Post-baccalaureate Programs

Could a post-bac program be the right move for you?
What is a Post-baccalaureate Program?

- Doing a post-baccalaureate, or “post-bac” program, isn’t a career in itself, but a step toward a career in the health professions.

- There is no single “correct” path to medical, dental, or veterinary school. To address situations where students require additional academic preparation after graduation, post-baccalaureate pre-health programs and courses have emerged as a viable option for many students.

- There are two main types of programs:
  - career changers – for individuals who need to take all or most of their pre-health pre-requisite courses
  - academic record enhancers – for individuals who have completed their pre-requisite courses but need additional academic preparation to demonstrate their readiness for health professions school

Within each type, there are some programs specifically focused on increasing the success of students who are underrepresented in medicine in terms of their race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs
Career Changer Post-bac Programs
(aka “Start from Scratch” Programs)

- Students can enter these programs right out of undergraduate or after years of work experience.
- Program length will vary, but generally take one to two years, which may include summer study.
- Students generally take 2-3 science courses with laboratories per semester and may supplement with health-related electives, seminars, or additional courses.
- Program costs vary dramatically from about $15,000 to upwards of $45,000.
- Financial aid, if offered, is generally in the form of student loans.
- Programs may be highly structured with specific courses taken in a prescribed manner with little flexibility, or may be highly unstructured, or somewhere in between.
- Some programs offer certificates to recognize completion of program requirements.

NAAHP.org/StudentResources/PostBaccalaureateOptions.aspx
Courses Offered Through Career Changer Post-bac Programs

- **Coursework**: pre-requisites and opportunities to take advanced electives in the sciences, or related courses that are relevant to medicine.

- **Advising**: These programs usually offer an advising office (similar to HPA at Princeton) to assist with managing courses, finding clinical experience, and preparing applications.

- **Committee/Composite Letter of Recommendation**: A committee letter is a summary of your candidacy written by the program. Access to a committee letter is a significant benefit to pursuing a structured post-bac program rather than taking courses “a la carte” at a college or university.

- **Linkages**: Linkage programs are formal agreements between specific post-bac programs and specific medical schools. They enable highly qualified post-bac premed students to apply privately to that school while in the post-bac program. A successful linkage applicant may eliminate the at-large application process.

- **Community/Student Organizations**: Some post-bac programs have activities and organizations that can help students gain a sense of community, among themselves or with the larger pre-health population.

- **Clinical/Research Opportunities**: Some post-bac programs will have a research or clinical component. More often, a post-bac program’s advising office can help you find these opportunities on your own.

Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Career-Changers.pdf
Examples of Career Changer Post-bac Programs

The AAMC currently lists 128 post-bac career changer programs in their online database: Apps.AAMC.org/postbac. Some of the long-established, well-known career-changer post-bac career changer programs are:

- Bennington (Bennington, VT): Bennington.edu/Academics/GraduateCertificatePrograms/Postbac.aspx
- Bryn Mawr (Bryn Mawr, PA): Brynmawr.edu/Postbac/
- Columbia (New York, NY): GS.Columbia.edu/Postbac/
- Georgetown (Washington, DC) Premed.Georgetown.edu/Postbac/
- Goucher (Baltimore, MD): Goucher.edu/x15377.xml
- Mt. Holyoke (South Hadley, MA): MtHolyoke.edu/Acad/Prehealth/Postbac
- Tufts (Medford, MA): USS.Tufts.edu/HPA/Postbac/

In recent years, Princeton alums have attended these programs and gone on to medical school: American U, Bennington, Bryn Mawr, Columbia, Georgetown, Goucher, Harvard Extension, CUNY Hunter College, Johns Hopkins, U Penn, NYU, San Francisco State, U Vermont

Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Career-Changers.pdf
Several institutions have responded to the need for programs that address the student who has a bachelor’s degree, but does not have a sufficiently strong academic record to apply immediately to health professional school.

Students in record enhancer programs generally do not repeat pre-requisite courses, but instead take additional, advanced-level science courses.

Students considering their options for demonstrating their academic readiness for medical school should weigh their options carefully and speak to both Princeton HPA and post-bac program staff prior to applying.

Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Record-Enhancers.pdf
Students can enter these programs right out of undergraduate or after years of work experience.

Program length will vary, but generally take one to two years, which may include summer study.

Students generally take 3-4 science courses and may supplement with health-related electives, seminars, or additional courses.

Program costs vary dramatically from about $15,000 to upwards of $45,000.

Financial aid, if offered, is generally in the form of student loans.

Programs may be highly structured with specific courses taken in a prescribed manner with little flexibility, or may be highly unstructured, or somewhere in between.

Some programs offer certificates to recognize completion of program requirements.

Some programs focus on preparation for specific programs, including pharmacy and dental medicine.

NAAHP.org/StudentResources/PostBaccalaureateOptions.aspx
Informal Post-Bac Program: Many colleges allow you to enroll as non-degree seeking student to take classes “a la carte” either full-time or part-time. This option may appeal if the student needs to finance their own course work by working in conjunction to academic preparation, or if additional grade enhancement is needed in order to gain entry into a formal program.

Formal Post-Bac Program: The benefits to a formal program include access to advising, a more structured environment, and sometimes some preference to postbac students in certain schools’ admissions processes through linkage agreements with health professions schools. Some programs focus on graduate level courses while others are at the undergraduate level.

- Undergraduate courses: By taking advanced undergraduate courses, your GPA as an applicant will reflect your work at Princeton and in these programs in a composite undergraduate GPA. These programs may be more appropriate for non-science concentrators or those who need to significantly improve their undergrad BCPM GPA.
- Graduate courses: By taking graduate courses, you will advance your preparation to pursue an alternate career to the health professions. Graduate grades will be reported separate from your undergraduate GPA.

Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Record-Enhancers.pdf
**Special Master’s Programs**: Students with cumulative undergraduate GPAs above 3.0 and average MCAT scores could consider a special master’s graduate program where they take medical school courses and are graded in relation to medical students. These programs allow you a chance to prove your capacity to do well in a rigorous medical school program.

**Graduate Program in Biology**: Pursuing a degree in Biology or a subfield (such as Immunology or Medical Sciences) may help students clarify career goals and provide preparation for health professions schools as well as science careers. Some graduate programs focus more intentionally on preparing students for health professions – this can usually be gleaned from program websites.

Note that **Master of Public Health programs** are generally not advised as a record enhancer option, as they do not include sufficient advanced science preparation that will demonstrate readiness for the medical school curriculum. Examine course offerings carefully to determine science coursework available.

Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Record-Enhancers.pdf
Examples of Record Enhancer Post-bac Programs

A recent search of the AAMC post-bac database ([Apps.AAMC.org/Postbac](Apps.AAMC.org/Postbac)) shows 142 academic enhancement post-bac programs in the U.S. This list represents some undergraduate, some graduate, and some Special Masters Programs:

- American University Postbaccalaureate Premedical Certificate (Washington, DC): [American.edu/CAS/Premed/CERT-GPMD.cfm](American.edu/CAS/Premed/CERT-GPMD.cfm)
- Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine Health Sciences Post Baccalaureate Certificate (Erie, PA): [LECOM.edu/Admissions/Entrance-Requirements/Health-Sciences-Post-Baccalaureate-Entrance-Requirements/](LECOM.edu/Admissions/Entrance-Requirements/Health-Sciences-Post-Baccalaureate-Entrance-Requirements/)
- Keck Graduate Institute Post-baccalaureate Premedical Certificate (Claremont, CA): [KGI.edu/Academic-Programs/Postbac-Premedical-Certificate-Program-(PPC)](KGI.edu/Academic-Programs/Postbac-Premedical-Certificate-Program-(PPC))
- Washington University Post-Baccalaureate Premedical Program (St. Louis, MO): [UCollege.WUSTL.edu/Programs/Postbaccalaureate/Premed](UCollege.WUSTL.edu/Programs/Postbaccalaureate/Premed)
- Icahn School of Medicine at Mt. Sinai MS in Biomedical Sciences (New York, NY): [Icahn.MSSM.edu/Education/Masters/Biomedical-Sciences/Admissions](Icahn.MSSM.edu/Education/Masters/Biomedical-Sciences/Admissions)
- University of Cincinnati Special Master’s Program in Physiology (Cincinnati, OH): [Med.UC.edu/MSinPhysiology](Med.UC.edu/MSinPhysiology)
- Tufts University MS in Biomedical Sciences: [PublicHealth.Tufts.edu/Academics/MBS-Microsite](PublicHealth.Tufts.edu/Academics/MBS-Microsite)
In recent years, Princeton alums have attended these programs and gone on to medical school:

- Eastern Virginia Medical School Medical Master’s Program (Norfolk, VA): [EVMS.edu/Education/Masters_Programs/Medical_Masters_Program/](EVMS.edu/Education/Masters_Programs/Medical_Masters_Program/)
- Harvard Extension School Premedical Program: [Extension.Harvard.edu/Academics/Premedical-program](Extension.Harvard.edu/Academics/Premedical-program)
- University of Pennsylvania Pre-Health Specialized Studies Program (Philadelphia, PA): [SAS.UPenn.edu/LPS/Postbacc/Pre-health/Specialized](SAS.UPenn.edu/LPS/Postbacc/Pre-health/Specialized)
- Georgetown University Special Masters Program in Physiology (Washington, DC): [SMP.Georgetown.edu](SMP.Georgetown.edu)
- Temple University Advanced Core in Medical Sciences (Philadelphia, PA): [Temple.edu/Medicine/PPP/](Temple.edu/Medicine/PPP/)
- Boston University MS in Medical Sciences (Boston, MA): [BUMC.BU.edu/GMS/Gateway/Prospective/Masters-in-Medical-Sciences/](BUMC.BU.edu/GMS/Gateway/Prospective/Masters-in-Medical-Sciences/)
- Rutgers – Robert Wood Johnson Medical School Master of Biomedical Science: [RWJMS.Rutgers.edu/Education/GSBS/MSBio.html](RWJMS.Rutgers.edu/Education/GSBS/MSBio.html)
Within the postbac record enhancers, some programs are designed to support students from ethnic and racial backgrounds that are underrepresented in medicine, or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Currently, more than 40 programs for students from lower-income backgrounds are listed on the AAMC website, and 73 designate a program focus on underrepresented minority students.

If a program is designated as HCOP (Health Careers Opportunity Program), it is supported by a federal grant to offer a program targeted to minority students. Usually such programs are located at medical schools. Other medical schools may fund their own programs for select minority students. These are typically small, well-designed programs that offer tremendous support to their students and have note-worthy success.
Researching and Evaluating Post-bac Options

**Researching:** The most comprehensive database of post-bac pre-medical programs is available on the Association of American Medical Colleges website at [Apps.AAMC.org/postbac/](http://Apps.AAMC.org/postbac/).

**Evaluating:** No single program is the best for everyone. It’s important to know what’s most important for you in finding a post-bac program, and asking questions that will help you weigh pros and cons of each. Factors that are significant to many students include:

- Location
- Cost
- Size of program and classes
- Support resources offered
- Guarantee of seats in required courses
- Community among post-bac students
- Linkage agreements
- Many post-bac programs will have program participants who you can contact to ask additional questions about their level of satisfaction. This can be more useful than statistics. In addition to doing web research, it may also be helpful to sit in on a class, or meet with an adviser.

[Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Career-Changers.pdf](http://Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/2015-PostbacPaths-Career-Changers.pdf)
Questions to Ask While Considering Post-bac Options

- Is there a linkage program? How many students have successfully linked to the medical school(s) in recent years?
- What MCAT support is available? How well do post-bacs fare on the MCAT?
- How often do students meet with advisers? How available and supportive are the program staff?
- Can I take electives outside of the pre-med core requirements?
- How would you describe the class environment? What do faculty think of post-bac students?
- How would you describe the post-bac student culture (e.g., independent, community-oriented, competitive, collaborative, etc.)?
- What academic support is available if I’m struggling in a class?
- Do you have contact information for program participants or recent graduates who I can talk with?
- What are the qualifications I have to have to have a committee letter prepared on my behalf? How many students in a given year qualify for a committee letter?
- What’s the cost of the program? How do students usually pay for it?
- What kinds of students tend to be successful in your program?
- What’s the timeline to apply? Is it best to apply early, or is it okay to apply at the deadline?
- Can you go over the timeline – how long will it take to complete the program, apply to, and start health professions school?
Many programs will open for applications early in the academic year before matriculation and offer suggested deadlines. If a program has rolling admission, apply early for the best chances of acceptance. Programs may offer varying start times (summer, fall, spring).

Application materials may include:
- Application (often online).
- Transcripts from any colleges and universities that you have attended. Some programs request high school transcripts as well.
- An essay describing your interest in your career of choice and in the program to which you’re applying.
- A resume or CV.
- Letters of recommendation from faculty or professional references.
- Standardized test scores (e.g., SAT, ACT, GRE). Some record enhancer programs require MCAT scores.
- Application fees.

Evaluation criteria may include:
- Excellent academic potential
  - Some programs have a minimum recommended GPA
  - Strong letters of recommendation
  - Competitive standardized test scores
- Demonstrated interest in career of interest
  - Career history, volunteer activities, experience in health care
  - Ability to articulate motivation in essays and interviews

Consult individual program websites for specific details!
For Additional Information

- AAMC Postbaccalaureate Premedical Programs: [AAMC.org/Postbac/#/index](http://AAMC.org/Postbac/#/index)
- NAAHP Post Baccalaureate Information (FAQ & Glossary): [NAAHP.org/PublicResources/PostBaccalaureateOptions.aspx](http://NAAHP.org/PublicResources/PostBaccalaureateOptions.aspx)
- Post Baccalaureate Options for the Medical School Applicant: [NAAHP.org/PublicResources/PostBaccalaureateOptions/PostBacArticle2.aspx](http://NAAHP.org/PublicResources/PostBaccalaureateOptions/PostBacArticle2.aspx)
- HPA Post-bac Paths: Career Changers: [Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/Career-Changer](http://Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/Career-Changer)
- HPA Post-bac Paths: Record Enhancers: [Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/Record-Enhancers/](http://Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/Record-Enhancers/)
- HPA Post-Bac Night 2011 (audio file): [Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/](http://Princeton.edu/HPA/Post-bac-Programs/)