

CONSIDERING MEDICAL SCHOOL?

The following information is an initial guide for undergraduate students who are interested in a possible career as a medical doctor. Basic information about what to expect as you prepare to apply to medical schools is provided, along with advice and guidance as you explore this career path.

BEFORE THE APPLICATION

Question yourself

Why do you want to become a doctor? When applying to medical school, hopefully you will have an honest and personal answer to this question that you truly believe in. Do not get pressured by friends and family, as applying to medical school is a very important decision that requires time and dedication.

Live life!

The most common misconception about successful medical school applicants is that they need to have completed a checklist of extra-curricular and academic activities. This is far from the truth; most successful applicants have spent their undergraduate years enjoying themselves and following their own interests. The benefit of this is that you will become a unique and well-rounded applicant who is satisfied with the experiences you have had in life, and you will be prepared to make the transition into medical school. **Undergraduate university can be a time of growth and self-improvement; don't let your identity become dependent on the single goal of getting into medical school.**

Prepare yourself academically

Canadian medical schools differ according to which prerequisite undergraduate courses must be completed prior to admission, and these prerequisite courses sometimes change. Be sure to investigate directly with the [Canadian medical schools](#) to understand the academic requirements and expectations. In general, you can expect to need biology, physics, general chemistry, organic chemistry, math, humanities and social science courses completed if you wish to keep your options open with medical schools in Canada and the United States.

As well, while it is never good to become entirely focused with grades, as this takes away from learning, keep in mind that marks are a very important factor in this highly competitive application process. To remain competitive, make sure you have consistently high grades (10s, 11s and 12s on McMaster's 12-point scale).

Ready, set, GO!

While it is not a good idea to get involved in extra-curricular activities with the sole intention of putting them on your medical school application, it is important to develop and demonstrate some fundamental skills and qualifications. Many Canadian medical schools ask for an autobiographical sketch or list of extra-curricular activities from their applicants to gauge their skills and personal qualifications for the medical profession and



medical school. The [CanMed Roles](#) provides a guideline for the types of skills and experiences that are expected of the profession.

Write the MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test)

Many medical schools require their applicants to [write the MCAT](#), a standardized exam covering four sections:

- Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems
- Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems
- Psychological, Social and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and
- Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills.

You must write the MCAT before you apply, so it is important to plan accordingly. Some students prefer self-studying from textbooks, while others have more success taking a preparatory course (ex. Oxford Seminars, Kaplan, Princeton). [Click here to learn more about the MCAT](#). And [Khan Academy has a free online self-study guide](#).

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Try not to get overwhelmed by all the specifics of the application process prematurely. However, if you have decided to aim for medical school, it is important to generally know what is needed. In Ontario, the application process is centralized through [OMSAS](#), and for other Canadian universities you apply to each school separately.

Transcripts

These must be sent from whichever post-secondary school(s) you have attended. Contact your school's registrar office to learn more about the fee involved and the time it takes for transcripts to be delivered.

Supplemental questions

These may involve short answer, short essay, or the [CasPer](#) which are meant to determine your suitability for the particular medical program. Writing the short essays or responding to supplemental questions often are the most time-consuming part of the application process. It is important to make the time to be thoughtful and articulate with your responses.

Autobiographical sketch

Many schools require a list of all your activities since the age of 16. Activities that should be listed include employment, volunteer work, research involvement and all other extra-curricular activities. For each activity listed, you must provide the contact information of a person who can verify that you have, in fact, completed that activity.

References

Be prepared to ask three professionals you have had significant interactions with to write you a cogent letter of reference. It is not necessarily beneficial to ask a medical doctor who barely knows you to write you a letter, since



the person should be able to write about your character from an objective viewpoint. Also, avoid using friends and family members for letters of reference.

Interviews

Each medical school will invite a certain percentage of applicants to an interview around late winter/early spring. It is very important to adequately prepare for these interviews, since they are your best chance to persuade the selection committee of your suitability for medical school. The McMaster Student Success Centre holds sessions on Preparing for Medical School Interviews early in the winter term.

MEDICAL SCHOOL ABROAD

Some students choose to apply to international medical schools in the United States, the Caribbean and beyond, to increase their chances of being accepted. A principal concern for students studying abroad with plans of returning to Canada should be securing a residency placement in Canada upon graduation from medical school. These residency spots are very competitive for international students, so it is very important to [conduct extensive research](#) if you are planning on studying medicine abroad.

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE PLAN A

Medical school acceptances are very competitive, and other career goals do not have to be labelled as “Plan B,” as there are many other exciting and fulfilling careers to pursue. The Student Success Centre can help you explore possible career paths, health-care-related or otherwise, through [career counselling and e-career planning essentials programs](#).

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Once again, **the goal of getting involved in extra-curricular activities should be self-development and self-awareness** — not simply adding to a resume. That being said, McMaster offers an extremely diverse range of activities, clubs and councils for you to get involved in. The best way to learn about what is going on is to read posters on campus, talk to people and join student groups. As well, the [MSU website](#) provides a list of all the student-run clubs available, and the Student Success Centre can provide you with further information on how to secure a volunteer placement.

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