

The Minority Association of
Premedical Students Presents:

THE PRE-MED GUIDE



PREPARED BY:

ZACKARI D MURPHY

MAPS MENTORSHIP CHAIR 2020-2021

MD-PHD CANDIDATE

MD (MOREHOUSE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE); PHD (UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON; MOLECULAR & CELLULAR BIOLOGY)

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE CHAIR. ARCS FELLOW, TL1 TRAINING GRANT RECIPIENT, STUDENT AMBASSADOR

EDITING AND DESIGN BY:

AMIRA RICHARDS

MAPS PUBLICATIONS 2021-2022

Dear Future Student Doctor,

I do hope this document finds you well. Below you will find a quick guide about information that will best serve you in your application to medical school. I will say that the guide is by no means fully exhaustive, however, all the fundamental information that you need to know is present and easily digestible. I wrote this based upon my own experiences in applying, mentoring others through their cycles, as well as my time served on medical school admissions committees. Use it as a reference to refer back to as you progress through the different stages of your career and the application cycle. Don't be afraid to discuss it with your fellow colleagues. In your premedical associations, use it as a foundational background for your programming to discuss in depth. Finally, I ask that you all enjoy your journey to the fullest. You are beginning a truly wonderful transition period in your education. Naturally, as time progresses, please feel free to contact us with additional feedback so we may build on this resource and have it up to date for years to come!

Good Luck

01

Premedical Years Strategy

05

Extracurriculars

09

The MCAT

10

Applying

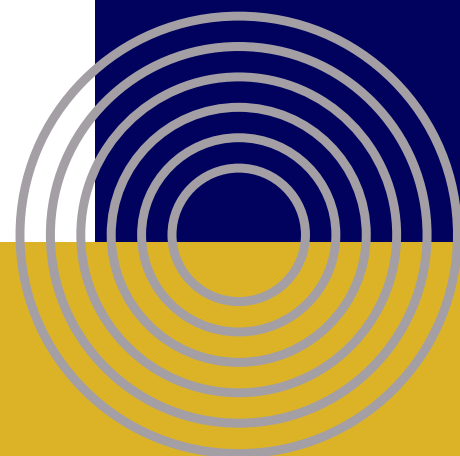


TABLE OF CONTENTS



PREMEDICAL YEARS STRATEGY

Deciding on a Major

The main goal is to pick a major that interests you, allows you to utilize your strengths, gives time to explore extracurriculars, and above all **COMPLETE YOUR SCIENCE PREREQUISITES**. As long as you complete the latter point and do decisively well in your science courses, you can choose whatever major you see fit!

You've probably noticed that most students tend to fall into what many consider the "premedical track" majors of Biology, Biochemistry, Chemistry, Engineering, Neuroscience, Kinesiology, etc. However, you are not obligated to follow the same track.

In fact, there have been increasing numbers of students getting into medical school with more "nontraditional majors" more in line with liberal arts, humanities, and social sciences. The advantage of these majors is it allows for you to explore your other interests besides that of medicine. Some interviewers find it refreshing to hear about unique experiences and skills one may bring to the table due to their nontraditional path. For example, an English Major may be able to talk about the nuances of Medical Literacy and how they studied the best way to communicate medical knowledge to ordinary people.

1

Strategize

After picking a major, you must be strategic in how you choose the order in which you take your courses.

SCHEDULING

2

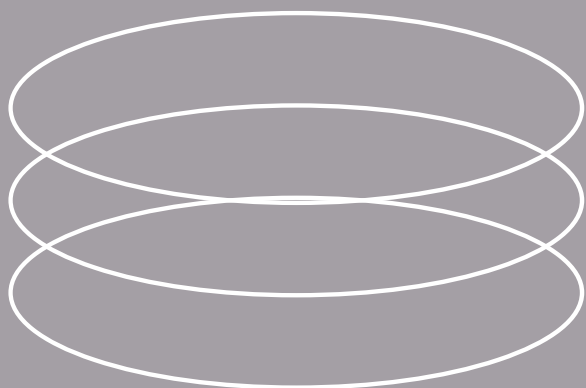
Pace Yourself

Freshman year can be overwhelming so it's not the best idea to take too many heavy science courses in your first semester. Start off slow with one intro biology/chemistry course and a lab to get your footing. As the semesters move forward, add more science courses but take into consideration work-life balance.

3

Improve

If you mess up in earlier courses, it's not a "death sentence" per se due to the fact admissions committees love to see positive trends. If they see you constantly improve over time in your upper-level science courses (A's), they may be more forgiving towards your earlier performance. However, don't always count on this as an absolute rule of thumb!



GRADES

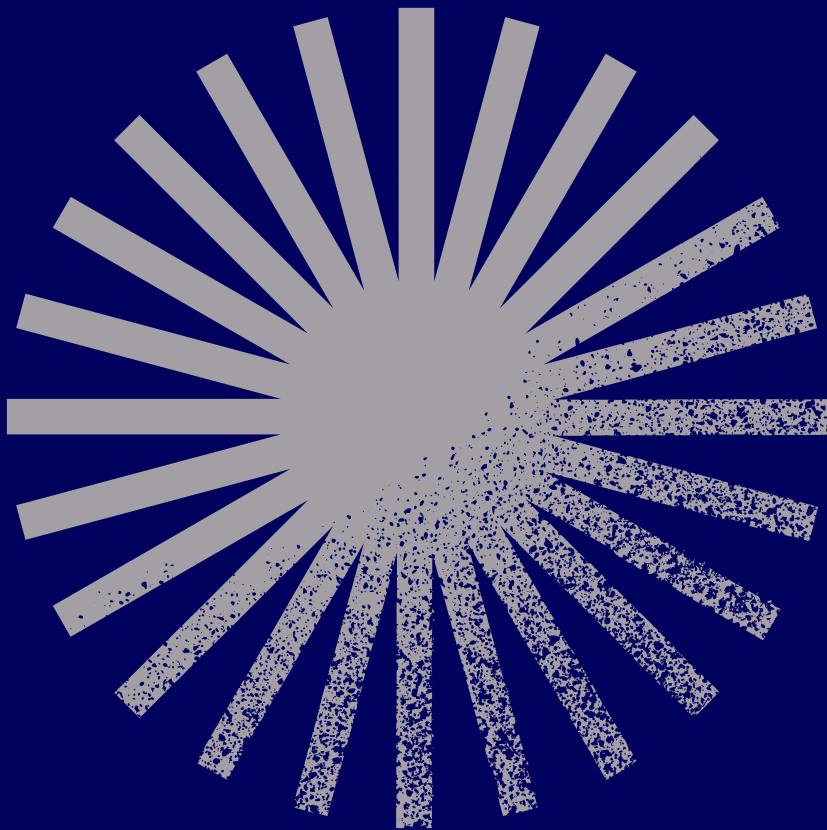
Typically, medical schools prefer seeing a GPA around ~ 3.7 with a science GPA of 3.5. With that said, these are just averages and don't tell the full story. Accepted Under-Represented Minority students' stats tend to be a little lower, not because they are unqualified but rather because admissions committees take into account what hardships certain minority communities face in light of pursuing higher education. It's in good faith of the student's capabilities if they were provided all the necessary resources and given a fair shot to excel.

Aim for at least a 3.5 cGPA and > 3.0sGPA as a URM. Combined with a decent MCAT (more about this later), you'll have a fair amount of interest and thus, secondary applications/interview invites. It goes without saying that a higher GPA will yield more options for you as well as potential sources of funding.

If your grades are not where you want them to be, you can always boost them by retaking the courses over the summer, especially ones you made a "C" in. (Some schools offer grade replacement, use it!) Please know the deeper you get into your degree program the harder it will be to raise your GPA as you have a large number of credits already which won't be offset by the new credits in grade calculation.

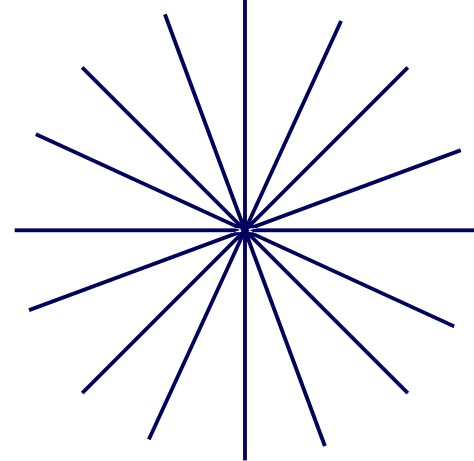
Postbaccs, Special Master Programs, and graduate school offer an opportunity to improve your study habits and showcase your ability to handle an intense scientific course load!

ALWAYS CONSIDER WORK-LIFE BALANCE.



**Pace yourself. Start
off slow and gain
your footing.**

EXTRACURRICULARS



01.

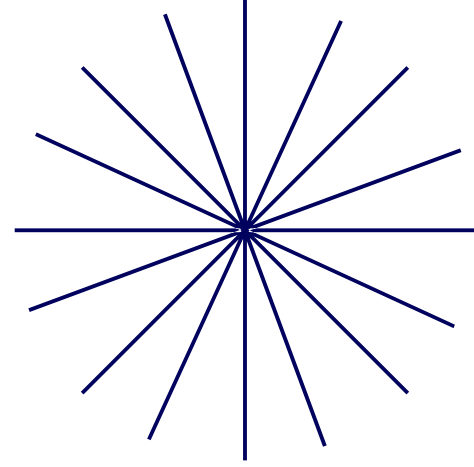
OPTIONAL ENDEAVORS

Stats merely get your foot in the door but it's the rest of your app that swings it open. Extracurricular activities not only speak of your passions/interests, but also of your leadership capabilities, time management skills, and commitment. This is largely left up to you, but it is advised you don't just "check a box." Allow us to explain:

There is an ongoing tactic to fill one's resume with as much research, shadowing, and volunteering as possible in hopes to gain admission. While these are all admirable feats, you must remember EVERY applicant has these on their respective resumes as well. You must focus on what sets you apart. Not every extracurricular has to be directly science/medicine related. Choose activities that highlight your outside interests and give you diverse experiences to talk about. Continue to pursue your artistic endeavors, such as dance, music or drawing, etc. Your active/outdoor hobbies are a great pursuit as well. Try to have them tied to an organization or institution so you will have someone able to write about and illustrate your involvement.

Above all, please remember it's not about what you do but rather what you were able to learn from it. Potential interviewers want to hear about translatable skills that can be used in medical school and as you practice as a physician. Whether it's leadership, communication skills, ability to delegate, ability to balance one's work life, or even interactions with a particular demographic; these are all invaluable lessons that the committees love to hear about.

EXTRACURRICULARS



02.

RESEARCH

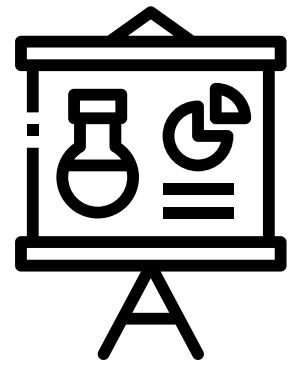
Research is a highly sought-after experience by most medical schools. This is due to the fact most medical professionals are tasked with writing grants, funding projects, giving presentations, and writing peer-reviewed journals as part of their tasks in order to pursue academic medicine and/or fellowships. While you by no means have to be an expert, it is worthwhile to participate in some research to learn some of these skills.

The first step is finding a research professor (PI). Although this can seem to be a daunting task, you'd be surprised how many professors openly welcome undergraduate help. If you take any science classes especially, upper level, your professor is most likely involved in research. Do well in the class, set up a meeting with the professor, ask them about their research and if there is an opportunity for you to get involved. Alternatively, if you go to your institution's website where the departmental faculty are listed, there are usually biographies of the PIs, their research interest, and if they are looking for students. Feel free to reach out and see if you can secure a project. Fear not if you get rejected. Just keep attempting and eventually, someone will say yes. Don't forget organizations such as McNair and IMSD actually offer funding to pursue this research. If your institution has these, they can be found on your school's website as well.

The next step is to have an honest realistic conversation with your PI about what you want to achieve while in lab including conferences, projects, and even papers. They serve as a mentor to you and a future letter writer so make sure you have a great relationship with them. If they have a toxic lab environment, however, don't be afraid to leave.

02.

RESEARCH



Presenting at conferences is a wonderful opportunity to develop your scientific speaking skills as well as networking. Networking is often under-appreciated but very crucial. Medical schools often send recruiters to these conferences, so it is an excellent opportunity to get to know different schools as well as have a direct line of communication with them if you choose to apply later. (They will remember you!) Also, you will meet other students who may be your colleagues one day. They can offer a great deal of insight as well as additional information and tips on how to excel in school. Chances are they will be applying to professional or graduate school as well. While it does look great to be an author on a paper your lab submits, it's by no means a definitive requirement for medical school. Being on a long-term project with continued involvement is more important. Focus more so on being able to confidently describe what you were able to accomplish in the lab and the research itself. Finally, utilize your summers effectively by participating in research internships at other institutions. These are usually held at medical schools so you have an excellent opportunity to network here, as well.

Here's a good place to
GET STARTED



03.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Schools love to see your dedication to the community and ways you choose to actively engage with them. From volunteering at an animal shelter to working with at risk youth, any experience showcasing altruistic behavior is looked upon positively.

However whatever you choose to engage in be present and absolutely passionate about it! DO NOT use these at-risk populations simply so you can check a box on a checklist. Interviewers will be able to tell if you were actually engaged in this work when they ask you to write and recall your experience. The overall goal is to experience some personal growth that expands your worldview and teaches you to engage with different communities, which are skills that can transfer to the hospital. Quality not quantity is important here. It looks better to have a couple of long-term impactful experiences than a bunch of short ones with limited hours of participation. Again, always be able to articulate what you learned from these experiences.

04.

SHADOWING

While most people would argue that shadowing is the most important experience in your application, this can be misleading. Clinical experience/exposure is actually what's important. Again, volunteering at a free clinic, scribing, working as a caretaker all count as exposure. Shadowing is useful for becoming more familiar with the day-to-day life of being a physician. When applying interviewers want to see you have a realistic knowledge of what you're signing up for, so this helps ease that concern. With shadowing, you may be constantly following someone around but not actually doing anything yourself. Aim for a balance of shadowing, while participating in other clinical opportunities that allow for a more hands-on experience. This will allow you to speak of some of the practicalities of the medical field.

DISCLAIMER: There is no magical set of hours for each activity that will guarantee an interview invite, let alone matriculation. You can look into the MSAR from the AMCC website to see what each school is typically looking for.

MCAT

This is usually the most talked about part of the application, especially for URM students. An exhaustive strategy guide would take an entire document on its own so we will provide you with some general tips.

This admissions test is fairly unconventional and will focus on your analytical and reasoning skills rather than stand-alone scientific memorization. There are four sections: Physical Sciences, Critical Analysis and Reasoning, Biological Science, and Behavioral Science. Each section is normally an hour and a half making for a grand total of ~8 hours. The scoring scale is 472 to 528. The goal is to have a balanced score with all the sections above 125. Naturally, you will have some sections higher than others but try not to have one lacking behind too far as this will raise concerns from admissions committees. A score of around 508 (subject to change by year) will likely yield more options with possible scholarship support. The MCAT typically should be taken after all your prerequisites are complete. Taking it from April-July will allow you to have your scores back in time for submission with AMCAS.

It is advised to take a course, however, these tend to be very expensive, around \$2000. Self-study is a completely viable method and saves a great deal of money. If you are self-motivated and good at time management, you can score exceptionally high! Buy a set of review books (Princeton Review, Kaplan, ExamKrackers, etc.) and set up your schedule to include 2-3 hours of dedicated study time each day. If you start in January you should be done with content review by April, leaving May for extensive practice testing and review before finally taking in June/July.

Aim for a goal of taking at least 10 practice tests across your study period. Doing significantly more than this can risk diminishing returns and burnout.

For your first 3 tests, you should not worry about the score. It will likely be low but do not be discouraged. Rather, use this as an opportunity to develop your strategy for reading the passages and TIMING. Many people tend to run out of time. Aim for around 7 minutes per passage and respective questions, 9 minutes on CARS passages.

At around tests 7-10, you should be aiming for your targeted score. It takes about a month to get your scaled score back and you have the option to retake during the admissions cycle (usually September) but you must report to the schools you applied to as soon as your scores are available.

APPLYING

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of Recommendation provide insight to the applicant beyond the statistics. Also, these letters are used to measure your character and if you would be a good fit into their institution. When it comes to letters, you usually have two options, a committee letter or 3-5 individual letters. Some institutions require you to use their committee letter, in which designated faculty will write a letter for you with the aid of your CV and transcript.

If you elect not to use a committee letter or your institution doesn't offer it, you will be responsible for uploading at least 3 letters to your application. At least 2 of these letters should be from science faculty who have taught you in the classroom and can speak to your abilities. A strategy for securing one is to pick a class you are doing well in. Ask to meet with the professor one day. In the meeting, ask about them, and discuss your career interests. Naturally, you may segue into your plan for applying to medical school. At this point, you may ask them if they would feel comfortable writing you a strong letter. If they say yes, thank them and promise to follow up with the materials they'll need.

Give them copies of your CV and personal statement so they know more about you. Although the requirement is only three, it is good practice to have at least five letters. These additional two letters should be from people who can talk to you on a more personal level. Examples include your research PI, extracurricular activity supervisor, mentor, etc. Letters do not have to be submitted until you submit your secondaries but still, try to have them in relatively early. Give your writers ample time and friendly reminders so they can balance it with their busy schedules.

APPLYING



Personal Statement

Arguably the most important part of your application. This is your opportunity to illustrate why you feel medical school is right for you. Write this as a narrative showcasing your upbringing, what initially got you interested in medical school, hardships you encountered while pursuing medicine, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. It is important to be transparent and open about your life without being too overly dramatic or emotional. Have people read over your statement and offer critiques. Be warned you will go through numerous rewrites until you get it perfect. Finally, be aware of the character limit. Writing your life story is hard enough but doing it with a limited word count can often be difficult. Be concise as possible and have a plan about what you want to relay in your message. Remember the first sentences should be eye catching as reviewers go through hundreds in a day, so you'd want to peak their interest early in your narrative to capture their attention.

Transcript

You will be required to submit your official transcript to the application service. In addition, you will have to type in every single grade you've ever earned by hand. Once you submit, it will take them around 2 to 5 weeks for them to officially confirm your reported grades and allow you to officially submit. Plan accordingly. Plan to submit your application at the beginning of June, so it will be one of the first in line for schools to review for secondaries.

APPLYING

Submission

Submitting can be very expensive, an initial \$300 and \$40 for each additional school you add. To alleviate this, apply for the Fee Assistance Program (FAP) through AMCAS if you qualify. You will have to show proof of low income. FAP can save you hundreds of dollars in the long run. You must be strategic in applying. Please use the MSAR from the AAMC website to assist you in choosing programs. This tool can tell you the demographics of the matriculating class along with stats, chances of getting accepted, in state preference, extracurricular breakdown, etc. Only apply to schools you feel are the best fit for you. Again, submit early but make sure you're putting forth the best product possible. Letters of recommendation can be added at any point.

Secondaries

If your application meets the minimum standard, you will be allowed to submit a secondary application. Unlike the primary AMCAS, a secondary is tailored to the individual school. Its purpose is to determine optimal fit for the institution. Rather than focusing on your CV, this application is about learning about you personally. The questions: "why do you want to come here?", "How does going here help you with your future goals?", "What unique traits do you bring to the diversity of our class?", are just a few you will see repeatedly. When you receive a secondary, plan to have it back in no more than seven days. Be thoughtful in your responses and check your grammar. If possible, have someone read over your responses before submitting.

APPLYING

Interviews

While an interview offer is an amazing sign, the interview itself can make you or break you. Be sure to respond as quickly as possible when invited as their schedules tend to fill up quickly. Having an earlier interview is better than a later one as there are more available seats in the class.

Prior to the interview day, be sure to secure a nice, fitted professional suit, and dress shoes. Minimal perfume/cologne is a nice touch. Have a mock interview for practice before each scheduled interview. You do not want to sound too rehearsed or “unnatural” so don’t try to memorize answers to give to specific questions. Re-read your personal statement and look over your application and be prepared to discuss these. Know what you want to emphasize or bring attention to on interview day.

Some questions may be rather unorthodox and unexpected but do not panic. Rather, take your time to think about it after a deep breath, make sure you understand the question, and give your best authentic response and not what you think they’d like to hear. Always make natural eye contact, while minimizing hand movements, as this may distract them from all the wonderful things you are saying. The best interviews flow more like a natural conversation rather than an oral exam. Don’t be afraid to show different aspects of your personality, while still keeping your tone professional.

Familiarize yourself with the school’s mission, programming, and community engagement initiatives. This will illustrate your interest in the institution as you can ask questions about these later. Remember you are interviewing them as well so don’t be afraid to ask questions. Ask about anything you found interesting or unique concerning the institution that you’d like to hear more about. Also, asking about what they feel are the strengths and weaknesses of the institution will allow you to get an honest perspective on how the school operates. If you have the opportunity to engage with current students, please do so, as they can be perfectly honest about how they feel being at that institution. Be friendly and cordial to everyone you meet, as you never know who is watching or observing you. Your character throughout the day matters tremendously so act accordingly!

After the day is complete feel free to ask for contact emails if you have further questions and if you’d like to send thank you letters. This is completely optional.

APPLYING

Outcome

After the interview, you will eventually hear back with a decision. The outcomes are usually: Accept, Waitlist, or Reject. Congratulations if you get the outright acceptance, however, don't get discouraged if you receive one of the latter two. With the waitlist, you are still in the running and you should view it as a sign they are interested in you. Stay in contact and send formal letters of interest/updates to them as you garner more experience, higher grades, and retake MCAT scores. A rejection is not a failure if you learn from it. If you receive a rejection don't become too upset, you still have options. After the interview season, you may call the admissions office and ask what you can do to improve your application moving forward. You always have the option of pursuing a Postbacc or Special Masters Program to prepare you for applying again in another cycle. It doesn't matter how long you take as the average age of matriculating to medical school is now ~25. Take your time, continue your work, and apply again if you are truly passionate!

Decision

When choosing a school, there are many factors to consider. Some schools are better at matching specific specialties. Some may offer a particular program you are interested in. Others may be closer or further from home, which is important depending on your support system. Cost is a huge consideration. Private schools offer higher tuition costs compared to state institutions. Less prestigious schools may offer you a scholarship to come there. Pick the school that offers you the least amount of debt where you feel you can excel and be most comfortable. A full scholarship means nothing if you are miserable your entire time going there. All of the HBCUs are private, and thus cost more, but are known for their familial, nurturing environments. Schools vary with pass/fail, dedicated Step 1 time, early clinical exposure, etc. Choose the curriculum that best suits your learning style.

We hope this guide helps you. Although it is by no means exhaustive, it will allow you to have a solid plan moving forward.

Hopefully, your MAPS chapter meetings talk about these topics in depth so feel free to use it as a guide for discussions and programming. We wish you the best of luck in your endeavors and trust you will all become amazing physicians!



ENJOY THE JOURNEY

Stay Connected



@SNMAMAPS



@national_snma_maps

