

PREPARING FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS

Philosophies of education, course requirements, qualifications for enrollment, and systems of training vary among the nation's medical and other health care professional schools, but all schools recognize the desirability of a strong foundation in the biological and physical sciences, highly developed communication skills, and a solid background in the social sciences and humanities.

Many students preparing for health care professions major in science, although this is by no means necessary. Whether you major in the sciences, the humanities, or the social sciences, your program must be rigorous and thoughtfully organized, because medical and other professional schools are most concerned with the quality and scope of your work. Students who major outside the sciences and who take the minimum number of science courses required must do very well to ensure adequate preparation for medical school and favorable consideration by admissions committees.

Specific course prerequisites for medical and other health professional school admission vary by program, but all schools demand an advanced understanding of both the sciences and the psychosocial bases of behavior. Advanced Placement or acceleration credit cannot usually substitute for course requirements, but students who place into higher-level courses in relevant disciplines should enroll in them whenever possible. Science courses must be taken with the corresponding laboratories to meet admissions requirements; biochemistry laboratory is an exception in most cases. Courses that fulfill the requirements for medical schools must be taken for a letter grade, and grades below C are not accepted. Schools for other health care professions, such as osteopathic and dental medicine, have requirements similar to those for medical school.

Topics on the required Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) cover material equivalent to one year each of college-level biology, physics, general chemistry, and organic chemistry, as well as one term of biochemistry and courses in college-level mathematics (particularly statistics), introductory psychology, and introductory sociology. Detailed information about the MCAT is available on the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Website. Resources for other health professions schools is available in the the Health Professions section of the Office of Career Strategy Website.

There is no prescribed sequence for premedical courses, but since you will be judged on the basis of the work you have completed by the time you apply for admission, you should plan to finish the majority of required courses before taking the MCAT or submitting applications. First-year premedical students often elect two courses each term in the areas of science and mathematics. Most students will want to fulfill the general chemistry requirement during their first year, in addition to doing some course work in biology or mathematics, or both. Information on placement exams for biology, chemistry, and mathematics is available under Special Programs, Placement, and Preregistration. A useful guide to medical school course requirements is *Medical School Admission Requirements*, published online by the AAMC. General information about academic preparation is available in the Health Professions section of the Office of Career Strategy Website.

In addition to discussing your course selection with your college adviser, you are urged to consult a health professions adviser in the Office of Career Strategy, 55 Whitney Avenue, third floor. A general informational meeting for incoming first-year students interested in the health professions is held during First-year Orientation and is announced in the *Calendar for the Opening Days*. In addition, extended open office hours are conducted during course selection period.

Academic performance is an important admissions criterion, but it is by no means the only one. Admissions processes and related practices evolve with changing medical education requirements. The AAMC states, "Medical schools are dedicated to achieving a system of medical education that prepares physicians and scientists to meet the nation's evolving health needs, while reducing application barriers and encouraging students from a wide variety of disciplines, majors, and backgrounds to apply to become the next generation of doctors." One example of this dedication is the transition to competency-based medical education (CBME). In CBME, competencies—observable abilities related to a specific activity that integrates knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes—are prioritized over the measurement of knowledge alone.

Non-cognitive traits evaluated by admissions committees in an application include, but are not limited to, critical thinking, written and oral communication skills, experience with scientific inquiry, service orientation, demonstration of cultural competence, ethical responsibility, resilience and adaptability, and capacity for improvement. It is important to demonstrate these traits through your extracurricular activities. For a comprehensive list of Yale and New Haven volunteer opportunities, consult the Website of Dwight Hall, the Center for Public Service and Social Justice at Yale. Further information about getting involved is available in the Health Professions section of the Office of Career Strategy Website.

Additional resources about preparing for a career in the health professions are available in the Health Professions section of the Office of Career Strategy Website.