



Every Road is Different

The CSU Student's Prospective Guide to
Medical School

**Cleveland State
University**
College of Sciences
and Health Professions

Office of Pre-Professional Health Programs
Cleveland State University
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Acknowledgments

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If you would like to learn more about how you can contribute to future publications of this guide, contact Brittany Wampler.

This guide is my gift to Cleveland State University & every student there who has ever felt lost with this intimidating process. I aspired to make this guide hoping the lend a hand to those who need it, for there were times in which I surely did.

-Mark Biro

Introduction

Welcome to *Every Road is Different- The CSU Student's Prospective Guide to Medical School*. This guide contains valuable advice from Cleveland State Alumni about the distance traveled from college to medical school. The information ranges from students just starting their first year of medical school to those currently completing third year rotations. This guide will cover important topics like:

The Cleveland State Experience

Preparation for the MCAT

The Application Cycle

What I Wish I knew

What to Expect in Medical School

These topics are by no means entirely comprehensive, but will offer you a chance to have many common questions students face answered. As the title infers, each of these students have taken unique paths toward medical school, some of which may relate more or less to your unique situation.

This guide is not intended to replace the invaluable input of your pre-professional advisors, but may bridge the gap when you are unsure or need reassurance. Each of us have been through the post test / late night / pre-mcat/ or just because freakout in which we needed to find something to keep us going - and hopefully this guide can help provide that.

Without further adieu - we will introduce our Cleveland State Alumni.



Mark Biro, Case, Third year

Undergraduate Institution: Cleveland State University – Honors Program

Post Baccalaureate Student? No

Undergraduate Major: Biology Major, Chemistry Minor

Undergraduate GPA: 3.94

Science GPA: 3.97

MCAT Scores/Total: Bio 12/Phys 13/Verbal 11/Total 36

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? AMCAS

How many schools did you apply to? 9

How many schools did you interview at? 3: CWRU, OSU & UPITT

How many acceptances did you receive? 3

How many waitlists did you receive? 2

Medical School Information

Medical School: Case Western Reserve School of Medicine

Current Year: Third year

Why did you choose your medical school? I chose Case mainly because it was the only place that I interviewed at where I felt truly comfortable and that all of the students were happy to be there.

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? The Law library— I would highly suggest it!

Favorite professor? Dr. Kalafatis because he always pushed you to be your best.

Most difficult CSU class? Biochemistry (Chem Version) with Dr. Kalafatis, but after taking this class, I did not even open a biochemistry book in medical school.



Thomas Bomberger, Case, Second year

Undergraduate Institution: University of Rochester

Post Baccalaureate Student? Yes

Undergraduate Major: History

Undergraduate GPA: True UG GPA: 3.45/Post-Bacc GPA: 3.99/AMCAS calculated GPA: 3.58

Science GPA: 3.8

MCAT Scores/Total: Bio 11/Phys 12/Verbal 11/Total 34

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? AMCAS only

How many schools did you apply to? Initially 32... completed secondary applications at 26 schools

How many schools did you interview at? 6

How many acceptances did you receive? 3

How many waitlists did you receive? 6

Medical School Information

Medical School: Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Current Year: Second year

Why did you choose your medical school? Case was my favorite place I interviewed at. The curriculum is very flexible, and that really appealed to me. However, the place had a good vibe too. I also have ties to Cleveland so I wanted to stay here.

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? Library, but I like to switch it up.

Favorite professor? Denny Sampson is great. To stay on his good side, just show up for class and take things seriously. Talk to him after class, don't email him asking for things.

Most difficult CSU class? I took "biochem and molecular biology" offered through the bio department during a 6-week block over the summer. It was BRUTAL.



Domenic Craner, NeoMed, Third year

Undergraduate Institution: University of Akron/CSU

Post Baccalaureate Student? Yes

Undergraduate Major: Family and Child Development

Undergraduate GPA: 3.4

Science GPA: 3.6

MCAT Scores/Total: Bio 9/Phys 9/Verbal 11/Total 29

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? AMCAS Early Decision

How many schools did you apply to? 1 (early decision)

How many schools did you interview at? 1

How many acceptances did you receive? 1

How many waitlists did you receive? 0

Medical School Information

Medical School: NEOMED

Current Year: Third year

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? The Law library.

Favorite professor? Doerder.

Most difficult CSU class? Biochemistry.



Scott Fulton, VCOM, Second year

Undergraduate Institution: Cleveland State University

Post Baccalaureate Student? No

Undergraduate Major: Biology and Chemistry

Undergraduate GPA: 3.61

Science GPA: 3.56

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? AACOMAS

How many schools did you apply to? 3

How many schools did you interview at? 3

How many acceptances did you receive? 2

How many waitlists did you receive? 1

Medical School Information

Medical School: Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM)

Current Year: Second year

Why did you choose your medical school? With its exceptional reputation, high board score averages, mission trip opportunities, and overall friendly atmosphere I felt VCOM was the right place for me. The campus is beautiful and set in a great town in Blacksburg, VA. The administration is so helpful in all aspects of medical school and is willing to listen to you. Also, when I first walked in, I saw they had a rugby ball and trophy in their case when they played against PCOM. After four years of rugby at CSU, I was sold.

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? Group study floor in the library.

Favorite professor? Doerder, Modney, Ball, and Bill Ransom.

Most difficult CSU class? Intro to University Life (kidding)...O. Chem II!



Shari Moore, ATKSU, Second year

Undergraduate Institution: Smith College

Post Baccalaureate Student? Yes

Undergraduate Major: Neuroscience

Undergraduate GPA: 3.0

Science GPA: 2.96

MCAT Scores/Total: Bio 6/Phys 8/Verbal 10/ Writing N/Total 24

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? Both

How many schools did you apply to? 30

How many schools did you interview at? 5

How many acceptances did you receive? 4: 3 MD & 1 DO

How many waitlists did you receive? 1

Medical School Information

Medical School: A. T. Still University- Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine

Current Year: OMSII; Second Year Medical Student, Class of 2018

Why did you choose your medical school? I chose the school that best represented my ideals in a doctor. I wanted training to not only be competent but also be able to address additional differences with patients, spirituality, racially and those suspicious of traditional western medicine. I hope to pursue a career in Pathology, Obstetrics or perhaps Pediatrics. Patiently awaiting the beginning of my rotation years.

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? Lobby of the Science Research Building or the couches in the main classroom.

Favorite professor? Dr. John Schupp and Dr. Michael Kalafatis.

Most difficult CSU class? Biochemistry 1 and 2 with Dr. Kalafatis.



Andrew Olsen, Ohio University, First year

Undergraduate Institution: The College of Wooster

Post Baccalaureate Student? Yes

Undergraduate Major: History

Undergraduate GPA: 3.1

Science GPA: 3.8

MCAT Scores/Total: 10-9-9 and 8-10-10/ 28

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? Both

How many schools did you apply to? 19, but cancelled 13 after acceptance at OU-HCOM

How many schools did you interview at? 1

How many acceptances did you receive? 1

How many waitlists did you receive? 0

Medical School Information

Medical School: Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine

Current Year: First year

Why did you choose your medical school? OU-HCOM was my first choice on my list of realistic choices due to its collegial atmosphere and the massive support network offered by the CORE.

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? Library quiet floors.

Favorite professor? Dr. Zurcher.

Most difficult CSU class? Physics. 231 and 232.



Lily Velet, NeoMed, Third year

Undergraduate Institution: Cleveland State University

Post Baccalaureate Student? No

Undergraduate Major: Biology

Undergraduate GPA: 4.0

Science GPA: 4.0

AMCAS and AACOMAS Applications? AMCAS

How many schools did you apply to? 1

How many schools did you interview at? 1

How many acceptances did you receive? 1

How many waitlists did you receive? 0

Medical School Information

Medical School: Northeast Ohio Medical University

Current Year: Third year

Why did you choose your medical school? Cost of attendance was lowest, close to home, thought that I wanted to do primary care.

CSU Information

Favorite place to study on campus? Honors lounge.

Favorite professor? Dr. Shukla.

Most difficult CSU class? Genetics with Dr. Boerner.

Experiences at CSU

As a whole, the city of Cleveland and Cleveland State University provides students with a number of excellent opportunities and experiences within the academic and healthcare setting. In this section, a number of these opportunities will be discussed in order to try to help you best utilize your time and efforts at CSU and outside of campus.



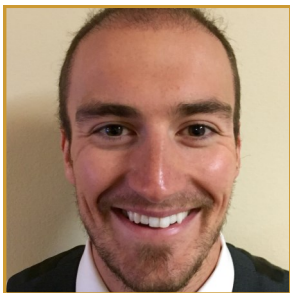
Who or what was your best source information en route to you becoming a medical student?



I had quite a few mentors and sources of information while preparing for my application to medical school. Being an older student, I had the advantage that many of my classmates from my undergraduate experience were already getting into residency when I was beginning the journey. I know that the input of friends who had been through the process was invaluable along the way. I also took advantage of the logistical information offered by Brittany Wampler. Her navigation of the application process and availability for statement planning and execution was very helpful.



I relied on myself to find out what I thought I needed to know about medical school and how to be a competitive applicant. Even though I got in, retrospectively, I wish I had a close relationship with a physician that provided guidance. To address this question, I used google for my information; in particular, I had a particular affinity toward forums and blogs that were authored by real students discussing real-life med school concerns and issues. Every time I met somebody that was a medical student or resident, I would inquire about the process and ask for advice.



The top two resources for me were Dr. Barbara Modney (our Pre-Med advisor at the time) and upperclassmen. Dr. Modney helped me learn the process and how to go about applying, as well as what things I should be involved in. Older students were invaluable since they had just gone through the process and could tell you “how it really is.” Don’t be afraid to ask anyone for advice! I asked a lot of people and took whatever most people said and made my own plan.



We had a different advisor when I was at CSU, but the advice I got from Brittany late in my application cycle was great. Additionally, I would talk to anyone you can who is currently in medical school or is in the year above you, as they can be helpful as well. However, my biggest piece of advice is that you should take all advice with a grain of salt. There is a lot of advice out there, and not all of it is helpful or good advice. Seeking out a variety of sources and talking to a lot of people can help tease out the good advice from the bad.

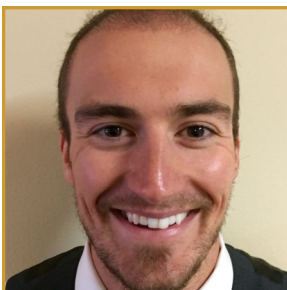
What service experiences / jobs / or shadowing experiences did you have prior to medical school that you believe made you stand out? Would you recommend it to others and how did you find out how to get involved?



I had a lot of hospital volunteer experience, but that didn't really make me stand out. I believe that my undergraduate research, especially my thesis presentation via the Honors program made me stand out. Doing research at the Cleveland Clinic/Lerner looks very good on one's application. In addition to that, the Clinic provides a very good environment to learn how to behave professionally. I got my spot at Lerner through the honors program. I also noted a lot of involvement with my church, which helped make me stand out.



I think two experiences that made me stick out prior to medical school were two years of research experience in the Biomedical Engineering Department at Cleveland Clinic and one year experience as a gross anatomy teaching assistant at Cleveland State. Research is becoming more of a necessity for students applying to medical school every year and after interviewing for Case for two years, I can say I have barely seen an applicant without some time spent researching. However, I can tell you that you are in luck because there are opportunities for you at places like CSU, CCF, UH and Metro within the Cleveland Area. CSU specifically has a ton of opportunities over the summer for students that come with a very nice stipend. I would recommend trying the CSU specific opportunities when you are first getting comfortable in the lab, as the members of the lab are very understanding and are often great teachers too. Also, if you have the chance to be a teaching assistant, I would take full advantage of it because these are usually paid and are great speaking points for interview day. It doesn't necessarily have to be gross anatomy to be worthwhile or provide you a valuable experience.

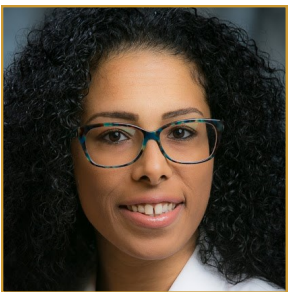


I really got involved at CSU starting my 2nd year. I volunteered as a Patient Service Liaison for a year at the Cleveland Clinic and also at 2 different nursing homes. I did research at the Cleveland Clinic and with Dr. Doerder. I held jobs as a mechanic, worked in the ER and ICU at a hospital, and was a tutor with TASC at CSU. I shadowed at a few different hospitals within the Cleveland Clinic system. I've always liked to try new things and would highly suggest finding something you might be interested in and being persistent until you get to try it. Be proactive!

Did you receive any letters of recommendation from faculty members at Cleveland State? If so, how did you go about establishing a relationship in order to get the best letter of recommendation?



It was easier to establish relationships in upper level classes due to the class size. I found it best to just let my class performance do most of the work. If you are an engaged learner (not playing on your phone/computer/tablet) they'll notice. Also, if you do well in the course, they'll notice. If you're struggling in a course, don't write that professor off. They could be your best recommendation letter asset. Make attempts to meet with the professor to discuss areas where you're having difficulty and show initiative to incorporate extra learning opportunities through discussion after class that initiative will show your drive and dedication to do well, which sometimes can be invaluable. Also, doing research with a professor helps.



I did, I used a letter from Dr. Michael Kalafatis as a reference letter. The others I obtained from my volunteer work, one from a previous employer and the others from professors from my original college. First off, always ask if they can write a FAVORABLE recommendation for you. If they can't speak highly of you or have enough detail, usually they will use this as an opportunity to decline or at least give you some better idea of who could write a more personal letter. The best letters for me didn't come from the classes I did the best in, they came from the classes that I was able to be most vocal about my thoughts and show my personality. In science courses that is often hard, but meeting with a teacher to discuss difficult concepts, showing how you interact with your classmates, following up on topics of interest or asking for additional materials are all ways to showcase who you are and where your interests lie. You can also ask to meet along the way so that they can become a mentor and also get a better idea of your framework for attending medical school and your other endeavors outside of their course.



When I applied, I think the basic requirement is that you're going to need a **minimum** of 3 letters, 1 of which should be your research advisor, and 2 others should come from science faculty. On top of that, some schools will accept other letters (non-science faculty or service project/leadership letters), so you may want to get some letters from them as well. Where to get LORs? The cliché is that best letters come from people who know you well, and this is probably true, but I'd add that they also come from people *willing to write you a good letter*. For me, one was from my research advisor with whom I had a lower level class, and 2 were from professors with whom I took courses (all at CSU).

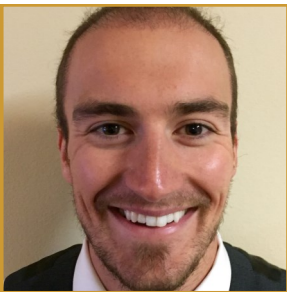
What organizations or opportunities did you get as a result of being a CSU student that you might not have had otherwise?



One unique opportunity CSU provided me was the chance to do 16 credit hours of research at the Cleveland Clinic. It is safe to say that I would not have had this same opportunity at other institutions. This research was on top of other paid research that I completed at CSU as well. I also think one of the most underappreciated opportunities you get at CSU that you do not get elsewhere is the diversity of the student base. As an undergrad, it was eye-opening and made me appreciate my situation and provided extra motivation along the way. My post bac friends were slightly older, but far wiser and helped keep me on track as an undergraduate.



CSU students are everywhere in Cleveland. As a result of being a student at CSU, I was able to procure a position at MetroHealth as an ED scribe, which played a big role in my acceptance into Medical School. Also, because CSU is so focused on placing its graduates in good positions, I think there is more helpful guidance offered from Brittany that many students get at other universities.



I am very thankful to have gone to CSU because it allowed me to be involved in several different organizations, research opportunities, and volunteering that I might not have been able to do at other schools. I was president of AMSA, president of CSU Men's Rugby team, and social chair for the American Chemical Society. I was also able to be involved in two different research experiences, and participated in the first Patient Service Liaison volunteering opportunity at the Cleveland Clinic. I was also fortunate enough to attend 2 National AMSA conferences through CSU.



The honors program arranged a wonderful research position at Lerner. The honors program scholarship was a wonderful opportunity, and I am very thankful for it.

Prepping for the MCAT

I theorize that if you said “MCAT” out loud in select buildings around campus during the spring semester you would invoke the panic response in juniors, seniors, and post-bac students alike. With so much on the line, there is are a number of reasons students get stressed about the exam. We hope that our advice in the upcoming section will help make this process easier for you - as there is much misinformation constantly floating around about this test.



What point in your career at CSU did you take the MCAT and how early before the test did you begin studying? Did you plan for the MCAT in your class schedule by taking fewer classes around the time you were studying for the test? What advice do you have about timing for the MCAT for students planning to apply during the summer?



I didn't begin to study for the MCAT in earnest until about a month prior to my test date. **THIS WAS A BAD CHOICE.** While I did just fine on the exam, I have no doubt that I would have done substantially better with more preparation. Scheduling is very dependent on how many directions you are being pulled in between work, school family, etc. For me, I didn't have to change anything. This may not be the case for everyone.



I took the MCAT the spring prior to the summer I applied. It was after I had already taken all of the pre-reqs for medical school. I didn't really change my course schedule to fit the MCAT (Learning in class is learning for the MCAT after all). I would block out specific time periods throughout my weekly schedule that were just devoted to reviewing old material for the MCAT. My best advice is to begin studying for the MCAT as soon as you start college by taking the time to really learn and understand the material in your classes. A lot of people roll their eyes when administrators or professors say it, but it's true. When you start truly studying for the MCAT you don't want to have to be wasting time re-learning (or learning for the first time) concepts that you should already know. You want to be able to just review the material and focus on incorporating into the test.

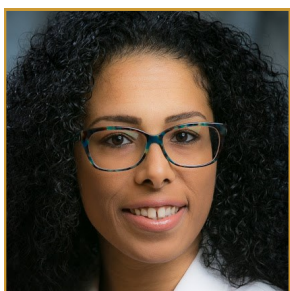


On the advice of Dr. Modney early in undergrad I decided to take the MCAT June of my junior year. She recommended that I get most of my prerequisites out of the way before the spring of my junior year to leave room for studying. I ended up taking a heavier load the first semester of my junior year so I could clear space to study for the MCAT. I started studying in January before taking my test in the middle of June. Although this ended up working out for me, I would suggest that the earlier you take the exam, like in May, the easier it makes getting in applications on time. If you wait until the end of the summer you are practically toast, just because by the time you get in applications some schools will have already given out most of their interviews.

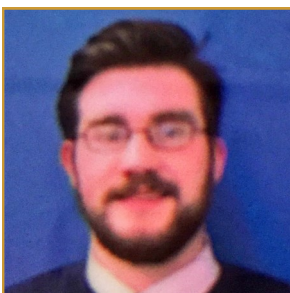
Did you use a class to prepare for the MCAT like ExamCrackers, Kaplan or Princeton Review or were you able to study on your own in preparation for the test?



I used ExamCrackers, but I didn't really like it. It did not cover the topics extensively enough for adequate preparation, in my opinion. I liked the ExamCrackers audio osmosis for audio study. Listening to it multiple times really hammered down the topics. Medical school is expensive. All the books you will need to buy, on top of tuition and fees really add up. So, it's silly to be cheap in your preparation for med school. You have to pay up (save up ahead of time) and buy a good resource to study for the MCAT.



ExamCrackers was helpful. Kaplan and Princeton Review didn't allow me enough flexibility to just focus on places that I needed work. So I got a tutor, a Case Western Reserve 3rd year medical student. Worth a shot to try to find someone willing to walk you through how to approach problems who has been there.

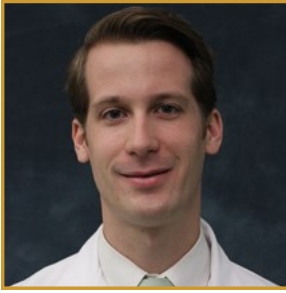


I did not take a course. I studied using ExamCrackers materials and by purchasing practice tests online. I felt that this gave me a fairly good base of understanding going into the exam, but I feel that I could have benefitted from a course. Additionally, I feel in retrospect that the ExamCrackers materials may have been too shallow in their depth of focus on each of the subjects.

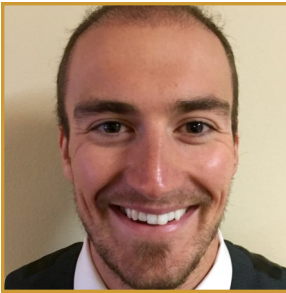


In preparation for the MCAT I ended up taking the Kaplan course and honestly would do it again in a heartbeat. It really is scary to look at those prices (can be up to \$2000) to take the class, but in the grand scheme of things that is peanuts compared to the debt you will accumulate in medical school. This test can also help you to get scholarship at some institutions if you are near the top of their incoming classes MCAT scores or allow you to attend your "dream school." I honestly still think I would have done all right without the class, but I do not know if they would have been high enough for me to get into the schools I did. Also to be honest, you should only want to take the test one time because schools usually do not treat it like the ACT or SAT was treated for undergrad. Kaplan did not just give out the material for the test, but also provided simple strategies to attack questions and if you follow them, you will be successful.

What was your best resource for the study period?



Practice exams, practice exams, practice problems, practice problems, practice exams. If you're studying on your own, you should work through every official MCAT practice exam by the time you take the test, and go over all incorrect answers in detail (making sure you understand every aspect of why you got each question wrong). Also, replicate the test conditions as best as you can for a selection of them (set timers and what not, and stick to them).



The best resources were the medical students that taught our classes. There were two in particular that had great ways of explaining difficult concepts and helping to memorize things.



I used ExamCrackers and audio osmosis, but as I went through them, I had to take the time to really understand what they were saying, i.e. annotate them. From now on out in your education, you can't just memorize stuff. You have to be able to understand what you are learning, because exams require that you synthesize and apply that information in different circumstances. Practice questions are really important. You may think you understand something until you encounter it in a question—and then you realize you are confused. They say practice tests reflect how you will perform on the big test day. Use practice tests to gauge how you are retaining and understanding the material. They'll also help with time management!

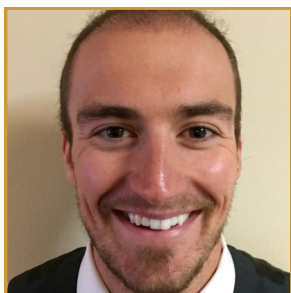


I think the best resources for me during the study period were Kaplan's seemingly endless question bank and Kaplan's flashcard set. The last month or so before the test, I only really reviewed flashcards along with questions and saw my practice test scores range from 34-38. When I ended up seeing a 36 on my actual test score report, I may have let out girlish scream (or squeal) of satisfaction in Dr. Shukla's lab. Keep this in mind - **You do not have to memorize textbooks, but understand how to approach concepts and basic facts for the MCAT. The test is not designed to make sure that you know each step of a biologic pathway.**

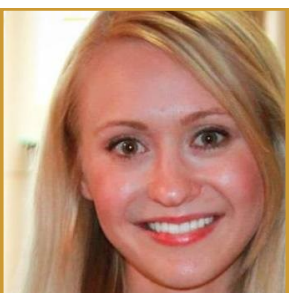
How did you find balance during your study period? Also, how did you pick yourself up if you had a bad practice exam or bad day at the books?



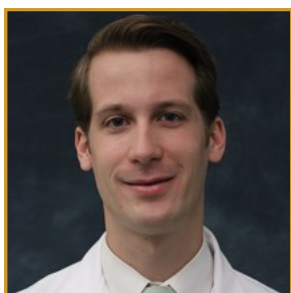
I created a study plan ahead of time and stuck to it. I only deviated from that schedule if there was an emergency that caused me to. In the schedule, I also built in afternoons off and made sure I ended each night with an appropriate amount of time to relax, watch television and enjoy life. After a bad practice test or overall study session, I would take a little bit of time to relax. More often than not, being burned out was the main reason for the negative performance. I would take a few hours and regroup, then take some time to review the topics that I had done poorly on usually the next day.



As I said before I was entirely too busy during my MCAT studying and should have taken a lighter load than I did, and take a break from some of the extracurricular activities I was involved in. A lot of times, my breaks were the volunteering, rugby practices/games, or organization activities I was in. If I had a bad practice exam I tried to see which area I performed the worse in and focus on that and realized I just needed to move on and keep chugging through.



It's hard to study all day long, so I would take breaks in the evenings and have snack breaks scattered throughout the day. Ultimately, a schedule is really helpful. If you can't do that, make a list of things you want to accomplish during the day. If you get behind, stress will kick in, and will result in more efficient studying (hopefully). If and when you get discouraged, remember, most people have gone, will go, and are going through the same thing you are going through right now. Also, keep in mind that I have made it, others ahead of me have made it, and you will too!



You definitely need to be disciplined with your studying, but you should also keep your sanity. For me, this meant setting aside time for socializing and working out in addition to studying. For bad days/scores, just keep in mind two things:

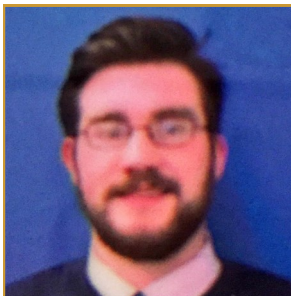
1. It takes more than one bad score to make a trend.
2. The only way you get better is by practicing. You want to peak on test day, not months beforehand. As long as you keep working through problems and learning from your mistakes, you'll be trending in the right direction.

The Application Process

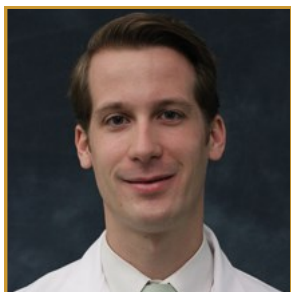
The application cycle begins May prior to the interview season and extends through the month of May the following year. Over the course of this time period, students must write a personal statements, arrange letters of recommendation, fill out primary and secondary applications, and later interview at schools before receiving an acceptance to medical school. Each of these stages provides specific challenges that must be overcome before making the jump into medical school.



Where did you initially seek information about the application process? Was it from an advisor, a meeting about the process, the AAMC website, or peers? What online tools did you use to help you decide where to apply?

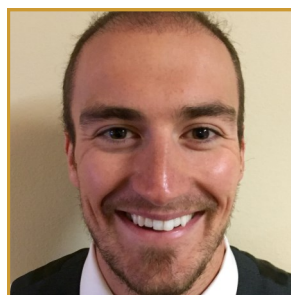


I had many resources when going through this process. Students who had been through the process and are willing to impart pearls are always a good start. Second, if they are worth talking to, those students will invariably say reach out to your pre-professional health programs advisor. Brittany Wampler was a great resource for all things application related. Her information meetings are very informative on a large scale, and she is also very straightforward when meeting one on one. She allows each of her students the ability to send in the best application they can.



So the application process is pretty absurd. I would definitely use the AAMC website initially just to get a lay of the land. However, that website isn't comprehensive. By that, I mean that there are many tricks of the trade they don't mention, and the format of the application is confusing. For things like that, I would use the advisors at CSU and students in the classes above me. I mainly sought information from my friends who had gone through the process. Plan to have a number of people review your entire application at least a month ahead of time so they can give you feedback, you can make edits, then send it out to them again for a second review.

For deciding where to apply, I used mainly the MCAT scores to help me rule out schools, as well as applying to regional schools and schools I had some kind of connection to (e.g., my undergrad institution). I used MSAR tool is on the AMCAS website to find schools that were decent "fits" for my MCAT scores and GPA, but I think you have to pay about \$25 for this (worth it). As a general rule, you should plan to apply to all the Ohio schools, any schools with which you have a connection, and a number of schools that you're in a competitive range for. I think the average number of schools that people apply to is over 20, so keep that in mind.



I first learned about the application process from some of the AMSA officers including a friend and a former CSU AMSA President & National AMSA President Nida Degesys (yep I'm bragging cause she is awesome). They provided a tutorial at one of the AMSA meetings, but were very helpful once they went through and applied themselves, offering advice that you would not otherwise have foreseen.

How long will it take to get my application done, start to finish? When did you begin working on application materials? When did you ask for letters of recommendation?



DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE APPLICATION PROCESS. This took me easily 6 weeks once I was granted online access to them and closer to 10 weeks when I factor in the work I did before going online. I began thinking about my applications in April with the intention of sending them in by mid June. I had my meetings to get my letters of recommendation at the beginning of the semester (around February 15), knowing I had to develop a intentional rapport with my professors, and to give AMPLE time to the other writers on my list.



In a perfect world I think you could put about a week into applications and have everything ready. However, I would say that the primary application including getting my scores, getting essays and resume together, and letters of recommendation took about one month to complete. I would plan to spend about this amount of time on the primary application, maybe with a little more or less depending on how efficient you can be. I began right after I took my test in late June and submitted it at the end of July. I know there are ways to see some of the information and criteria for personal statements before the applications open and I would highly recommend checking this out in hindsight.

A big catch with applications is waiting on them getting processed, which takes a while and longer if you get in your application a month or two after they have opened the up for submission. I got all of my secondary applications between September and October and didn't have them all completed until mid October. I do not recommend anyone do this for MD schools (DO schools have slightly later deadlines so that's actually okay), unless they have a score to back it up. I missed out on the chance to interview at a few schools based on this and found out after talking with the admissions departments some of those schools.



This depends on your ability to write a personal statement and how easily you can change your essays to match your schools interest. **DO** not copy and paste the same answers for every school. Spend time tailoring them to each school- it shows. I asked for all my recommendations about 6 months in advance because- I hosted them on interfolio and was really happy with the service and the timeliness and ease of use.

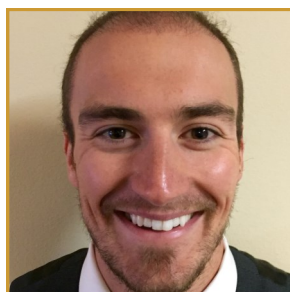
What did you do in order to get the perfect personal statement? How did you make your personal statement stand out?



Getting a perfect personal statement is very hard. It's hard to walk the fine line between expressing your capabilities vs bragging, as well as revealing personal aspects without looking like you're asking for pity. For these reasons, I felt that the personal statement was difficult to write. Make sure that as you are writing, you are already thinking of people that can edit your personal statement. Give them enough time to edit and provide constructive criticism. Don't feel bad if you have to rewrite several times. I think a good personal statement is personal and most importantly explains why *you* should be accepted.



I'm a firm believer in the fact that your personal statement should be a story of who you are and where you're going to go because of it. Its easy to get caught up in trying to say all the right things (You don't actually have to use the phrases primary care, community, patient care or hard work in your statement to get accepted!), and listing all of your accomplishments which can become frustrating trying to fit it all into the allotted space. You need to be able to tell a story about yourself that is entertaining to the reader and makes them want to know more about who you are. This is your chance to interject some of your own personality into your application. Discuss your achievements by describing what you learned from them and not just listing what you did. Give your personal statement a theme and title. If you do that, then you can start from the beginning with a direction you want your story to go, write multiple drafts, have faculty and friends proof read it.



It took me a long time to finally start and have something on my paper. I had thought about it a lot in my head, but one day I felt creative and just sat down and wrote it. I went through about three or four drafts in total and had about 5 different people read it. I wrote honestly about my life and motivation to become a physician. We all hear countless times, "don't just put 'because you want to help people'", and I got really hung up on that because that is a big part of it. Finally I realized that really was one of the biggest reasons, so I wrote around that subject with additions of my experiences.



Be honest. Everyone wants to help people, everyone has struggled, but what makes you interesting is your perspective and how you dealt with these challenges. Perhaps your essay can be about distance traveled. I am a first generation college student from a family who hates doctors, my essay was about what drives me.

What is the best advice that you heard about the interview process?



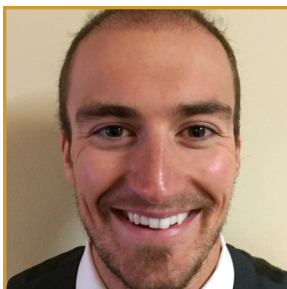
This is a chance to share an embarrassing story at my own expense for your benefit. The best advice I heard about the interview process came on the day of my first interview. An hour into the day, a tour guide mentioned that we should have read up on the school and curriculum. It appeared I was the only one who didn't do enough research on the school before interview day, because I instead focused on how to answer interview questions beforehand. I had a few hours before both my student and faculty interview luckily, so I ran (yes ran once I was out of sight of anyone) to the bathroom and read as much info from the handouts as possible. I spent quite a bit of time in there so I can't imagine what the others thought I was doing in there, but I managed to cram enough into my brain that the rest of the day went a bit more smoothly. I do not think I will ever make a mistake like that again because of it.



When you get to the interview, the school has already seen and thoroughly reviewed your application. They know the classes you took and your grades, they know your MCAT scores, they know your volunteer work, etc. If they're interviewing you that means they liked you on paper and want to know who you are off paper. You've made it through the hard part! They like you already! They think you could be successful in their program! Now they just want to know if you're a good fit personally. Let your personality show, be yourself, let them see the side of you that can't be seen on paper.



Feel confident and comfortable in your own skin. They can ask you anything. It depends on where you go to interview, so prepare accordingly. If you interview at an academic school that emphasizes research, then expect to be asked about your research. Otherwise, they may not ask about it (but always be prepared). They always ask why you want to be a doctor. Always. It won't hurt to prepare a recited answer ahead of time. They almost always ask about what you do for fun, so have a polished answer for that (allows your personality to shine through). Read about the school ahead of time and ask questions about the school, their curriculum, etc. Appear interested and engaged during the entire interview.



The best advice I heard was to be honest with them. As much as you may practice doing an interview, you will never come across the same questions that they will actually ask you. I have heard some crazy stories about some of the questions they ask, and had a few myself. Don't try and tell them what you think they want to hear. If you're honest, they can tell, and you'll be able to answer any question they throw at you.

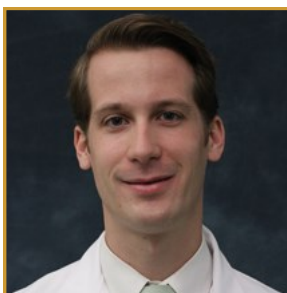
Did you ever contact schools during the application process or find it necessary to update them on your information?



Contacting schools is beneficial and shows that you are interested. It is also very good to write down the name and email of all the people you encounter during your interview in order to send them personalized ‘thank you’ emails afterwards. These go a long way. Everyone hears of this tip, but not everyone follows through. Think about the application process as a dichotomous process. There are things that are out of your control once the application process begins (MCAT score, GPA, undergraduate school) and there are things you have control over (how you are perceived= personal statement, thank you notes, interview, being proactive and engaged, etc). Do whatever you can to help yourself; in other words, try really hard in how you are perceived because even though it’s in your control, it takes a lot of effort.



This is a great question, I would say that’s a case-to-case basis and depends on where you are in the interview process. I think the first point that you can contact the school is to make sure you have properly submitted all your secondary applications. I would not expect to hear more than a yes if you do this though. The next spot where you can update the school is if you have anything to add to your application, but I did not do this until interview day. Usually they will ask if you have anything to add at the end of an interview and this is where I made mention of what updates I had. The next chance to contact schools is after you have been given a response after an interview. I contacted the schools I got waitlisted at to see where I stood, but did not add too much info other than I was really interested in their school. If you do contact the school **NO MATTER WHO YOU TALK TO ALWAYS BE POLITE!** Interview day, on the phone, over social media, etc. If you interact with anyone and I mean anyone at a school, do not throw a hissy fit, play on your phone, or show a lack of interest. People are keeping tabs on you and you should be on your best behavior.



Yes, I found it necessary to send an update in to a few schools. One of the things I learned is that there is a difference between “pre-interview updates” and “post-interview updates.” Apparently, sending updates before a school grants you an interview may be considered presumptuous and unnecessary by some medical schools. Post-interview, I think it’s normal to stay in touch with places and keep them updated of any relevant activities. I sent some pre- and post-interview updates and got varying responses. Most said they would put it on file. Some said they didn’t accept updates. One granted me an interview shortly after (which may have been coincidence). If you do feel like you need to send a pre-interview update, it should be something that really enhances your application.

What I Wish I Knew

Most students are guilty of saying something along the lines of “I wish I would have - (insert any thought about what they would have done differently here).”

Although this advice may no longer directly benefit us, we would like to pass along some of this valuable information to you the student in hopes that it will benefit you along the way.



What was the best piece of advice you heard along the way about the journey to medical school? If you could look back at yourself prior to medical school is there any advice you would now give yourself?



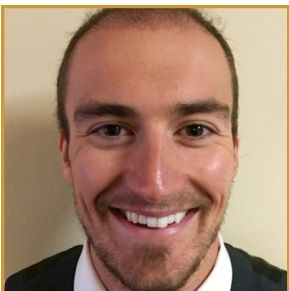
Becoming a doctor is hard. Don't be scared if you struggle because you will. Even though you might not enjoy struggling, take time to look back and learn from it and use it the next time you're faced with a task (or the impossible Dr. Zurcher physics problem). A B in that class you should have gotten an A in isn't the end of your dream to be a doctor like everyone thinks.



I'm not sure I remember any one or two pearls of advice along the way, but I do think that there are a few things I would have done differently. I wish I had made a point to meet with a learning specialist to determine my most efficient learning style. When I was at CSU, and prior to that at The College of Wooster, I got by on being intelligent enough to understand the material at the pace that it was expected of me. I never developed a real set of study tools to work most efficiently with the tools that I possess. I know that had I taken the time to determine how I learn most effectively then, I would have had a smoother transition into Medical school curriculum. I also think I would have enjoyed my time at CSU more than I did, as I would have been able to achieve the same level of success in a most efficient way.



It is really good to have a good idea about what kind of doctor you want to be. Specialty exploration is hard during the first two years of medical school because of the intense coursework. Shadow as many doctors as you can before medical school begins. Reach out for help if you are shy in getting people to shadow. It is easier said than done. This is important because there is an unwritten rule that you have to do summer research between the first and second year of medical school. It is more favorable if this research is in the field you will do your residency.

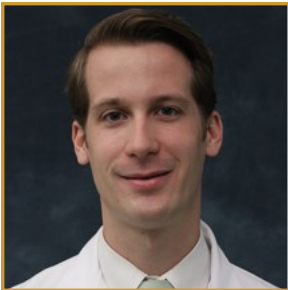


Regarding the application, the best advice was to start early with everything. Start the application early, possibly doing one the year before your actual application just to see what info you need to gather. Get to know professors and physicians you want a letter from early on. Also from Day 1 of undergrad start keeping track of all that you do with a master resume. That was really helpful and made the application much easier to do. Regarding the MCAT, ask around! I asked everyone I possibly could and honed in on what everyone was or was not saying collectively to help me decide. Also start early and give yourself time! But take breaks and do not burn out.

If you had to go through any step of the process over would you have done anything different (experiences, mcat prep, apps)?



I would say for me I should have spent more time to dedicated MCAT prep and not spread myself too thin. I learned through that experience that you have to be able to say no sometimes, which is something I have been able to implement in medical school. I took far too many classes that included both Ochem, Physics, and Biochem while doing all the extracurriculars/research/volunteering/sports and trying to prepare. No Bueno. But I made it through thankfully! If you are someone who needs structure, the in class MCAT prep can be an awesome tool. But make sure you have time to prepare before AND after the class! That will help you utilize it the most. If you don't need structure and you've been killing it in undergrad all by yourself...maybe don't waste your money.



I would have submitted my application ON THE VERY FIRST DAY that it was eligible to be submitted. Delaying by even a week at that point can lead to an 8+ week delay in how long it takes for your application to be verified, so schools get your application way after the first wave. I believe I would have gotten more interviews if I had done this. Also, I would have done just a few MCAT practice problems in the few days leading up to the test to help me stay fresh (I took the three days before the test completely off and my score went down a little bit). Finally, I would have tried to target more schools that liked non-traditional applicants and applied to those.



This response may leave me sounding like a broken record – but I would get in my primary and secondary applications much sooner than I initially did. Leave yourself plenty of time once the semester is over to work on your applications and have them done as soon as possible because of lags in the process. When you turn in your application it can take 3 weeks to 8 weeks to process, I think mine took closer to 8 because of how late I got mine in and it left me very frustrated. I have a number of friends who were in the same position and came out empty handed when interviews were being sent out because of this same reason. This would probably be a great thing to timeline and plan out with your advisor.

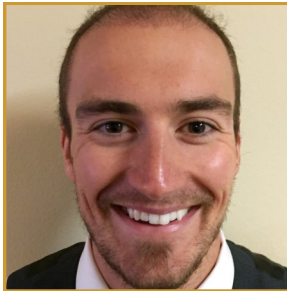


I would have taken different approaches to studying in school. Cramming to get an A isn't bad when you're only trying to get an A, but when you have to take an exam like the MCAT its more important that you really understand the material. If I had taken the time to do that, The MCAT studying period would have been a whole lot less stressful and maybe more enjoyable than it really was.

**What classes were most beneficial to you once you got to medical school?
Is there a class you wish you would have taken?**



Gross anatomy, hands down. It provided a very good foundation for the extensive anatomy we learn in medical school. Having taken it before also provided confidence and eased my nerves for the practicals. Biochem was also really helpful. All of these pre-medical courses made me more confident in myself, which allowed me to better understand how the material applies to medicine. Seeing how much these two courses helped me, I wish I took more!



Definitely taking genetics and biochem (which at the time for me were not required for med school) were beneficial. I didn't take Immunology but had a friend who did and he barely studied for Immuno during med school because it was very similar. I would suggest taking Immunology, Endocrinology, and 100% take all the Anatomy & Physiology you can because if you go to a school which teaches systems-based, you'll use A&P every block. Again this is only if you have time to actually LEARN the information and not take 30 credit hours to just fit it in.



Plant biology – because herbology classes with Pomona Sprout were extremely difficult. If you didn't catch that Harry Potter reference I will have to forgive you. Anyways the classes I would suggest to everyone:
2 Semesters Biochemistry via the Chemistry Department – Dr. Kalafatis will literally teach you all the biochemistry you will need in medical school along with other topics including pharmacology, microbiology, cell biology and immunology. I did not even have to open a biochemistry book in medical school because of his class.

Gross Anatomy – After T.A.'ing for gross anatomy my senior year I never needed to study for an anatomy practical or class. As a student this would be good to take your senior year because you will probably forget most of it otherwise in your first time through.

Microbiology and Immunology – I really wish I had taken one of these classes in hindsight. But I would argue that Biochemistry and Gross are more important.

Honorable mentions – Endocrinology and genetics were helpful, but they aren't the hardest concepts to begin with.

Was there ever a time where you wanted to give up and what did you do to overcome that? What drove you toward your ultimate goal?



I think that being a little older, and having the experiences I have has allowed me to avoid this hurdle for the most part. Everybody gets overwhelmed at times, but understanding what your motivation for doing what your doing it the only way to stay at it. Unfortunately, I think everybody's got to do this for themselves.



There were many times giving up felt like an option: After a long physics exam in particular. The best thing I would do was to take time to myself, think about what my goals were and just relax. In the end, if this is what you really want to do, when the bad taste of that exam has worn off you'll still be left with the goals you've set and realize that a small set back isn't the end.



Everyone has moments where they are sick and tired of all the studying, stress and worry that goes hand-in-hand with becoming a doctor. Stop and think about all the people ahead of you who have gone through what you are going and have made it through. Also, look back at your own accomplishments and see that you ARE capable. You can do it! It takes a lot of work, but you can do it!



I think that everyone goes through a point where they think the process as a whole is too much or beyond them, but whether they admit it or not is a different story. That point for me did not happen until earlier this year, when I was halfway through medical school. I had pneumonia while I was studying for my board exams and then I had some stuff outside of my control happening in my life. I questioned everything in the few hours before I went to sleep. The next day I still felt a little bit off about everything, when randomly someone I knew was in need of advice. I spoke to them for about 5 minutes and afterwards it put things back into the big picture for me.

What to Expect in Medical School

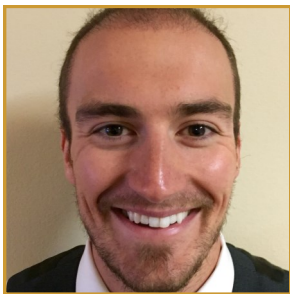
In our final section we will discuss what to expect when you're expecting - pause for dramatic effect - to go to your dream school next year. If you look up the definition of dream school I have been told, it is the school that is willing to put the faith in you as a student for four years. Aside from that we hope this final passage will help allow you to make a smooth transition for the next few steps of your journey.



What was the most difficult part of the transition from CSU to medical school for you? How did you overcome feelings of being overwhelmed?



The most difficult transition is the pace of play. Nothing you do in medical school will be very difficult on its own. We are not doing anything that you have not seen before. The only difference is the sheer amount of information in a very small amount of time. A good rule of thumb has been that in two weeks of lecture we will cover the same amount of material presented in a 15 week semester course in undergraduate. The great equalizer for everyone is time. Putting in the time is the only way to get the information in your head. Just like anything else, however, you will adapt. Everyone in my class spent two months freaking out and then found a new normal. It is hard for everyone, then they get used to it.



The most difficult part of transitioning from undergrad was, you guessed it, the amount of information. I usually could do pretty well in classes in undergrad without putting in a lot of effort, which at the time was great. However, I failed to develop really good study habits...which I found out is the most important thing you can learn in undergrad (despite your Ochem professors saying otherwise...). It was very overwhelming ;however I dealt with it by constantly trying new ways of studying methods, taking breaks more frequently, and being willing to change. "To improve is to change, to perfect is to change often".



The pace of learning is a lot faster, but in a way it's easier because you're only focusing on one thing (kind of). The hardest part is that it's difficult to find the right level of detail at which you need to know something, because you can really go off the deep end trying to know every biochemical or cellular pathway. But, over time you find your reliable sources and you kind of get it down.



If you have been out of school for a while- brush up on your study habits and get to a clear and happy mental place before you start. Don't start with a less than confident attitude.

What in your opinion is the best part about your school? Is it the learning environment, people, curriculum, patient approach, etc?



The best parts about my school are the multiple opportunities they give for clinical experience in the first 2 years which really made the transition into the hospitals 3rd year much smoother. Also, the majority of lectures are optional. They would video record every lecture and post them to the school website. For me, who is a very independent learner, this made learning much more enjoyable and the work easier to manage as well.

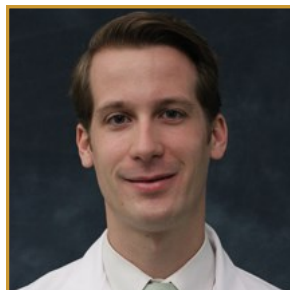


I think the thing that jumps out for me about Case is that everyone from the students to faculty is excited to be there. It was the only place that I interviewed where I felt that kind of atmosphere and made my medical school decision a no brainer. Since I have more lines of dialogue to use my suggestions when looking for a school are:

1. Find school that has a pass fail curriculum in the first two years if possible – everyone goes through essentially the same material so taking extra stress off yourself is a worthwhile cause.
2. Really investigate the curriculum – there are video's out there that explain things like problem based learning vs traditional medical school curriculums and you take a stand on what you would prefer for yourself.



Graduates from my school are wonderful people, as simple as that. I especially like the heavy emphasis on patient care. Everything we do is about developing a healthy relationship with our patients. I really like that because it's why I got into medicine —for the patients. The students work to build each other up and help each other navigate through the rigorous academic journey.



Case is the best place to be for medical school. You should definitely apply here. The curriculum is really set up in a cool way, in your clinical years you rotate at 4 top-notch hospitals, the atmosphere is really non-competitive, and we have a great match list. The environment is very collaborative, so you end up learning a lot from your classmates.

I have been hearing balance is hard in medical school -- How do you find balance in medical school? Is there still enough free time to have fun?



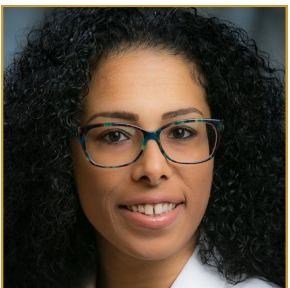
Balance can be maintained! In medical school, it is more important than ever to understand yourself and how you learn best. Maintaining a schedule is one of the best ways to handle the work load. Once you're in, medical school becomes your full-time job. If you treat it like that you would be surprised how much free time you really have. I would get to the library every day at 8am and study till about 5 or 6pm, even during dedicated study for Step 1, I still had time to work.



Of course there is enough time for fun, however you should think of medical school as a full time job with constant overtime. How much fun you have will depend on your schedule at a particular point in time. For example, you will have less free time around an exam, but at other times, your schedule will be lighter. You will know yourself and how comfortable you feel about the material that you are learning, which will guide your decision about how much time off from studying you can take. Although there is a lot of studying, it is interesting and fascinating. Everything builds on top of a previous concept. Things start to make sense and it is a really gratifying when all your worry about an exam results in a spectacular score! It is wonderful to see hard work pay off, and it will --if you work hard.



This is something that I have heard from almost every student I have interviewed. Anyways the short answer is - there is time to do everything you need to for school and still have fun in medical school. Despite that everything comes at a rapid pace and the amount of information can be overwhelming at times, keep your head up because its entirely possible. I kept balance by making a schedule for the day (which I hated at first) of what to get done and then cutting myself off at a certain hour every night. The nice thing is that you do not need to worry about learning everything in one day. If you cannot take away the basics from the start of a new block of material, the finer details become much more of a blur.

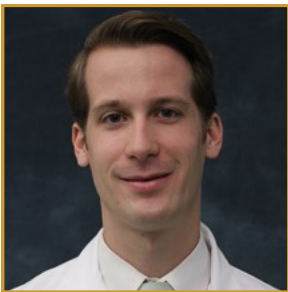


Of course we have fun still. I get away on weekends, I spend hours studying Netflix and we have family dinners together. I don't spend as much time studying as I pretend I do. But its needed to decompress and keep me sane. I don't have any need to be the top of my class and also kill my social life. I'd rather run in the middle of the pack and be well adjusted.

What is something that I should do in the first few weeks or months of medical school?



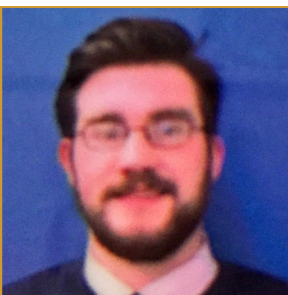
Call your family, tell them you'll talk to them in 4 years...haha just kidding. My best advice in the beginning of school is to get to know your classmates and some people from administration. Try and figure out which study methods work best for you (which will change with different classes and different teachers and that's ok!). Also, figure out a few things you want to continue doing or start for fun and see how you can fit those into your schedule. These will be invaluable as you let your brain rest and get to relax and do something you enjoy! Most importantly, if you have free time in the beginning...go enjoy it!



Wherever you go, just make time to have a little fun and get to know your classmates early on. It's kind of a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet a really cool group of people with similar interests who are similarly driven, and will be going through the exact same thing with them for four years. Also, it can really help keep you going to share some laughs later on, and if you're at a pass-fail medical school, your classmates can be excellent resources to help you learn.



The first thing I suggest is to get to know the city you are in, by getting lost. Get to school before the school year starts, get comfortable in your new living situation and go stumble upon places you would not have otherwise found. Once classes get intense you won't have as much time to explore, but if you already know the area you will know where to take friends and make suggestions for others. This is a great way to meet new people in your class as well. The second thing I would suggest is to try not to miss out on social events, even if the first few weeks can be overwhelming. The people you become friends with will be the same ones who will be by your side to support you as your curriculum gets more intense.



Make friends in your class, and make friends in the classes above you. You will need the social release from your classmates, and the second years are an immensely helpful resource when trying to figure out the best resources to use.

Additional Information & Acknowledgments

There is a lot we covered in this guide, however, if we have not answered all of your questions fear not for we have put together an additional list of resources that you may find beneficial:

AAMC Student homepage hub with additional links below including aspiring docs and applicants: <https://www.aamc.org/students/>

Aspiring Docs Homepage AAMC site: <https://www.aamc.org/students/aspiring/>

Applicants Page AAMC site: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/>

AAMC Data and Analysis: <https://www.aamc.org/data/>

AAMC Specific data on the MCAT - old, new and historic data: <https://www.aamc.org/admissions/dataandresearch/>

Medical School Admissions Requirements MSAR tool - One of the best I used this to narrow down schools to apply too: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/>

The Accepted Blog for Premedical and Medical Students: <http://www.accepted.com/medical/>

This site provides questions that may help you with the new sections offered on the MCAT: <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/mcat/critical-analysis-and-reasoning-skills-practice-questions/critical-analysis-and-reasoning-skills-tutorial/e/the-ultimatum-game>