

BENEDICTINE COLLEGE

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A Pre-Health Advising Handbook: Pre-MD/DO/DPM

# Pre-Medical Advising Handbook



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## Choosing to Pursue the Path to Medical School

*“Before and above all things, care must be taken of the sick, that they be served in very truth as Christ is served.” -Holy Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 36.*

Choosing to pursue a career in the medical field is both an exciting and intimidating decision. Becoming a pre-medical student means you intend to pursue medical school after graduation. Medical school includes allopathic medical school (Medical Doctor, MD), osteopathic medical school (Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, DO), or podiatric medical school (Doctorate of Podiatric Medicine, DPM). The majority of this handbook focuses on allopathic medical school (MD), but most of the information also applies to DO and DPM programs.

Being successful in the path to medical school requires determination, constant focus, and hard work. This handbook will guide you through the pre-requisite courses necessary to apply for medical school, obtaining and recording appropriate extracurricular experiences, getting in the habit of personal reflection and evaluation, navigating the MCAT, and completing the medical school application. However, it is important to remember *you* are the best advocate for your future career: do your own research, read everything you can on pursuing a medical career, and work hard throughout your time at Benedictine College. The best place to start your research is on the Association of American Medical Colleges website ([www.aamc.org](http://www.aamc.org)) for allopathic medicine, the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine website ([www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org)) for osteopathic medicine, or the American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine website ([www.aacpm.org](http://www.aacpm.org)) for podiatric medicine.

### Why do you want to be a medical doctor?

When you apply to medical school, you will continuously be asked *why* you want to be a medical doctor. While your reasons may seem obvious, students often find it challenging to articulate these reasons. As you begin your pre-medical journey you should actively start thinking about how you would answer this question. Avoid generalities, such as “I want to help people” or “I love the human body,” and instead fully develop your personal story by including unique and specific experiences, events, and encounters. Continuously add to this list so when you begin your personal statement and prepare for your interview you have many different ideas to pull from. Use the following page to record your experiences and describe how each experience influenced your decision to pursue a career in medicine.







## What does the path to Medical School look like?

There is no one path to medical school. Some students choose to take a gap year after college, either to pursue other educational opportunities or to gain clinical or service experience, while others go to medical school directly after completing their undergraduate degree. It is important that you recognize your strengths and weaknesses in the core competencies and your own personal goals as you develop your timeline. However, the most common route for Benedictine students is to apply for medical school between their junior and senior years, and the timeline below reflects this path. This timeline will be discussed in greater detail in Section 6 of this handbook.

### Sophomore Year

#### Summer (or before)

- Shadow one (or more) physicians
- Evaluate personal core competencies and begin to look for opportunities to develop weaknesses

### Junior Year

#### January

- Purchase the online Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)
- Research and request Medical School information
- Consider enrolling in an MCAT prep course

#### February

- Register for the MCAT
- Begin drafting personal statement

#### March

- Ask references for letters of evaluation (LOE). While three are usually required, it is better to have 4-5, with at least one of those from a shadowing experience
- Have several people read over your personal statement, and make revisions as necessary.
- Continue studying for the MCAT

#### April-May

- Ideally, take MCAT at *the latest* in June
- Initiate primary AMCAS application

### Senior Year

#### June

- Submit primary AMCAS application
- Send official transcripts from all institutes attended

#### July

- Secondary/supplemental AMCAS application begins: complete within 1-2 weeks of receiving them

#### August

- By August 1: Confirm LOE have been submitted
- Continue secondary/supplemental applications
- Verify individual school deadlines

#### September/October

- Continue secondary/supplemental applications
- Interviews/visit schools
- October 15: First acceptances sent out by medical schools

#### January - April

- Interviews (cont) / visit schools

#### May - July

- May 15: Last date to hold multiple acceptances
- Submit final transcripts

#### July - September

- Medical school begins, depending on the school

## Cost: Create a Budget

Students are often surprised at how much it costs to apply for medical school, and it is not a bad idea to start thinking about budgeting for this expense early. Between MCAT fees, AMCAS processing fees, transcript fees, primary and secondary application fees, and the cost of travel to interview, it is not unheard of for applicants to spend five to ten thousand dollars over the course of a few months. Even after acceptance, some schools require applicants to pay a deposit to hold their spot in the incoming class (ranges from \$500-\$2000 and is usually non-refundable). The AAMC Fee Assistance Program can help offset some of these fees. Based on parental income and family size, find out if you are eligible on the AAMC website. You should investigate this program before registering for the MCAT or beginning your AMCAS application.

## Medical School Pre-Requisite Courses

*“Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.”*  
–St. Augustine

**B**eyond all else, being a successful pre-medical student requires a love of learning – every class you take at Benedictine College will develop your scientific knowledge, your ethical and theological foundation, your communication skills, or your critical and analytical thinking abilities. To be a successful pre-medical student, you should realize the benefit of every class to your future career. You should strive to gain wisdom and develop your whole person throughout your college experience, in both general education classes and science classes. One benefit of choosing a strong liberal arts college such as Benedictine is that you get an education that goes far beyond technical and professional skills – you should appreciate this opportunity!

Often pre-medical students ask what major they should pursue as an undergraduate, since “pre-med” is not a degree, but a path. The pursuit of any major is acceptable, but a student will be most successful choosing a degree they are passionate about and find personally satisfying. There are specific pre-requisite classes that must be satisfactorily completed in order to apply to medical schools. These classes can vary by medical school, so it is vital that you investigate the schools you are interested in for their particular prerequisites. There are classes, though, that are the most common prerequisites, and those appear in following list. As you complete each prerequisite, record your grade in the table. Having a high GPA, especially a high science GPA, is important in getting into medical school (the average GPA of accepted medical students is 3.7) – while it is not impossible to get into medical school with a lower GPA, it is much easier if you do not have to explain why your GPA is lower than that of other applicants. It is also suggested to keep your study materials for each of these prerequisite classes, as they may be useful to you as you study for the MCAT and take your classes in medical school.

### Important Considerations and Recommendations

- While Advanced Placement (AP) or College Level Examination Program (CLEP) classes may transfer as college credit to Benedictine, in most cases they are not accepted by medical schools. For science classes especially, students should take the college level class at Benedictine. You should check with your desired medical school for more information on what they will or will not accept.
- Often students are nervous about taking more than one science class in a single semester. However, medical schools want to see that you can handle a rigorous class load, so students should try to have at least one semester where they have multiple science classes.

- Do your own work. It seems obvious, but it unfortunately is not uncommon for students to get so caught up in getting a good grade that they succumb to the pressure to act inappropriately. Remember, if you ever cheat, your professor has the right (and duty) to report your behavior. Having an academic misconduct incident on your record is a huge red flag for medical schools and may completely prevent you from getting into medical school.
- The pre-medical prerequisites are academically rigorous. They are supposed to be – they are not only preparing you for medical school but are also ensuring that you have the work ethic and intellectual capability to succeed in medical school. It is important to stay academically focused. Sometimes that may mean you have a different college experience than your friends - you may have to skip social events or incorporate more study time into your day.
- Engage with your professors. Besides enhancing your classroom experience, this will allow you to make relationships that will be important as you request letters of recommendations. At Benedictine College, our small class sizes allow you to really get to know your professors and form these strong and lasting relationships.
- Try not to have any “withdrawn” courses on your transcript. Medical school admission committees usually see this as a sign classes became too much for you to handle, suggesting you may not be able to juggle the many demands of medical school. If you do need to drop a class, it is better to drop a non-science course. For Benedictine, the last day to drop a class without a “W” is four weeks after classes begin (ask your advisor for the exact date).
- If you do not do as well (grade-wise) as you would have liked in a class, consider it a learning experience. Use self-reflection to determine what you could have done better – it may be tempting to blame either the class or the professor, but you must understand the responsibility is completely your own. If you are asked in your interview why you received a poor grade, it will not go over well if you blame others – medical school admission committees expect that you will be able to accurately learn and apply material despite external circumstances. To determine where things went wrong, ask yourself questions such as: *Could I have studied more, or differently? Could I have met with the professor more outside of class? Could I have used other resources, such as the textbook or online sources, to gain a better understanding of confusing or unclear information? Did I try to cram for tests the night before, or did I study a little every day so I could better retain the information? Could I have managed my time better?* Be honest with yourself, and use this as a means to change your behavior to be more successful in the future.
- If you plan to study abroad (which is a great way to develop your maturity and cultural awareness), remember to include this in your four-year curriculum plan. Benedictine has a summer abroad experience in Italy, so this might be a good option if you want to study abroad without taking away time during the normal academic semesters.
- If you are planning on applying to medical school after your junior year, you will be studying for the MCAT the spring semester of your junior year. Many students opt to have a ‘lighter’ load that semester to allow for time to study.
- This following prerequisite list does not include English, although one year of English is usually required by medical schools. However, most Benedictine students satisfy this requirement through the Benedictine general education program. If you are concerned, check with your medical school of interest.

## Common Pre-Requisite Courses

While these are common pre-requisites, it is absolutely necessary that a student consult their medical school of choice, as these can differ between schools.

Benedictine College Course Code	Class Name	Semester Recommended*	Grade Received
BIOL-1121	General Biology 1 with lab	Freshman (Fall)	
BIOL-1122	General Biology 2 with lab	Freshman (Spring)	
CHEM-1200/1201	General Chemistry 1 with lab	Freshman (Fall)	
CHEM-1210/1211	General Chemistry 2 with lab	Freshman (Spring)	
CHEM-2200/2201	Organic Chemistry 1 with lab	Sophomore (Fall)	
CHEM-2210/2211	Organic Chemistry 2 with lab	Sophomore (Spring)	
CHEM-3500-3501	Biochemistry 1 with lab	Junior (Fall)	
PHYS-2000/2001	College Physics 1 with lab	Sophomore (Fall)	
PHYS-2010/2011	College Physics 2 with lab	Sophomore (Spring)	
PSYC-1000	General Psychology	Before taking the MCAT	
SOCI – 1000	General Sociology	Before taking the MCAT	
PSYC-2503	Lifespan Development**	Before taking the MCAT	
BIOL-3000/4000+ Upper-level biology courses, especially:	Cell Physiology **	Junior or Senior year	
	Cellular and Molecular Biology**	Junior or Senior year	
	Genetics**	Junior (Fall)	
	Immunology**	Junior or Senior year	
	Microbiology**	Junior or Senior year	
THEO-3940	Christian Bioethics**	Anytime	

\*The recommended semester is for incoming freshmen planning on a pre-med path. It is perfectly acceptable to take these in different semesters, especially for students choosing to pursue pre-med later in their academic career.

\*\*These courses are recommended courses. While some are required by a few schools, usually they are suggested rather than required. It is necessary that you investigate your school of choice to see if they are required. However, even if not required, is a good idea to take these recommended courses because they will help prepare you for either the MCAT or medical school classes.

## Physician Shadowing

*“Listen with the ear of your heart.” – Holy Rule of St. Benedict, Prologue.*

Your goal to become a physician should be based on real-world, firsthand experience. You must be able to demonstrate you have made an informed career decision and aren’t scared away by the realities of the medical field. Shadowing involves following a physician as they go about their day-to-day job activities. Most medical school applicants have *at least* forty hours of shadowing experience. It is beneficial to have two types of shadowing experiences: In the first, you shadow the same physician multiple times. This will allow you to not only get a full picture of the daily life of the physician, but will also allow you to form a personal relationship with the physician, which will become valuable when you need letter of recommendations. In the second, you shadow physicians in different specialties and environments. Your experience with an emergency room physician will be completely different from your experience with a small-town family physician. All your experiences will help you understand the complexities, joys, and difficulties of pursuing a career in medicine.

### Finding Shadowing Opportunities

It is your responsibility to find and arrange shadowing opportunities. Taking the initiative to set up these opportunities yourself show that you have the interest and the maturity to be a pre-medical student. Contact any physicians you have ever interacted with (including your childhood family physician or family members) – if you have a personal relationship with them, they are more likely to consider your request. When you contact the physician (either by phone or email), give them some information about yourself, your future goals, and why you want to shadow them specifically. If you have already received HIPAA training, include this in your email (see the next page in this handbook for more information). Be professional, polite, and appreciative in your email. It is a good idea not to put time constraints on them – work around their schedule. If you do not hear back in approximately a week, it is perfectly acceptable to send a follow-up email.

Another option for finding shadowing opportunities is through a hospital or large clinic. Often, these will have dedicated webpages to help you find shadowing opportunities, and you can find these by simply searching the webpage of the hospital near you. Opportunities at hospitals near Atchison can be found on the following page.

In addition, as a member of the Benedictine community, you have access to the Benedictine Ravenwalk ([ravenwalk.benedictine.edu](http://ravenwalk.benedictine.edu)). This platform allows you to search for Benedictine friends and alumni that have offered to help students in their career path.

## Shadowing Recommendations and Considerations

- Treat your shadowing opportunity as you would a job interview. Wear professional clothes (no jeans!) and always act in a professional manner. Use proper titles for anyone you meet.
- Don't be late. Physicians are extremely busy and on a tight schedule, so they don't have time to wait for you. Allow extra time into your drive time, and if you are unsure of the location where you are supposed to meet, consider scoping it out the day before.
- Act only as a shadow – be as discreet as possible. You should not interact with patients, and you should not ask questions of the physician in front of the patient (although it is perfectly acceptable, and encouraged, to ask questions later, if time allows). Record any notes after your experience, not during.
- Show excitement. If the physician asks you if you want to observe, participate, or help with something, you should always say yes. Remember, they are offering for your sake.
- Send a thank you card.
- Ask the physician if they have any recommendations for other physicians to shadow. Once you have one connection, it is often easier to find other opportunities, especially if you have made a good impression.
- Record any observations you have. You may think you will never forget, but it is easy to draw a blank when you are asked for specific experiences in your interview. Besides recording individual stories, also reflect on how these impacted your perception of medicine: *How did this experience clarify your desire to be a physician? What insights did you gain into the medical field?* There is some space for reflection in this handbook, but you might also consider purchasing a dedicated notebook to record your experiences.
- Some hospitals or clinics may require you to undergo a background check, have a tuberculosis (TB) screening test, or verify you are up-to-date on your vaccinations (including the influenza vaccine).
- If you are planning a shadowing opportunity at a large hospital or clinic, they may require you to take HIPAA training. Usually they will provide and pay for this training. However, if you are asking to shadow at a smaller clinic or with an individual physician, it may be beneficial to get your own HIPAA training certificate. You can complete an online training (approximately \$30) at <https://www.hipaatraining.com/>.
- Atchison Hospital is convenient and very friendly to Benedictine students looking for shadowing opportunities. In addition, several hospitals near Atchison have straightforward shadowing applications:

Mosaic Life Care in St. Joseph	<a href="https://www.mymosaiclifecare.org/General/nwmo-ahcc/Job-Shadowing/">https://www.mymosaiclifecare.org/General/nwmo-ahcc/Job-Shadowing/</a>
Saint Luke's in Kansas City	<a href="https://volunteers.saintlukeskc.org/pages/OBSERVER">https://volunteers.saintlukeskc.org/pages/OBSERVER</a>
Children's Mercy in Kansas City	<a href="https://www.childrensmercy.org/professional-education/observerships/">https://www.childrensmercy.org/professional-education/observerships/</a>
North Kansas City Hospital in North Kansas City	<a href="https://www.nkch.org/community/student-programs/school-to-career/job-shadow-form/">https://www.nkch.org/community/student-programs/school-to-career/job-shadow-form/</a>
University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City	<a href="https://www.kumc.edu/community-engagement/kumc-educational-experience/educational-experiences-offered.html">https://www.kumc.edu/community-engagement/kumc-educational-experience/educational-experiences-offered.html</a>





## Extracurricular Activities

*“Get involved in local activities, get involved in local initiatives, be involved in leadership positions, because you can’t learn unless you are involved.” -Dr. Wangari Maathai ’64*

Being successful in your classes is essential to getting into medical school. However, it is just as important to show that you have unique interests, a developed character, and the desire to serve others. Medical schools want to ensure they are training physicians that will be empathetic and passionate leaders, and therefore they holistically review your application. In addition, participation in extracurricular activities will demonstrate your teamwork and social skills, your ability to commit and follow through on obligations, your altruism and compassion, and your personal initiative and enthusiasm. When you complete your medical school application, you will have the opportunity to fill in fifteen extracurricular activities (including shadowing and work). However, this is not a number that you should strive to just to ‘check it off the list.’ You should choose meaningful, long-term opportunities that excite you – and it is perfectly acceptable (and common) to have fewer than fifteen activities. It is better to have a few strong and impactful activities than multiple short-term activities. Similar to your shadowing experiences, you should constantly and consistently reflect on these activities, record any notable occurrences, and evaluate how they are helping you gain the core competencies that will enable you to be successful in medical school and beyond.

## Research

Participating in an academic or laboratory research project is not an official requirement for medical school. However, this experience can not only considerably enhance your scientific knowledge and critical reasoning skills, but also demonstrates that you truly have curiosity and love for science and learning. Therefore, medical school admissions recognize the value of this participation and often recommend you have at least a year of research experience. Choose a research project you are passionate about – if you don’t have passion for the project, it will be a long and difficult road, as research can sometimes be tedious and time-consuming.

At Benedictine you have the unique opportunity to participate in the Discovery Day Program. This program allows you to design a research project, prepare a grant application, use Discovery Day funding to perform your research, and present your research at the annual Discovery Day Symposium. It is strongly recommended you take advantage of this distinctive opportunity.

Every faculty member at Benedictine has a personal research project, and they are generally open to including students in their project. If you want to join in on a specific project, ask to meet with the professor to explore this option. Before your meeting you should read as much as you can on the project so that you fully understand what

the research will entail. Be enthusiastic and agreeable in all your interactions – remember, they are doing you a favor by allowing you to participate. Say yes to any offers to present at external conferences.

You can also consider applying for a summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) through the National Science Foundation. In these competitive summer programs, undergraduate students work on a pre-planned research project with a research advisor. These experiences include a stipend and (usually) compensation for travel, housing, and board. For information on these programs see: <https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/>. Applications are usually due in January, although check the webpage for specific due dates.

Finally, two important notes about research: 1) If your GPA is low, it may be a good idea to focus on your grades instead of trying to fit in a research project. 2) If you are pursuing a MD/PhD, research is necessary for admission.

Record your research below:

Research Project Title	Research Advisor	Other Research Members	Presentation Locations and Dates

## Leadership

It is inevitable that as a physician you will be a leader. Therefore, it is important to start developing these leadership skills early in your academic career and learn how to be an effective leader even in challenging situations. You should seek out impactful leadership opportunities. These opportunities can come from a variety of sources, such as: academics, church, volunteer activities, clubs, or sports.

There will be times when you encounter difficulties as a leader. You should record these instances, reflect on how you handled the situation, and evaluate what you could have done differently. There also will be times when you will have great success as a leader. You should also record these instances, reflect on how you handled the situation, and evaluate why it was so successful. Keep a record of specific ways that your leadership had an impact. For example, did you increase the number of times the club met by 25%? Did you increase the number of students that

participated in the mission trip by 10%? Did you invite four speakers to the meetings? Having concrete numbers provides the admissions committee with evidence that your leadership was not just to pad your resume, but you actually were a valuable and impactful leader. The specific information and the reflections can be used in your medical school application, your personal statement, and your interview.

Record your leadership experiences below:

Leadership Position	Project/Club/Etc	Notes

## Volunteer Service

One of the most common answers as to why a person wants to be a physician is because they want to “help people.” However, simply saying that you want to “help people” does not go far. It is much better to clearly demonstrate that you actually have a commitment and desire to help people, and the easiest way to do this is to volunteer through service. If you truly do want to ‘help people,’ this should not be something that you are simply doing to check off the list. You really should *want* to volunteer. Find something you have both the passion and capability for. Most applicants aim for ten to fifteen hours of volunteer service a month. This should include both healthcare and non-healthcare related service, and it is a good idea to show commitment and stay with a single organization long-term (for months or even years).

Most hospitals accept volunteers and have dedicated volunteer programs that can easily be found on the individual hospital websites. Nursing homes, veterans’ hospitals (see <https://www.volunteer.va.gov/StudentProgram.asp>), and hospice care programs are all possibilities for finding volunteer opportunities. Benedictine students have volunteered at the Atchison Hospital and the Atchison Community Health Clinic.

As a Benedictine student, you have access to the GivePulse service and volunteering network ([benedictine.givepulse.com](http://benedictine.givepulse.com)). Simply log on using your Benedictine username and password and you will have the

ability to see and sign up for multiple service opportunities. Furthermore, this platform also records your service hours and reflections. It is extremely user friendly and you will find it easy to identify service opportunities in Atchison and beyond. In addition, you can insert and record additional service hours from experiences that are not on GivePulse.

Other options for finding service opportunities include the Volunteer Match website ([volunteermatch.org](http://volunteermatch.org)), the Points of Light website ([pointsoflight.org](http://pointsoflight.org)), the Volunteer Kansas website ([volunteerkansas.org](http://volunteerkansas.org)), or the Create the Good website (<https://createthegood.aarp.org/volunteer-search.html>). Like GivePulse, these sites allow you to search for service opportunities in a given location.

Many classes at Benedictine incorporate a service learning component. Don't forget to include these experiences into your volunteer hours! Even if they are a short-term or one-time experiences, you may gain valuable insight into your personal maturity, capacity for leadership, or ability to interact with diverse populations. These insights can be incorporated into your personal essays or interview answers.

Record your volunteer experiences below:

Volunteer Experience	Organization	Location and Contact Info	Notes

## Clinical Experience and Jobs

While shadowing gives you the opportunity to observe a physician in action, clinical volunteering or employment allows you to have direct and personal patient interaction. Clinical experience will not only help you evaluate whether you actually want to pursue a career in the medical field, but it also shows admissions committees that you are genuinely interested in the medical field. Some medical schools have a requirement for clinical experience hours (often 32 hours or more). There are numerous opportunities to obtain this clinical experience, either paid or unpaid, for example: certified nurse assistant (CNA), emergency medical technician (EMT), paramedic, operating room technician (OR tech), personal care attendant (PCA), patient transport aide, emergency room technician (ER tech), medical scribe, home healthcare worker, community health clinic volunteer, or hospice volunteer. Many of these require certification, so be sure to do some research before you apply.

A medical admissions member once stated one of the best summer jobs they could see on an applicant's resume was a restaurant server. This job, while not directly medically related, requires many skills that are necessary in the medical field: the ability to memorize and multi-task efficiently, the capability of being polite and respectful even if not reciprocated, and the ability to perform tasks quickly and efficiently. While it is not necessary to go out and get a server job, it is a good idea to reflect on the jobs that you have: What skills are you gaining that will translate well into the medical field? Often students think they should only pursue opportunities that are directly in the medical field, but it is certainly not detrimental to also have non-medically related jobs.

Record your job experiences below:

Job	Location	Supervisor and Contact Info	Notes

## Hobbies

Your hobbies have the opportunity to showcase who you are and what you enjoy. In addition, they can demonstrate qualities and characteristics about you that may otherwise not be apparent: a musician may be considered dedicated and passionate, a dancer considered graceful and determined, a marathoner considered resilient and focused. Avoid broad hobbies, such as “exercising” or “reading,” and definitely do not include “Netflix binging” or “sleeping.”

Only showcase hobbies you have continued in college and be specific about how you have continued to engage in the hobby. For more information on which hobbies to include in your medical school application and which to avoid, and what the best way is to showcase your hobbies, see: <http://www.savvypremed.com/savvy-pre-med/2019/1/14/the-best-and-worst-hobbies-to-include-in-your-medical-school-application>.

## Pre-Medical Programs

There are some specialized one-day workshops or summer programs that are directed toward pre-medical students. These programs can help you learn more about the medical field through workshops, seminars, and clinical shadowing opportunities. Some of these programs are listed below:

Summer Health Professions Education Program ([www.shpep.org](http://www.shpep.org)), various locations

NAAHP summer opportunities: <https://www.naahp.org/student-resources/summer-opportunities>

Primary Care Workshop (<http://www.kumc.edu/school-of-medicine/education/premedical-programs/primary-care-workshop.html>), University of Kansas Medical Center

Rural Health Professions Summer Preceptorship (<https://rockford.medicine.uic.edu/education/programs-high-school-college-students/rural-health-professions-summer-preceptorship/>), Illinois

Pre-Medical Wilderness and Emergency Medicine Course (<https://www.coloradowm.org/courses/pre-med/colorado-emergency-wilderness-medicine/>), Colorado

Pre-Medical Rural Community Health Project (<https://www.etsu.edu/com/ruralprograms/premedical/community.php>), Tennessee [must be a TN resident]

AAMC Summer Undergraduate Research Opportunities (<https://students-residents.aamc.org/choosing-medical-career/article/summer-undergraduate-research-programs/>)

Summer Academic Enrichment Program (<https://dhsd.vcu.edu/programs/college/summer-academic-enrichment-program-saep/>), Virginia Commonwealth University

Dean for Medical Education's Academy for Research, Clinical, and Health Equity Scholarship (*ARCHES*) program (<https://som.georgetown.edu/diversityandinclusion/guarches/>), Georgetown School of Medicine

## Extracurricular Recommendations and Considerations

- Consistency is key. For example, it is better to volunteer at the hospital every Saturday for two years than volunteer at five different locations for a couple hours each in one semester or go on a single mission trip (although both are a good addition). There are no shortcuts – you must put in the time over months or years.
- Choose activities for which you have a genuine passion. You should not do extracurricular activities merely to pad your resume, instead you should be sincerely interested. It is much easier to be consistent and dedicated to an activity if you actually enjoy it. In addition, your passion will be apparent as you talk about your experiences in your medical school interviews, and this passion is attractive to admissions committees.
- Don't feel like you need to do everything your freshman year. Your freshman year should be primarily about settling into the routine of college life and determining the best way to study for academically rigorous classes. Often students fall into the trap of focusing on extracurricular activities at the detriment of grades. If you are struggling in your classes, it is probably not a good idea to add in a time-intensive research project or service experience.
- You can't do it all. While you may look at this list and feel overwhelmed, remember that it is fine to have just a few meaningful experiences. Take everything one day at a time, don't compare yourself to others, and focus on your accomplishments. If you start to feel anxious, take a step back. Go for a walk. Talk to someone. Go to mass. Use the Benedictine College counseling center. Self-care is just as important as everything else.

## The MCAT

*“Nothing great is ever achieved without enduring much.” - St. Catherine of Siena*

One of the most daunting tasks for pre-medical students is preparing for the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT). This computer-based, multiple-choice exam is a prerequisite for almost all medical schools in the United States and Canada. It is designed and administered by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and is required for admission into MD, DO, and DPM schools. Besides testing on subject knowledge and understanding, it also tests critical analysis and problem-solving skills. The MCAT is a predictor of future success in medical school. Therefore, medical schools use the MCAT score to make admission decisions. The MCAT has four sections and each is scored between 118 and 132. The total MCAT scores range from 472 to 528 (median score is 500).

### MCAT Content

The MCAT is comprised of four sections:

- Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems  
*This section focuses on physics and chemistry concepts, and especially tests your ability to relate these concepts to the human body.*
- Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems  
*This section focuses on biology, biochemistry, and physiology, and especially tests your ability to recognize the impact minute biochemical processes can have on the organism as a whole.*
- Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior  
*This section focuses on human behaviors and relationships, and how these fit into medicine and society as a whole.*
- Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills (CAR)  
*This section tests the ability to reason through a problem and determine what information is important in determining the solution to the problem.*

Each section has 59 questions (except CAR, which has 53) and is a combination of passage questions and stand-alone questions (except for CAR, which is entirely passage-based). All questions are multiple-choice. The official length of the exam (content length) is six hours and fifteen minutes, but with breaks usually lasts approximately seven and half hours.

## Registering for the MCAT

You will register for the MCAT on the AAMC website ([www.aamc.org](http://www.aamc.org)). An AAMC account is required. If you register more than fifteen days in advance, the MCAT costs \$315 (and increases to \$370 if you register fewer than fifteen days before the exam). Depending on parental income level and family size, you may be eligible for the MCAT fee assistance program. This program not only covers the MCAT fee but also includes financial assistance for practice materials and application fees. You can check eligibility and apply on the AAMC website. You must apply for fee assistance prior to registering for the MCAT or beginning your AMCAS application.

The MCAT exam is offered at multiple testing locations (Pearson Vue Professional Centers) from January to September. Find the registration and testing schedule on the AAMC website. Most Benedictine students take the MCAT in April-June of their Junior year, so that they have their score when they apply for medical school early in the summer. There are a limited number of test seats during each testing date so it is a good idea to register early.

## Studying for the MCAT

While you will cover some MCAT content in your prerequisite classes, it is still important to allocate a significant amount of time to focus exclusively on MCAT study. It is recommended you spend at **least** ten hours a week over at **least** three months. Successful students strategize their studying by creating a specialized MCAT study schedule based on MCAT content. The AAMC offers a free MCAT study plan (<http://offers.aamc.org/mcat-study>) and MCAT content list (a 128-page pdf, found at <https://students-residents.aamc.org/mcatexam> or on the Benedictine pre-med Blackboard site). It is a good idea to schedule “MCAT study time” into your day and plan to “attend” just as if it was an enrolled course. Study rooms may be reserved in the Student Success Center or library.

As you begin your MCAT preparation plan, start by taking a practice exam to see how much you know. **DO NOT** sit for the actual MCAT for your practice exam – this MCAT score would be visible to medical schools when you apply. There are online practice exams that you can take to get an idea of where you stand and what subjects you need to work on the most. AAMC has an official MCAT prep sample test available for \$25, and an additional three official practice tests you can take at various points in your study cycle (\$35 each).

Besides AAMC, numerous companies offer resources for MCAT preparation. These resources including practice questions and exams, tutorials and learning modules, study books and review questions, and in-person or online preparatory courses. Some of the resources are free, but most require a fee (ranging from hundreds to thousands of dollars). These companies include, but are not limited to: Kaplan, UWorld, Next Step, Princeton Review, Altius, Kahn Academy, and Examcrackers. Anki online flash cards (for pre-made MCAT anki decks, see <https://ankiweb.net/shared/decks/mcat>) have become a popular study tool that can be used in addition to other preparatory material. You should research the different options and find one that works best for you.

It is a good idea to take several practice exams (at least the three AAMC practice tests, and likely an additional 2-5 from other companies) at different points during your study schedule so you can see how you are improving and which areas you are still struggling in. Some considerations for the practice tests:

- If you are not seeing an upward trend in your scores on the practice tests, you should re-evaluate your MCAT study methods and consider changing your approach.
- If your scores on the practice tests are significantly lower than you would like, especially as you are getting closer to your exam date, consider paying to reschedule the exam for a later date.

- After each practice exam, carefully review all the questions, whether you got them right or wrong. Use the practice exams not just as an assessment tool, but also as a study tool.

## Taking the MCAT

The day of the MCAT, aim to arrive before the exam start time of 8am (you probably will not be permitted to enter the test center until 7:30am). You might want to drive to the test center prior to the test date to make sure you know the location and exactly how long it will take you. When you arrive, present a non-expired driver's license or another government-issued identification card (make sure it is an id with your signature on it – passport cards may not be accepted, and Benedictine student ids are definitely not accepted). You will have your photograph taken and your palms scanned.

You will not be allowed to eat or drink during the exam (including water and coffee). However, you can bring food and drink to eat during the optional breaks. You should bring food that you are used to eating – now is not the time to try something new. If you have never had an energy drink before, it may make you jittery, so keep that in mind. You will be given a locker to access during breaks. Even though the breaks are optional, it is highly suggested you take them. You will probably find you come back refreshed and focused.

When you are finished, confirm your completion certificate says you took the test and you request for it to be scored. Go home and celebrate!

## MCAT Scoring

MCAT scores are released approximately a month after the exam date (exact score release dates can be found on the AAMC website).

The MCAT score ranges from 472 to 528, and the mean MCAT score is 500. See the attached chart to determine approximate MCAT percentile rank (although medical schools will use the actual score, not the percentile rank). Students are often surprised that just a few point difference can dramatically affect percentile rank. The mean MCAT for students admitted into allopathic medical school is 511 and the mean MCAT for students admitted into osteopathic medical school is 503.

After you receive your MCAT score, you should re-evaluate your plan for your medical school applications. AAMC has a tool called the Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) that allows you to compare student profiles of individual medical schools (cost is \$28). This allows you to fully evaluate where your personal MCAT and GPA scores fall in the range of accepted students to the institution of your choice. For The University of Kansas Medical School, for example, the average MCAT of accepted students is 509, while Baylor College of Medicine has an average MCAT of 518. Knowing these numbers can help you identify which schools it is worth it to apply to, and which ones you might want to skip (each application costs money!). However, remember your application is much more than just your GPA and MCAT, and even if both are high (or lower than you would like), acceptance or denial is never a guarantee.

MCAT Score	Percentile Rank
498	40th
501	50th
504	60th
507	70th
510	80th
514	90th
517	95th
520	98th
521+	99th

## MCAT Recommendations and Considerations

- Students often opt to take a lighter load the spring semester of their junior year to allow for dedicated MCAT study time.
- Find your own study rhythm. It is tempting to discuss your study habits with other pre-medical students, and this can be helpful to get effective study tips. However, you might have to put in more (or less) time than them to get the same result.
- Practice, practice, practice. When you take the practice exams (and you should take multiple of these), simulate test day as closely as possible. Plan to spend seven hours on the exam without distractions like music, food and drink, or phone and internet. Train your brain to focus for seven hours.
- The CARS section is often considered the most difficult section of the MCAT. This section tests your cognitive ability and critical reading skills. Since it is not content based, students find it difficult to know how to study for CARS (find example CARS questions on the Benedictine pre-medical Blackboard page). A few ways you can prepare for CARS:
  - Read voraciously and consistently, and start early (even as early as your freshmen year). This will increase your reading speed and comprehension.
  - Read short articles and summarize the main points after reading. This forces you to actually think about what you read and not just skim.
  - Read things that interest you, but also read “boring” articles. Force yourself to continue reading and summarize the main points. *The New Yorker* and *The Economist* both have dense and detailed articles.
  - As you get closer to the MCAT, nothing prepares you better than practice CARS questions. There are many practice CARS question books (highly recommended books: Next Step 108 CARS, Examcrackers 101 Passages, and/or AAMC Q-packs). You can also get a daily CARS question from Jack Westin (this is free!). Carefully examine the answers for each question and evaluate and reason through why the correct answer was the correct answer.
- If you qualify for testing accommodations at Benedictine, you **may** qualify for MCAT testing accommodations. You will have to apply for accommodations and have proper documentation. For more information, see the AAMC website.
- The earlier you can take the MCAT exam, the better. Medical schools grant admission on a rolling basis, and you can't be considered for admission until your MCAT is submitted. Remember, you won't receive your MCAT score for approximately a month after the exam date. However, if you are not prepared for the MCAT, it is better to wait until you are prepared.
- If you did not score as well as you would have liked on the MCAT, you may want to re-take it. You can take the MCAT three times in a single year, four times in a two-year period, or seven times in your lifetime.
  - Keep in mind that most students who re-take the MCAT do not significantly change their score.
  - To significantly change your score, you must change your study methods. Something didn't work.
  - Evaluate whether your score actually is “low.” Use MSAR to fully assess your score.
  - Not all schools will look at just your highest score. Some schools will average all your scores, some will use the most recent, and some will use the highest score in each MCAT section.
  - If you choose to re-take the exam in a single application cycle, be aware of application dates.

## Applying to Medical School: AMCAS

*“The world offers you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” -Pope Benedict XVI*

Applying for medical school can be intimidating and stressful. However, especially if you have prepared well over the rest of your academic career, it can also be extremely exciting and satisfying. You have worked hard for this moment – now is your chance to show off and shine! Applications for allopathic medical schools (except for publicly-supported Texas schools) are processed through the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), applications for osteopathic medical schools use the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS), and applications for podiatric medical schools use the American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine Application Service (AACPMAS). You will submit all your application materials through these application services, and they will verify your submitted information and disperse your application to the schools of your choice. Whichever type of medical program you decide to apply to, you should become thoroughly familiar with the appropriate application site. There are key points in this handbook, but you will find many more specific details and answers to unique questions on the websites. Most of the information in this section will refer to the AMCAS application, but the AACOMAS and AACPMAS applications are similar.

### Timeline and Deadlines

The AMCAS application service portal opens in the beginning of May (usually May 1). Prior to this date, it is a good idea to review the official AMCAS Instruction Guide, found on the AAMC website. On May 1, you can begin filling out the AMCAS sections. The earliest the AMCAS application can be submitted for verification and review is around June 1 (for exact date for your application year, check AAMC). You can find individual school application due dates on the AAMC website, but because most medical schools offer rolling admission, it is advantageous to submit the application as soon as possible.

The cost for AMCAS processing is \$170, which includes the application fee for one medical school. For each additional school you choose to apply, there is another \$40 fee. You can request financial assistance through AAMC.

## Early Decision Program

If you have a single school that is absolutely your top choice, and your GPA and MCAT scores fall into the accepted range for that school, you **might** want to apply for an Early Decision Program (EDP). In an EDP, you apply before August 1 to a **single school**. You *cannot* apply to any other school. You will be notified of acceptance or rejection to that school by October 1. If you are accepted, you are obligated to accept. If you are denied, you can then apply to other schools. There are benefits and risks to applying for the early decision program. The biggest benefit is that multiple applications cost time and money, and can be very stressful. Having a single application streamlines the process, and (potentially) getting an acceptance early can certainly relieve some stress. However, it is a pretty big risk to apply to only one medical school since each school only accepts a few students through EDP, so it is extremely competitive. Furthermore, if you receive a rejection from your school of choice, you will be on the tail end of the application cycle for the other schools, making it more difficult to get an acceptance from them.

## Scholars in Rural Health Program

If you are a Kansas resident from a rural community, you may be interested in the Scholars in Rural Health Program. Applications for this program are due June 10 after your sophomore year. If you are accepted, as long as you maintain a high undergraduate GPA (>3.5) and receive an acceptable score on the MCAT, you will be accepted into the University of Kansas Medical School. In return, you promise to practice in an underserved rural area of Kansas. To see if you qualify, see: <http://www.kumc.edu/school-of-medicine/education/premedical-programs/scholars-in-rural-health.html>.

## AMCAS Sections 1-3: Applicant Information

Section 1 of the AMCAS is primarily identifying information – your name, birthdate, etc. This should be an easy section!

Section 2 includes a list of *every* high school and post-secondary school you have attended. If you were homeschooled, list the county and state where you were homeschooled, and in the school field select ‘other’ and type “home-schooled; city you were homeschooled in; graduation year.” For more information on how to list schools see the official AMCAS instruction guide found on the AAMC website. After you list schools in this section, you will be able to print AMCAS Transcript Request Forms to send to the schools you have attended (click on the “Create Transcript Request Form” next to the “Schools Attended” section). Inform the registrar of the attended school that the form must accompany the official transcript.

Section 3 of the AMCAS is your biographical information: your contact information, citizenship, military service, childhood information (did you grow up in a medically underserved area? Did you receive a Pell grant to attend college? Was your family part of a government-funded financial assistance program?), if you consider yourself disadvantaged (you must explain why), and your parents information. This is also the section where you will disclose and explain any felonies or misdemeanors.

## AMCAS Section 4: Coursework

Section 4 is a list of all coursework you have taken and the grades received for each course. AMCAS will verify each course you list with your transcript(s). This is the section that causes the most delays in AMCAS verification, so be

thorough and attentive as you fill out this section. It is recommended that you request personal transcripts for each school you have attended, and have this transcript available as you complete this section. The AAMC website has an extensive webpage devoted to helping with section 4, including frequently asked questions.

## **AMCAS Section 5: Work and Activities**

Section 5 is a list and explanation of your extracurricular activities, including paid jobs and shadowing experiences. Throughout your undergraduate career, you should keep a detailed record of your extracurricular activities. This record will make it much easier to complete this section of your application.

While you can list up to fifteen activities, most applicants do NOT list fifteen. You should group like items together (in other words, instead of listing each shadowing experience separately you should group them all together as a single activity). You can record up to four occurrences for each activity (for example, up to four shadowing experiences in a single selected “shadowing” activity). Remember, however, quality is more important than quantity. For each, be specific and honest about what you did. Skip high school activities unless continued in college.

In addition, as you choose which activities to list, you should reflect back on the core competencies desired by medical schools (see section 1 of this handbook, these core competencies are: service orientation, social skills, cultural competence, teamwork, oral communication, ethical responsibility to self and others, reliability and dependability, resilience and adaptability, capacity for improvement, critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, scientific inquiry, written communication, living systems, and human behavior), and try to choose activities that demonstrate a wide and diverse range of core competencies.

As you organize your list of activities, you will sort them into broad types of experiences. The following options are available to select through a pulldown menu for your fifteen activities:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| -artistic endeavors                                    | -leadership – not listed elsewhere        |
| -community service/volunteer –<br>medical/clinical     | -military service                         |
| -community service/volunteer – not<br>medical/clinical | -other                                    |
| -conferences attended                                  | -paid employment – medical/clinical       |
| -extracurricular activities                            | -paid employment – not medical/clinical   |
| -hobbies   | -physician shadowing/clinical observation |
| -honors/award/recognition                              | -presentations/posters                    |
| -intercollegiate athletics                             | -publications                             |
|  | -research/lab                             |
|  | -teaching/tutoring/teaching assistant     |

For each activity, you will be asked for the following information:

- dates of participation (start and end weeks)
- average hours per week spent participating
- organization name

- city, state, and country location of the activity
- any positions/honors/awards received in the activity
- the contact information of a person that worked most directly with you (someone they can contact for verification)
- whether you had a leadership or shared leadership position
- a 700 character (including spaces) description of the activity and the impact the activity had on you

A few notes about the Work and Activities Section:

- You do not need to write a full 700-character description for every activity – academic recognitions (such as “Dean’s List”) are usually self-explanatory.
- The most difficult part of this section is likely writing the description of the activity. It is suggested you divide this description into two parts: the first, which describes your role, responsibilities, and accomplishments in the activity, and the second, in which you describe how the activity will make you a better physician. For example:

*For the past eight summers, I was a lifeguard at the Silver Canyon YMCA, and the last three of those I served as head lifeguard. I was in charge of a team of ten lifeguards, responsible for their schedules and performance reviews. I was the main point of contact for decisions and documentation made in response to any incidents. My second summer as head lifeguard, I was awarded the Lifesaver Award for the actions of my lifeguard team during a life-saving incident. My lifeguarding duties taught me that a leader must be calm and in control, even during stressful situations. The incident had a positive outcome because of the communication and teamwork my team displayed during the incident.*

The above description (which is exactly 700 characters) starts by describing the applicant’s role in the activity, lists the award the applicant received for the activity, and then demonstrates how this activity shows the applicant’s core competencies. There are several core competencies revealed through this description: being named lead lifeguard reflects reliability and dependability, writing incident reports reflects good written communication skills, and the positive leadership displayed during the incident reflects teamwork, good oral communication skills, resilience, and adaptability. Furthermore, the applicant accurately portrays their role in the activity – displaying humility while talking about the success of the “team,” rather than taking all the recognition. Note also that the description does not simply list the core competencies, it implies them through description. You do not need to do this for every activity, but it is probably a good idea to write a narrative for those activities that might be unique to you and make you stand out.

- For some activities, a bullet-point list may be more suitable than a narrative description. If you group multiple shadowing experiences into a single activity, for example, you can put bullet points in the narrative with the contact information for the different physicians you shadowed and a very brief description of any experiences, for example:  
09/18-11/18; 36 hours; Lucy Lewood, MD, OB/GYN (555-5555), Atchison, KS: observed several c-sections and vaginal deliveries
- For Honors/Awards/Recognitions you will enter “0” as the average hours per week.
- Sometimes there is a question of if an activity should be listed under “artistic endeavor” or “hobbies.” Generally, if a wider audience was reached, it should be listed under artistic endeavor. For example, if you

play the guitar in a band that regularly plays at a local coffee shop, it could be under “artistic endeavor.” However, if you play the guitar in your room for a few friends, it is probably better to list it under “hobby.”

- For up to three “most meaningful” activities you can write a 1325 character description. Select these carefully, and make sure the description is different than your personal statement. It is probably a good idea for one of these selections to be related to the medical field.
- For more examples of work and activities descriptions, and more detailed recommendations for the works and activities section, see: <https://crackingmedadmissions.com/amcas-work-and-activities-example/>

On the following two pages, find sample work and activities lists from Benedictine students currently enrolled in medical school (some identifiers have been removed to allow for privacy):

*Student 1:*

Physician Shadowing/Clinical Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Orthopedic surgery</li> <li>- OB/GYN</li> <li>- Internal medicine</li> <li>- Physical therapy</li> </ul>
Hobbies	- Violinist in BC orchestra and Baroque Quartet
Volunteer	- Directed young students in Applied Biology
Paid Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High school teaching: A&amp;P</li> <li>- Peer support mentor at BC</li> <li>- Medical scribe with ScribeAmerica</li> </ul>
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discovery Day Project, including presenting twice at Discovery Day and at two external conferences</li> <li>- Summer research with an advisor at a local university</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-Medical Club: President</li> <li>- Resident Assistant (RA)</li> </ul>
Honors	- Summa cum laude with biology degree

*Student 2:*

Shadowing	- Two internal medicine physicians
Volunteer	- VA hospital volunteer
Paid Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical scribe</li> <li>- Teaching assistant – BC biology department</li> <li>- Radiology technician assistant</li> <li>- Server and hostess</li> <li>- Certified nursing assistant (CNA)</li> <li>- Sales clerk</li> </ul>
Research	- REU – pathology
Leadership	- BC Ministry Department: Ravens Respect Life

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-Med club: Treasurer</li> <li>- Intramural sports</li> <li>- Mission trip</li> </ul>
Honors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summa cum laude with biology degree</li> </ul>

*Student 3:*

Shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Radiologist</li> <li>- Cardiologist</li> </ul>
Volunteer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boys and Girls Club - Atchison</li> </ul>
Paid Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coach for teen soccer</li> <li>- EMT</li> </ul>
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discovery Day Project with two Discovery Day presentations and one external conference presentation</li> </ul>
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-Med Club: President</li> <li>- Biology Club</li> </ul>
Honors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summa cum laude with biology degree</li> </ul>

*Student 4:*

Shadowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Atchison Hospital</li> <li>- KUMC</li> </ul>
Volunteer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group leader – Girl Scout Forensic Science Activity</li> <li>- Volunteer nurse at Atchison Community Health Clinic</li> <li>- Donations Collector, Salvation Army</li> <li>- Volunteer Director for Spooky Science Fair at BC</li> <li>- Kindergarten tutor at Atchison Elementary School</li> <li>- Museum tour guide</li> </ul>
Paid Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chemistry tutor</li> <li>- Biology tutor</li> <li>- Psychology department assistant</li> <li>- Cook, bartender, waiter, host, dining room attendant</li> <li>- Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)</li> </ul>
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Six Discovery Day research presentations, two publications in progress, and five external conference presentations, including one that received an award.</li> </ul>
Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- International Honors Society for Psychology – President</li> <li>- Sociology Club – secretary</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student Government Association – Senator</li> <li>- Leadership Seminar Course</li> </ul>
Honors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summa cum laude with biology degree</li> </ul>

## AMCAS Section 6: Letters of Evaluation

Many admission committee members say that the letters of evaluation (sometimes called recommendation letters) are the second most important part of their decision of who to admit (the first is the interview). These letters provide the admission committee the opportunity to get an outsider’s evaluation of your proficiencies in the core competencies. Therefore, it is important that you have strong letters of evaluation in your portfolio.

The first step in getting letters of evaluation is deciding who to ask. The number and the type of letters vary from school to school, so for additional details and guidelines you should check with your individual school. However, most commonly required is three to five letters, with two of those from science professors, one from someone who has observed you in a clinical setting, and one from someone who has direct interaction with you in a service experience. If you have taken time off between college graduation and your application to medical school, you should have a letter writer from that time period speak about your post-graduation experiences.

When you ask your letter writer to write you a letter, be professional and courteous, and make your request well in advance (March is ideal). Remember, they are busy people, and they are doing you a favor! While hopefully you have chosen letter writers that are very familiar with you, it is still a good idea to give them a copy of your updated curriculum vitae and/or a list of your extracurricular activities, as well as your personal statement (see information on AMCAS section 8 below). AMCAS also has an informational sheet (“guidelines for writing a letter of application”) you can share with your letter writers that will provide them with information on what qualities and core competencies medical schools are hoping to see. Put all these in an organized folder with your name and a desired deadline. This deadline should be a couple weeks (at least) before you plan on submitting your application.

After you have started your official AMCAS application, you will provide your letter writer with your official AMCAS ID and AMCAS Letter ID numbers. These will be generated when you get to Section 6 of the AMCAS application. Therefore, if you use the AMCAS system for obtaining your letters, you won’t be able to have your letter writers submit their letters until after May 1, when the AMCAS application service opens. Alternatively, you can have your letter writers submit their letters through Interfolio ([www.interfolio.com](http://www.interfolio.com)). On the Interfolio website, you can enter your AMCAS ID and choose individual letters to have Interfolio upload to AMCAS. While Interfolio has a yearly fee (~\$50), it does have several benefits: 1) you can collect letters at any point during the year, not just during the AMCAS application cycle, 2) you can send your letters to other application services besides AMCAS (without asking your letter writer to send it to several different places, such as AACOMAS), 3) it will store your professional letters for you to use in the future (for another application cycle, for scholarships, etc), 4) it will check to ensure the submitted letter: a) actually is a recommendation letter, b) has a signature, and c) is about you (in other words, it makes sure your letter writer didn’t accidentally upload the wrong file). Make sure when you create your Interfolio account you waive your right to see the letters so they remain confidential.

Some undergraduate institutions have a pre-medical committee of faculty that evaluate and rank the pre-medical students at the undergraduate institution, and then write a committee letter based on this evaluation and ranking.

At Benedictine College, we do not offer a committee letter – you will ask professors for individual letters of recommendation. The lack of a committee letter will not impact your medical school application; if a committee letter is requested, simply tell them that it is not offered by your undergraduate institution.

After your letters have been submitted, thank your letter writers for taking the time to write you a letter. A written thank you note is very appreciated. Letter writers also appreciate hearing about your acceptances, decisions, and successes. They wrote you a letter because they had confidence in your abilities and your future success – they like to hear that they were right!

## **AMCAS Section 7: Medical School Selection**

In section 7 you will choose the medical schools you want to apply to. On average, students apply to fifteen medical schools, but this number can vary based on your academic scores and your preferences. Use MSAR to determine which medical schools have student profiles that are closest to your profile. Remember, it costs an additional \$40 for each application.

Apply to medical schools that are in the state you currently live in - most state schools give preference to in-state applicants. Apply to any school you have a personal connection to – for example, if you have family in the area or you have lived in that state before. Mention this personal reason in the secondary essays. Also apply to schools that match your personal interests – for example, some schools focus on rural populations while others focus on urban populations. Mention these interests in secondary essays. Cost is also a factor to consider – for public schools, in-state tuition will be dramatically less than out-of-state tuition (furthermore, it is usually easier to gain acceptance to in-state schools). Do your research on the schools and decide which ones are the best fit for you.

Even after your application has been submitted, you can still apply to other schools if their application deadline has not passed.

## **AMCAS Section 8: Personal Comment Essay**

This section, often referred to as the “personal statement,” is one of the most important parts of the application. In the personal statement, within 5300 characters including spaces (4500 characters for DO application), you will tell the admissions committee your personal reasons for wanting to be a physician.

Your personal statement should be distinctive to you and should give the admissions committee a picture of you as a person. Choose a unique event or experience in your life and expand on it to tell a story. However, don’t just describe, also reflect – how did this event or experience influence your decision to be a physician? Hopefully over the past few years, as you shadowed, volunteered, and reflected, you kept a reflection journal that gives you several ideas to pull from. Do not make the mistake of trying to cram everything into your personal statement. Choose one or two significant experiences, and then save the rest for your secondary essays and interview.

It is not a bad idea to organize your personal statement using a classic five-paragraph essay format. The first paragraph, your introduction, should begin with something interesting that develops your overarching theme for your essay. Tell a story that is compelling and personal. Something descriptive is good here – don’t start with “I want to be a doctor because I want to help amputees like the one I saw while shadowing,” but instead start with an interesting hook, such as “As he removed his prosthetic leg, the putrid odor of decay reached my nose.” Draw the reader in. Be sure to describe your role or response in the story - be reflective, not just descriptive. For example,

“When I was growing up in rural Missouri, I never imagined that someday I would be washing the infected stump of a double amputee war veteran in an inner-city veterans hospital. However, this experience taught me the importance of ...” Finish your introduction paragraph with a thesis statement that articulates your reason for wanting to attend medical school.

Within the next three paragraphs, develop your theme. Include examples of activities that demonstrate your core competencies. However, don’t just list these activities, describe them so that they exhibit your strengths, show that you have gained different viewpoints and perspectives, and reiterate your desire to attend medical school.

In your concluding paragraph, tie all your stories together with your theme. Show how your experiences have positively impacted your desire to become a doctor and how they have developed the skills necessary to succeed in medical school. Try to tie back to your introduction story.

- Have as many people as possible read your personal statement. Your readers should include all different backgrounds - an English teacher, a science teacher, a relative or best friend. While you may not take all their advice, getting more eyes on the personal statement allows you to get more ideas and be less likely to have grammatical or topographical mistakes.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread. Typos not only show laziness, but also suggest to the admissions committee a lack of caring, and they may wonder if you really want to attend medical school.
- For helpful examples and suggestions, see the following website:  
<https://www.shemmassianconsulting.com/blog/medical-school-personal-statement-analysis>
- Sometimes it helps to write your personal statement, walk away for a week or two, and then come back.
- If you are applying for MD-PhD programs, you will need to write two additional essays: 1) why you want to pursue a MD-PhD (3000 characters), and 2) your research experience, including a summary of a research project you have worked on and your contribution to that research project (10000 characters).

## **AMCAS Considerations and Recommendations**

- Double check and proofread everything. Then do it again. You don’t want to have your application delayed (or worse, thrown out) because of a careless typing error.
- Due to rolling admissions, it is ideal to apply as early in the application cycle as possible. However, this is not good advice if this means you are rushed and hurried as you fill out your application. The best time to apply is when you are ready. Make sure your personal statement is strong and has been read by multiple people, your activities are well organized and developed, and your coursework is accurately documented. Don’t submit an un-edited application just to get it in early.
- Ideally you will have your MCAT score when you submit your application. However, even if you don’t, you can still submit your application, and once you receive your MCAT score AMCAS will automatically submit it to the medical schools.
- When you submit your application to AMCAS, it is not immediately forwarded to the medical schools. It first must be verified by AMCAS, and this process takes up to six weeks.

- Public Texas medical schools (including Texas A&M, Texas Tech, and the University of Texas) do not utilize AMCAS, but have their own application system, the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service (TMDSAS, fee of \$140). Fewer than 5-10% of matriculants are out-of-state residents at these public Texas medical schools. If you do choose to apply, the TMDSAS submission opens May 1 (a month earlier than AMCAS).
- With all the different parts of the AMCAS application, you might be wondering what is the most important to admissions committees. In 2011, in an AAMC survey (*AAMC: Analysis in Brief, Vol 11:6, Sept 2011*), admissions committee members were asked to rank the importance of the different factors in medical student selection. The order of importance of the different factors (on scale of 1 to 5, with 5 the “most important”; the mean rating is in parenthesis): interview recommendation (4.5), letters of recommendation (3.8), GPA: cumulative science and math (3.7), community service: medical (3.6), GPA: cumulative (3.6), MCAT total scores (3.4), personal statements (3.4), medical/clinical work experience (3.4), community service: non-medical (3.3), leadership experience (3.2), completion of premedical requirements (3.1), experience with underserved populations (3.0).



## Applying to Medical School: Secondary Applications and Interviews

*Whatever good work you begin to do, beg of God with most earnest prayer to perfect it.*  
-Saint Benedict

A few weeks after you have submitted your AMCAS application, you will begin to receive secondary application requests. Some schools indiscriminately send secondary applications and every applicant will be asked to submit a secondary application. Other schools review the applications before asking for secondary applications, and only request from applicants that meet a GPA and MCAT score cut-off. The secondary applications are supplementary essay questions that request information beyond the information you put in your personal statement. You will pay an additional fee to submit secondary applications (usually range from \$50-\$150 each). After submitting your secondary application, you will receive a rejection or an interview invitation (time varies between submission and rejection/invitation - it could be anywhere from several days to several months). After interviews the medical schools make their final decisions and choose which students they will accept, waitlist, and reject. Except for early admission decisions, the AAMC rules state that medical schools are not allowed to notify students of acceptances until October 15 (however, they are permitted to make rejection notifications earlier).

### Secondary Essays

Secondary essays provide medical schools the opportunity to ask you specific questions that will give them an idea about whether you will be a good fit in their community. Therefore, the questions in the secondary essays often relate to core competencies the medical school would like to see in their applicant. Furthermore, they often want to see the applicant understands the mission and values of the individual medical school, so they will ask questions that show the applicant has done their research into the given school.

You should treat these essays in the same manner that you wrote your personal statement. Include specific examples in your essays and make them unique to you. Include stories and experiences that are different than those that you discussed in your personal statement. Have multiple readers proofread the essays. These essays have specific character/word counts, so it is important to be concise - make every word count. You should send secondary applications in within two-three days after receiving them, so you may want to develop some ideas beforehand.

Depending on the medical school, two to six additional essays may be requested. Some examples of secondary essay questions from various medical schools in previous years include (with word/character limit):

- How have your experiences serving others contributed to your personal growth? (400 words)
- Describe your motivation to attend this medical school. (400 words)
- If applicable, please describe any connections you have to the [medical school] communities. (400 words)
- If you have already graduated, briefly summarize your activities since graduation. (400 words)
- Is there anything you want the admissions committee to know about your qualifications for medical school that is not already represented in your application materials? Note: This space is provided for new information only, not to promote qualifications already highlighted in your other materials. (400 words)
- If you have taken a gap year(s), please explain what you have been, or will be, doing since graduating from your undergrad institution. (2000 characters)
- From your list of "most meaningful experiences" on the AMCAS application, choose one that has been the most formative in terms of your desire for a career in medicine. Why did that experience have such meaning for you in your decision-making process? How did it prepare you for a career in medicine? (200 words)
- We seek to train physicians who can connect with diverse patient populations with whom they may not share a similar background. Tell us about an experience that has broadened your own worldview or enhanced your ability to understand those unlike yourself. (200 words)
- Describe a non-academic challenge you have faced and explain how you overcame it. (200 words)
- If you have received a C grade or lower in any coursework, please explain. (none)
- Tell us about any specific reason(s) (personal, educational, etc.) why you see yourself at this medical school. (200 words)
- Please tell us an interesting fact about yourself that a casual acquaintance may find surprising or interesting. (50 words)
- Describe your health care experiences that involved direct exposure to physicians' clinical duties and how they have shaped your desire to apply to medical school.
- Describe examples of leadership experience in which you have significantly influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.
- Beyond academics (grades and MCATs), describe the most significant challenge you have faced and the steps you have taken to address this challenge.
- Describe examples of leadership experience in which you have significantly influenced others, helped resolve disputes, or contributed to group efforts over time.
- Give an example of what you have done to make your community a better place to live.
- program. (500 Characters)
- Practice after residency: How do you see yourself practicing medicine after residency training? (Please include choice of medical practice and location) (500 Characters)
- We are all differentiated from or connected to one another by individual inflections that constitute our diversity. Explain how your relationship with your own diversity and to the diversities of others manifests in your personal and professional activities. (500 Words)
- Share with us your thoughts about the relevance – or not – of diverse learning environments in which you wish to learn medicine. (500 Words)
- Comment on how you hope to impact medicine in the future. (1500 Characters)
- Discuss a time when you stepped out of your comfort zone. What were the challenges? What did you learn? (250 words)
- If you could present yourself to the Committee on Admissions, what would you want to make sure they knew about you? (250 words)

## CASPer Test

Some medical schools may request that you take an additional exam called the CASPer test. This test is a situational judgement test (SJT), which is a type of psychological test that evaluates your personality and people skills (it advertises as assessing ten traits: collaboration, communication, empathy, equity, ethics, motivation, problem solving, professionalism, resilience, and self-awareness).

The exam is entirely computer-based, and you can take it at home on your personal computer. It takes 60-90 minutes and is comprised of six video or written scenarios. After each scenario, three open-ended questions are presented and should be answered. For sample scenarios and questions see: <https://takecasper.com/test-prep/>

The fee to take the CASPer test is \$40, with an additional \$10 for each school you want to send your score.

## Interviews

The interview is widely considered the most important part of the medical school selection process (see page 32 of this handbook). The interview can make or break an applicant - many applicants with strong scores receive rejections because of poor interviews, and vice versa. Therefore, it is important to take the interview seriously and be well prepared.

- Wear professional attire and remember to smile.
- Present yourself as confident but not arrogant. Articulate your strengths but recognize your weaknesses. Don't take all the credit for your accomplishments, remember to recognize the role others played in helping you get where you are today. Likewise, don't blame others for your failures, but recognize the role you played in that failure as well.
- Prepare for common interview questions beforehand. You should have a planned response for questions such as: "Why do you want to be a doctor?" or "Tell us about yourself."
- However, it is impossible to prepare for every question you could be asked. But if you have maintained a reflection journal throughout your shadowing and service experiences, read over the journal before your interview so you have stories and ideas to discuss. This will allow you to prepare for the interview without sounding rehearsed.
- Look over your application before your interview. Remind yourself what you wrote about - the committee will likely have the application in front of them and will pull something out of the application to ask you about.
- Research the school. Be aware of any unique attributes, learning styles, or educational or extracurricular activities they offer, and be able to explain why you find these attractive. Show the committee you want to be there.
- Make sure to have a list of questions to ask the committee about the school. This shows that you truly are interested in attending that school. However, don't ask questions that are easily found through the school's website. Ask deeper or more specific questions.

- Schedule a mock interview with the student success center or with one (or more) of your professors.
- Research current news stories and events that might pertain to the health field in that location. For example – are there any specific healthcare struggles that are currently occurring in the state? Any current legislations related to healthcare currently being discussed? (think marijuana/CBD, opioids, healthcare costs, doctor shortages, closure of rural hospitals, mental health in schools). Do a quick google search of [medical school location] + health/medicine/etc + news to find these stories. Not only will this give you things to discuss, but it also might give you an idea of what questions the admission committee might ask you. You should repeat this for each school you interview at.
- Approximately half of medical schools use an interview style called the Multiple Mini Interview (MMI). This style involves a rotation between six and ten interview stations. At each station, the interviewee will be given a question, allowed to prepare for two minutes, and then engage in a five to ten minute conversation with the interviewer. Questions presented can vary depending on the school, but sometimes include a patient-physician scenario, an ethical question, a team challenge with other interviewees, or standard interview questions. Find example questions on the following website: <https://multipleminiinterview.com/>
- Each year, studentdoctor.net provides information on interview experiences and questions for specific schools based on input from current applicants.  
See: <https://schools.studentdoctor.net/schools/2/allopathic-medical-interview-feedback/1#siu>

## Other Resources

*“Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven’t done one thing. You are just talking.” - Dr. Wangari Maathai ’64*

**S**tudents with all different background and experiences have succeeded in the path to medical school. As you navigate your own personal path, you will find you have questions that are not answered in this handbook. Fortunately, there are numerous resources available to obtain these answers. In addition, exploring multiple different sources of information will give you different perspectives and ideas. Start this early in your pre-medical career so you can make changes to your plans as needed.

Furthermore, reading books about the medical field, the human body, or diverse communities can broaden your view on what it means to be a physician. The summer reading list below provides books that may be of interest to a pre-medical student.

## Websites

- [Students-residents.aamc.org](http://Students-residents.aamc.org)
- [Savvypremed.com](http://Savvypremed.com)
- [Reddit/premed](http://Reddit/premed)
- [Reddit/MCAT](http://Reddit/MCAT)
- [Prospectivedoctor.com](http://Prospectivedoctor.com)
- [Princetonreview.com/med-school-advice](http://Princetonreview.com/med-school-advice)
- [Medicalschoolhq.net](http://Medicalschoolhq.net)
- [Studentdoctor.net](http://Studentdoctor.net)
- [Kevinmd.com](http://Kevinmd.com)

## Summer Reading List

- Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016.
- Dunn, Rob R. *The Man Who Touched His Own Heart: True Tales of Science, Surgery, and Mystery*. First edition. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2015.
- Dunn, Rob R. *The Wild Life of Our Bodies: Predators, Parasites, and Partners That Shape Who We Are Today*. New York, NY: Harper, 2011.
- Farmer, Paul. *To Repair the World*. University of California Press, 2013.
- Gawande, Atul. *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance*. New York: Metropolitan, 2007
- Gladwell, Malcom. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Malcolm Gladwell, 2013.
- Graeber, Charles. *The Breakthrough: Immunotherapy and the Race to Cure Cancer*. First edition. New York: Twelve, 2018.
- Hamblin, James. *If Our Bodies Could Talk: Operating and Maintaining a Human Body*. Toronto: Anchor Books, 2016.
- Hunter, James C. *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*. California: Prima, 1998.
- Jauhar, Sandeep. *Heart: A History*. First edition. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.
- Kidder, Tracy. *Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World*. New York: Random House, 2003.
- Lents, Nathan H.. *Human Errors: A Panorama of Our Glitches, From Pointless Bones to Broken Genes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018.
- Maathai, Wangari. *Unbowed: A Memoir*. New York: Knopf, 2006. **\*\*Wangari Maathai was a 1964 graduate of St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.**
- McAuliffe, Kathleen. *This is Your Brain on Parasites*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2016.
- Millard, Candice. *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President*. New York: Doubleday, 2011. **\*\*Candice Millard was the 2019 Convocation Speaker at Benedictine College.**
- Moalem, Sharon. *Survival of the Sickest: The Surprising Connections Between Disease and Longevity*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.
- Novogratz, Jacqueline. *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*. New York: Rodale, 2009.
- Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Random House, 2010.
- Taylor, Jeremy. *Body by Darwin: How Evolution Shapes our Health and Transforms Medicine*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

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