



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Planning Your Health Careers or Pre-Med Studies

[www.brown.edu/go/healthcareers](http://www.brown.edu/go/healthcareers)

#### YOUR PREPARATION TO EXPLORE HEALTH & MEDICINE AND PREPARE TO APPLY

##### Health Professions Competencies

Healthcare is a dynamic field of study and professional realization. As you explore your interests in the health professions, newly-articulated guidelines help you gauge your level of preparation and serve as a roadmap to your self-reflection, academic, clinical, research and other activities. To strengthen their holistic approach to the application process, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) with input from medical professionals and educators developed a set of 9 inter- and intra-personal competencies essential for success in medical and other health professions schools. These personal competencies complement the 6 science, thinking and reasoning competencies typically associated with learning in an academic context through course work, research, teaching or other means of developing and applying scholarly knowledge. These 15 competencies give detail and clarity to help you reflect, engage with learning, service and leadership, and prepare. Medical schools are progressively including these competencies in their application evaluation processes. This is great news for students and future applicants. It ensures that admission committees evaluate applicants holistically, not only based on grades and test scores. The new MCAT takes an integrative approach to the sciences and incorporates knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences to reflect the same holistic approach. Use these competencies first to reflect on the career direction you are taking and then to guide your choices of courses, concentration(s), clinical, research, service or other volunteer activities while at Brown.

**Allopathic (M.D.) schools** have started to adapt their admission expectations to reflect this- a process that will take a number of years. Beginning to plan now to develop knowledge and qualities that demonstrate these competencies will be most helpful to you as an applicant in the future. **Osteopathic (D.O.) medical and other health professions schools** look similarly at personal, scholastic and analytical qualities but do not explicitly articulate these competencies. However, whether you wish to pursue education and a career in Allopathic, Osteopathic, Dental, Veterinary medicine or another clinical health profession, these competencies offer an informative framework in which to place your academic and experiential activities as an undergraduate students. The competencies are listed below and detailed on our website's **HEALTH PROFESSIONS COMPETENCIES** page. Also included is information about the evolution of the reform to competency-based medical education. The competencies are: **INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES: Service Orientation, Social Skills, Cultural Competence, Teamwork, and Oral Communication. INTRAPERSONAL COMPETENCIES: Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others, Reliability and Dependability, Resilience and Adaptability, and Capacity for Improvement. THINKING AND REASONING COMPETENCIES: Critical Thinking, Quantitative Reasoning, Scientific Inquiry, and Written Communication. SCIENCE COMPETENCIES: Living Systems, and Human Behavior.**

#### YOUR HEALTH CAREERS PORTFOLIO IN ASK

##### Reflect, prepare, track your accomplishments, and areas for improvement

The field of health and medicine is continually evolving. To help guide you better, we designed the **Health Careers Portfolio in ASK**. The portfolio is designed to promote self-reflection and to track your coursework and co-curricular activities relevant to the health careers. Every year early in the fall semester, you will complete a portfolio questionnaire that will help you plan and reflect on your preparation for the study and practice of your chosen health profession. Articulating your passions and interests can sometimes be difficult. Your portfolio enables you to do just that by helping you identify your interests, evaluate your accomplishments, and plan your own growth. You will be able to look back at your questionnaires from previous years and assess the areas in which you need to improve. Your answers will help you be better prepared to apply to medical or other health professions programs. They will also help us get to know you better so we can provide you with directed guidance during your time at Brown. In the near future you will be able to upload your own materials to your portfolio- whether a paper you wrote on public health issues, an article you found informative or notes about your summer internship or research project. The Health Careers Portfolio is described in

detail on our website and is discussed during first-year and sophomore information sessions throughout the year. We look forward to getting to know you better through your Portfolio.

## **ACTIVITIES**

### **What kinds of co-curricular activities are helpful or appropriate if I am considering medical school or another health profession?**

Medical and other health profession schools look for evidence that candidates for admission are making an informed choice and that they are altruistically oriented. Hence, any activities that help you to learn about the profession are important. Experience in a clinical setting is required for admission. In addition, you should engage in service- and leadership-oriented activities that interest and inspire you. As detailed above consider the competencies as a framework when reflecting on and selecting co-curricular activities to get involved with. If you are considering a career in dentistry or veterinary medicine you may be required to have spent a certain number of hours volunteering, interning with or shadowing a practitioner in the field. Be sure to check the requirements for schools in which you are interested for specific guidelines. Most successful health professions school applicants would have had continuity in their clinical and other activities for a couple of years or more prior to applying for admission. Use your academic years and summers to plan and engage with a range of co-curricular activities so you balance your time commitments effectively and engage more deeply.

## **CONCENTRATIONS**

### **What concentrations are “best” if I am pre-med or considering the health professions in general?**

Medical schools, as well as other health profession training programs, do not require any particular concentration. You should choose your concentration based on your academic interests. As you think of your concentration and other courses to take, consider that college offers a unique opportunity to explore different knowledge areas. Don't be afraid to take advantage of all that Brown's curriculum has to offer- it will make you a well-rounded individual and a stronger candidate for admission. The Thinking and Reasoning as well as Science competencies can help inform your choice, but keep in mind that learning has many dimensions and you don't have to go about your Brown studies solely planning for health profession school applications.

## **CONCENTRATING OUTSIDE OF THE BIOSCIENCES**

### **If I am not a Biology or Neuroscience concentrator, how many Biology courses should I take in order to be a competitive candidate and to do well on the MCAT or DAT? Any suggestions about which are the most useful ones?**

In general, two biology courses with lab sections will prepare you adequately for the MCAT, DAT, or other standardized test though taking more than two would strengthen your preparation and credentials significantly. You should begin with BIOL 0200 unless you have an AP score in biology or other equivalent preparation. Physiology (BIOL 0800) and Genetics (BIOL 0470) are both excellent courses to take in preparation for a career in the health professions. Students who concentrate in fields other than the biosciences, will benefit greatly from taking a few biology or neurosciences courses beyond the required minimum. These additional courses do not need to have labs. Note that Biochemistry (BIOL 0280) is an excellent course to take; it is necessary for the new MCAT and is taken by most Brown students as part of their chemistry preparation. This course would not be considered part of your biology course work, however. For additional courses in the biosciences, explore the Biology and Neuroscience curriculum and choose courses based on your interests and prior preparation.

## **GRADES**

### **Do I have to get straight A's or mostly A's to be a competitive candidate?**

While it is important to have a strong academic record to be a competitive candidate for admission to health professions programs, it is certainly not true that you must have an A in every single class that you take. If you experienced challenges during your studies but your record improved, this will be noted by admission committees. The best information source about grade point averages needed for admission to MD programs is Medical School Admission Requirements, the official guide from the Association of American Medical Colleges. The web-based version contains all information: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/>. Other health professions vary in their competitiveness for admission. Guidebooks for various health professions are available in the Health Careers Advising office in JWW 313; most are on the web. Use them to help you gauge your preparedness for admission.

### **What counts in the Science GPA (BCPM- Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Math)?**

Each health profession has its own online common application service which has its own method of classifying courses for the science GPA. **Usually, application services count courses listed in biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics toward the science GPA.** Application services will often include neuroscience courses under biology, but they do not include courses in psychology, cognitive science, geology, or computer science (engineering is usually a separate classification). Mathematics generally includes courses in applied math as well as statistics courses in the social sciences (e.g., sociology and psychology). For more information on which courses count toward the science GPA, consult the instructions provided by the application service(s) you use when applying for admission, (e.g., the AMCAS Application Course Classification Guide).

### **S/NC COURSES**

#### **Is it OK for a Brown pre-med to take a course satisfactory/no-credit? If so, which ones and how many?**

You should not take any of the courses required for admission satisfactory/no-credit (with the obvious exception of courses that are only offered Mandatory S/NC). Note that S/NC\* courses (with an asterisk) indicate that the S/NC grade option was mandatory. The asterisk does not indicate that you passed the course “with distinction”. Note also that “with distinction” does not appear on the Brown transcript. Courses not required for admission may be taken S/NC but you should be judicious in using this option. Schools find it difficult to evaluate applicants who have taken a large number of S/NC courses, so be careful. Taking one or two S/NC courses during your studies at Brown in areas outside of your concentration of major area of study should not be problematic. You should only choose the S/NC option if you believe that it will enhance your educational experience in a given course. Never use the S/NC option to make it easier to do well in the rest of your courses for a given semester. The S/NC option is not intended as a time-management tool or grade point average enhancer!

### **SUMMER COURSES**

#### **Is it OK to take required health careers courses in the summer at Brown or elsewhere?**

In general, many health profession schools, and particularly medical schools, do not view summer courses as favorably as they do courses taken during the fall and spring terms at Brown. However, if you have a compelling academic rationale for taking summer courses (e.g., to enable you to study abroad, or to participate in research or clinical activities which you would miss otherwise) and if you think you will be a strong applicant overall, you could take a required course over the summer. You should preferably do so at Brown or at a university with a strong academic reputation (no community colleges or online courses). Furthermore, we do not recommend that you take more than one required class in the summer for the duration of your undergraduate education. It is best not to take any required science courses during the summer, particularly chemistry.

### **RESEARCH**

#### **Is doing research really critical if I am pre-health or pre-med?**

Engaging in research, whether in the sciences or in other disciplines, is a wonderful way to enhance your education and to build connections with faculty mentors. This can certainly help your application to medical school (or to other health profession schools) as most applicants would have some research experience. Successful health practitioners must be intellectually curious and have the ability to keep up with the changing science that underlies their practice. The Science, Thinking and Reasoning Competencies are developed not only in course work, but also in the process of scholarly inquiry- one more aspect to consider when thinking about research opportunities. However, you should never undertake research unless you have genuine interest in it. Faculty members at Brown, as well as members of admission committees, can recognize lack of passion or zeal for a particular activity listed on an application. You will be a stronger applicant if you are truly excited about an activity in which you have participated and if you have engaged in it well. A wide array of research opportunities is listed on our website, including intensive summer immersive programs for students from backgrounds under-represented in the health professions.

### **THE MATH REQUIREMENT**

#### **How much Math is really required for the majority of med schools?**

Health profession schools vary in their mathematics requirements. Over half of all MD programs require up to two semesters and all remaining schools strongly prefer some experience with college mathematics. The majority of medical

schools (M.D. and D.O.) with a math requirement will look for between one and two semesters of math. Most of them would expect a semester of calculus and a semester of statistics (offered by a variety of departments). No health professions schools require multivariable calculus. A small number require two semesters of calculus but they will allow you to substitute college courses with advanced placement credit or credit from other college-level exams taken in high school. Some California state medical schools do not accept advanced placement credit. If you had AP or other credit for MATH 0090 and/or MATH 0100, you should still take at least one math course at Brown (statistics recommended). The definitive source of information about all required and recommended coursework by individual M.D. programs is the Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR). D.O. schools produce the Osteopathic Medical College Information Book (CIB) in print and as a free PDF. Veterinary schools produce the Veterinary Medicine School Admission Requirements (VMSAR). Other health professions have their own web or printed resources. Be sure you know the requirements for the schools in which you are interested. For all health professions, ***it is your responsibility*** to be sure that you have met all applicable admission requirements.

## **THE CHEMISTRY REQUIREMENT**

**Will CHEM 0330, 0350, 0360 or CHEM 0330, 0350 and BIOL 0280 be sufficient for most applicants?**

**No.** Nearly all health profession training programs, including medical, dental, and vet schools, require four semesters of chemistry with lab. Most health professions schools look at Biochemistry as an excellent substitute for a second semester general chemistry with lab. Knowledge of biochemistry is also necessary for the MCAT beginning in 2015. Some medical schools require a five-course sequence in chemistry which includes biochemistry together with 4 semesters of chemistry with lab (2 general and 2 organic).

At Brown there are two typical course sequences depending on the level of your Chemistry preparation and the health professions programs to which you plan to apply. Most students come to Brown with a strong high school background in chemistry, which may include AP scores, and begin the course sequence with CHEM 0330, followed by CHEM 0350, CHEM 0360 and BIOL 0280 (or CHEM 0400). Note that the Chemistry department does not place AP scores on student transcripts.

Students without strong high school preparation in Chemistry and AP scores begin with CHEM 0100, followed by CHEM 0330, CHEM 0350, CHEM 0360, and BIOL 0280 (or CHEM 0400). Note that CHEM 0100 can meet the first semester general chemistry requirement but should only be taken by students with no high school chemistry background. Do not take CHEM 0100 after taking a higher level chemistry course simply to meet the requirement. This will look very bad on your applications! Admission committees will expect you to take challenging courses that are appropriate for your level of preparation.

There are two ways in which you could complete the five-course sequence in chemistry. If you completed CHEM 0330, CHEM 0350, CHEM 0360, BIOL 0280 (or CHEM 0400) take one additional general chemistry course with lab. This could be either CHEM 0400 or CHEM 0500. If you plan to take a more advanced course, consult with the schools where you plan to apply first. If you completed CHEM 0100, CHEM 0330, CHEM 0350, CHEM 0360 and BIOL 0280 (or CHEM 0400) this should be sufficient to meet the five-course requirement.

For all health professions, ***it is your responsibility*** to be sure that you have met all applicable admission requirements.

## **THE BIOLOGY REQUIREMENT**

**What courses would be most helpful for the MCAT, DAT or other tests? How would my concentration or APs affect my course choices?**

Nearly all health professions programs require 2 biology courses with lab. The first course in the biology sequence is BIOL 0200. If you have an AP score or other relevant preparation that places you out of this course, take two more advanced courses above the BIOL 0200 level. Admission committees do not accept AP scores to fulfill the Biology requirement. Physiology (BIOL 0800) and Genetics (BIOL 0470) are both excellent courses to take. If you are not a Biology or science concentrator, we advise that you take a few Biology or Neuroscience courses in addition to the required (not necessarily with lab). Most health professions programs consider Neuroscience to be equivalent to Biology

so your additional courses could be taken in this department. We strongly recommend that you take the two required lab courses in the Biology department. More is outlined above under CONCENTRATING OUTSIDE OF THE BIOSCIENCES.

## **OTHER ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS**

### **What else is required?**

Besides math, chemistry and biology, most health profession training programs require: two semesters of physics, with accompanying laboratory sections. Two semesters of English are also required. This requirement can be met by taking writing or literature or foreign literature in translation courses in English or other disciplines (e.g., comparative literature, classics). WRIT designated courses, unless they fall into the above categories, are not likely to satisfy the requirement. **Health Careers Advising cannot endorse any particular course. The three categories above meet the requirement.** Please consult the Health Careers Advising website for a complete description of the basic admission requirements. Beginning in 2015 the MCAT contains a section on the Social and Behavioral Sciences and it would be best that you have exposure to foundational concepts in these two fields. A small number of medical schools require a semester in both. Most other health professions schools recommend such course work. We encourage all Brown students to explore the curriculum and take one or two foundational courses in the behavioral and social sciences to prepare well for the MCAT, to give their education further breadth and to position themselves well as future applicants.

### **Are there additional requirements?**

In some cases, schools have additional and particular requirements. For example, some medical, dental, and vet schools require biochemistry (taken by most Brown students); some vet and dental schools require anatomy; others may want you to have course work in the behavioral sciences. Ultimately, for all health professions, it is your responsibility to be sure that you have met all applicable admission requirements. Consult the Health Careers Advising website for details and see GRADES above.

## **MCAT, DAT AND OTHER TEST PREPARATION**

### **What is the best way to prepare for the MCAT?**

Most importantly, you should take the exam only after you have completed the necessary courses successfully and have given yourself ample time to prepare. All of your MCAT scores are visible to every medical school to which you apply and it is important to take the exam only when you are prepared to do your best work. Most students and alumni take the exam in the year prior to their application (which starts every June). About 70% of Brown students and alumni apply to medical school upon or a year after graduation. Your academic preparation should include a biochemistry course, as well as a foundational course in the behavioral and social sciences. After you complete these courses 2-3 months of dedicated study is typically sufficient. Both self-study and preparation courses can be effective though each has pros and cons. A test prep course gives you plentiful review materials and practice exams, as well as a lot of structure. However, the price is high, sometimes exceeding \$2,000. Self-study is less expensive and many good review books and practice exams are available at bookstores and through on-line booksellers. Note that this approach requires self-discipline. If you opt for self-study, consider forming a study group. Be sure that your partners are self-motivated, reliable, and dedicated! Consult the official MCAT preparation web-based and print guide books. You can obtain official MCAT practice tests and many tutorial and self-evaluation materials from AAMC. To learn more about the exam consult the following: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>.

## **APPLICATION TIME-LINE**

### **When should I apply, including finishing the required courses, taking the MCAT, DAT and actually submitting applications?**

The process of applying to medical school, or to any other health profession training program, takes up to one and a half years. Students planning to take one or more years off before beginning their professional training have much flexibility and can develop stronger application credentials. Students who wish to matriculate to a health profession school in the fall immediately after college graduation must have completed all of their required pre-med/ pre-health coursework and have taken the MCAT, DAT, GRE, etc. in the spring and no later than May of junior year. Nationally the majority of successful applicants take at least one year to develop strong credentials, work, volunteer, travel or combine those. Nearly three-quarters of Brown applicants take at least a year off. The national average age of matriculating M.D. students is 24 and rising. It is more challenging to succeed in the process when applying between junior and senior year.

## HOW MANY SCHOOLS TO APPLY TO?

### To how many schools does a "typical" pre-med apply?

The average applicant to medical school from Brown University applies to about twenty schools. Nation-wide, the average is fifteen schools. Applicants to other professions generally apply to about ten to a dozen schools.

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

### What are the best kinds of recommendations for med school?

The Health Careers Advisory Committee requires that applicants from Brown University have two letters of recommendation from faculty at Brown who have taught and/or supervised you in an activity, at least one of which must be from a professor in biology (or neuroscience), chemistry, physics, or mathematics. Engineering concentrators with extensive course work and research in the field could opt for a letter from an Engineering instructor or supervisor. You are also required to have a third letter from an individual who knows you in an academic, supervisory, or mentoring capacity. This could be another Brown faculty member but it could also come from individuals on or off campus. You can add a fourth letter from a faculty member, mentor, supervisor, etc. (from Brown or elsewhere) if you feel that this will help to represent the breadth of your experiences. In general, letters of recommendation should be substantive evaluations of the particular qualities that you will bring to your chosen profession. Therefore, the best recommendations will come from people who know you well. Recommendations from high-ranking or well known individuals who do not show substantive knowledge of your qualifications are not as helpful as letters from individuals who are less prominent but who have better knowledge of your abilities and experiences.

## OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE

### Where else can I get advice about pre-med or other health careers?

- Dean Katherine Smith, oversees Biology undergraduate programs and academic advising. Her office provides full academic counseling and assists all undergraduates studying the biological sciences and related areas. Her office and website also offer essential information about research opportunities at Brown and elsewhere. <http://biology.brown.edu/bug>. The advisors in the Biology Undergraduate Education program are generally knowledgeable about pre-med and other health careers requirements and challenges. Their office is located in 124 Arnold Lab, 97 Waterman Street.
- Pre-vet students might want to talk to Dr. James Harper, a veterinarian who is the Director of the BioMed Animal Facility. Dr. Harper is very knowledgeable about veterinary medical education. His e-mail address is [Jim\\_Harper@brown.edu](mailto:Jim_Harper@brown.edu).
- David Targan, Associate Dean of the College, is knowledgeable about science education in general and undergraduate research in particular. His office is located in the Science Center. He holds weekly office hours which are posted on the Dean of the College web site at [brown.edu/college](http://brown.edu/college) and he can also be reached at [David\\_Targan@brown.edu](mailto:David_Targan@brown.edu).
- For various aspects of your preparation for health careers programs, be sure to connect with advisors and mentors at the breadth of academic and co-curricular support offices throughout campus. CareerLAB and the Writing Center are especially helpful when you are working on resumes and personal statements. The Swearer Center can be an excellent resource as you seek volunteer opportunities in the community. The Curricular Resource Center as well as the Office of International Programs would be especially helpful as you plan your academics. The Tutoring Office and Academic Support Services can give you indispensable support with your academic preparation. The Office of the Dean of the College, as well as the Office of Student Life assist with general advising and support all aspects of your overall college experience. **Health Careers Advising** is the hub for all matters relating to your exploration of the health professions as educational and career options.