitment and are a competitive enough candidate to merit serious consideration by schools of interest. Pragmatically, you should have:

- Completed (and done well in) prerequisite courses.
- Carved out ample time to prepare 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.

To try to matriculate directly to medical school after graduation, you would apply in the June following your junior year.

I’M CURIOUS ABOUT THE MCAT...

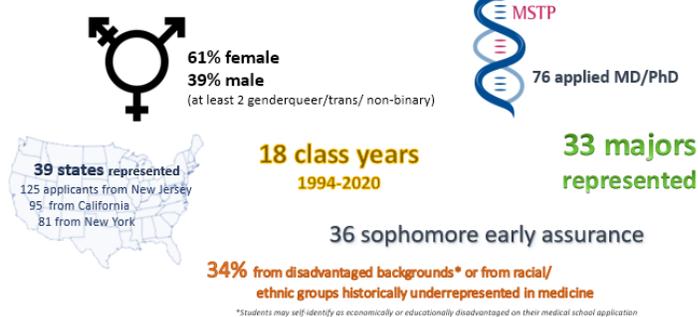
It’s a day-long standardized test that is required for the regular medical school admissions cycle. It tests critical analysis and reading skills, science knowledge, and concepts from psychology and sociology that address the importance of socio-cultural and behavioral determinants of health. You will 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. Similar tests are administered for most health professions. Learn more: www.aamc.org/mcat.

WHO APPLIES TO MEDICAL SCHOOL?

Our applicant pool is as diverse as the Princeton student body. They come from every concentration, across the country and internationally. Some come from a family of physicians and others are first-generation college-goers.

Our belief at HPA is that any student who can get into Princeton has what it takes to get into medical school, but it does require significant self-reflection, thoughtful planning, and an openness to making adjustments in time management, study skills, and priorities. We work with students to navigate their holistic preparation based on their unique strengths, interests, and plans.

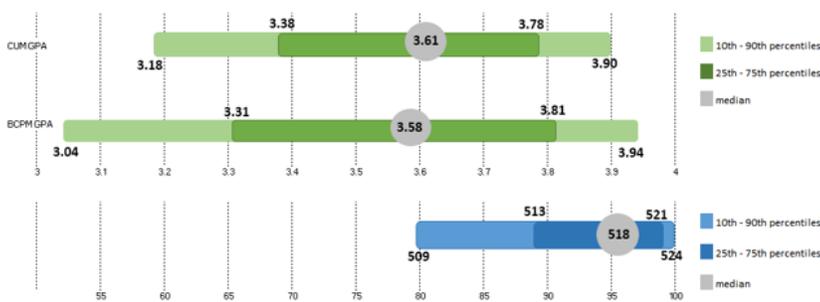
2016-2020 Princeton medical school applicant characteristics (n=683)



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. As importantly, our students feel well prepared for their professional school and do well once they’re accepted.

2016-2020 Princeton Accepted Applicants GPA & MCAT RANGES



Of accepted Princeton applicants, 80% had a cumulative GPA between 3.18 and 3.90; a BCPM (science) GPA between 3.04 and 3.94, and an MCAT between 509 and 524. Many students in the lower GPA range took postbac undergraduate or graduate course work before or while applying to demonstrate their readiness for medical school.

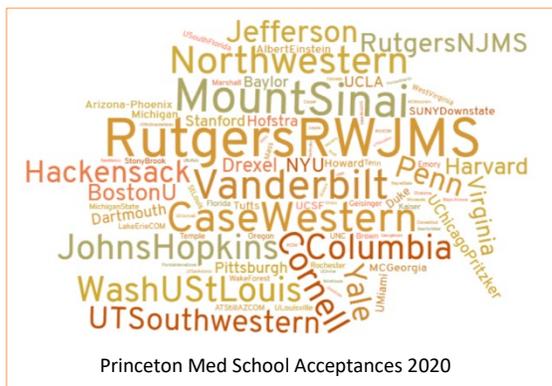
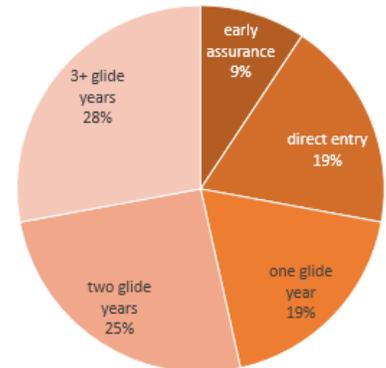
WHAT GPA AND MCAT SCORE DO I NEED TO GET INTO MED SCHOOL?

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, incoming students should focus on adjusting to Princeton, setting a reasonable course load to facilitate a smooth transition from high school, and refining study strategies and time management so that they are confident that they are putting in their best work.

WHY DO STUDENTS TAKE TIME OFF BETWEEN GRADUATING FROM PRINCETON AND MEDICAL SCHOOL?

One or more “glide” or “gap” years provide scheduling flexibility, stronger letters of recommendation, a completed senior thesis before application, and time for real world experience between two rigorous academic endeavors. The average age of a medical school matriculant is 24 – many opt for taking time to regroup and pursue interests. All of the services that Princeton HPA offers are available to alumni.

2020 Princeton Accepted Applicants by Timeline to Matriculation



WHICH MEDICAL SCHOOLS DO PRINCETON STUDENTS ATTEND MOST OFTEN?

Many choose to attend public medical schools in their home state, where financing options are favorable and support networks close at hand. Many also choose urban areas with diverse patient populations. The med schools where the most Princeton applicants matriculated in the past four years are U Penn, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson, Sidney Kimmel Medical College, Icahn / Mt. Sinai, Weill Cornell, Harvard, Case Western, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, Washington University St. Louis and Northwestern.

ADVISING

WHY SHOULD I MEET WITH HPA ADVISERS?

HPA advisers have worked with hundreds of students who have each taken their own unique path to their chosen profession. 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 your 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’ll be available at course registration during orientation to answer initial questions, then attend a Prehealth 101 Info Session in the fall and bring follow-up questions to an individual appointment or to drop in hours. The earlier we get to know you, the more we’ll be able to help you set and reach your goals. We look forward to meeting you!

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