CONSIDERING MEDICAL SCHOOL?

The following information is meant to act as an initial guide for undergraduate students who are interested in a possible career in medicine. 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 which 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 extracurricular 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 greatly differ according to which prerequisite undergraduate courses must be completed prior to admission, and these prerequisite courses sometimes change. Be sure to check out the links to Canadian medical schools at the end of this guide for specific courses, however 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. Some schools consider GPA as 40% or more of the application. To remain competitive make sure you have consistently high grades (i.e. 10’s, 11’s and 12’s 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 very important to demonstrate an ability to multitask and exercise good time management. Many Canadian medical schools ask for an autobiographical sketch, or list of extra-curricular activities, from their applicants to gauge their ability to balance activities like volunteering, involvement in clubs and athletics with academics.

Write the MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test).
Many medical schools require their applicants to write the MCAT, a standardized exam covering physical science, biological science, verbal reasoning (as of 2013). There will be a major revision of the MCAT starting Spring 2015 check the website for details. It must be written 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. Oxford Seminars offer MCAT preparation courses and two common prep courses are Kaplan and Princeton ($1700-$1800.)
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 from applicants.

Transcripts
These must be sent to OMSAS (Ontario Medical Schools Application Service) 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.

Personal Statements
These involve short answer or essay questions which are meant to determine your suitability for the particular medical program. They often take a long time to answer, and for many comprise the most time-consuming part of the application process. It is important to think long and hard about your answers, as you want to demonstrate what you have to offer to their medical school and the medical community in general. See attached document for more details.

Autobiographical Sketch
Many schools, including McMaster, require a list of all your activities since the age of 16. Activities which 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 with whom 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 families 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. McMaster Student Success Centre holds workshops on Preparing for Medical School Interviews early in the winter term.

MEDICAL SCHOOL ABROAD

Many students choose to apply to International medical schools in America, 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 labeled as “Plan B” as there are many other exciting and fulfilling careers available to pursue. The Student Success Centre can help you explore possible career paths, healthcare-related or otherwise through drop in career advising, career counselling and/or career planning programs. Come to the Student Success Centre in Gilmour Hall room 110 to find out more about all the services offered or check out the resources on our website.
EXTRACURRICULAR 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 MacInsiders, a student run information network. As well, the MSU website provides a list of all the student-run clubs available and the volunteer peer helpers in the Student Success Centre can provide you with further information into how to secure a volunteer placement.

WEBSITES WORTH VISITING

- Ontario Medical School Application Service (OMSAS)
- Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS)
- Association of American Medical Colleges - Student Info
- Getting into a Canadian Medical School
- Volunteer Hamilton
- International Medical Volunteers Association
- Career Cruising
- Canadian Medical Association (CMA)
- Association of American Medical Colleges - MCAT
- The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario
- Canadian Premed and Med School Forums
- Charity Village Canada
- MacInsiders
- MentorLinks

RESOURCES IN THE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTRE (GILMOUR HALL 110)

Ask our Student Success Leaders or Student Services Assistants for the following:

Medical School Information Binders on:
- Admission requirements to Ontario Medical Schools
- MCAT preparation
- Alternatives to Medicine

Books on:
- Medical School Admission Requirements for American and Canadian Medical Schools – 2010/2011 edition
- Writing Personal Statements for Medical schools
- Medical School Preparation and Experience – “So, you want to be a Doctor, eh” comes highly recommended.
ONTARIO FACULTIES OF MEDICINE

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Medicine
451 Smyth Rd.
Ottawa, Ontario, K1H 8M5
Telephone: (613) 562-5409
Fax: (613) 562-5651
Email: admissmd@uottawa.ca

Queen’s University
School of Medicine
Kingston, Ontario, K7L 3N6
Telephone: (613) 533-2542
Fax: (613) 533-3190

University of Toronto
Faculty of Medicine
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1A8
Telephone: (416) 978-2717
Fax: (416) 971-2163

University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Medicine
Medical Sciences Building
London, Ontario, N6A 1G7
Telephone: (519) 661-3744
Fax: (519) 661-3797

McMaster University
Faculty of Medicine
Hamilton, Ontario, L8N 3Z5
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 22235
Email: mdadmit@mcmaster.ca

Northern Ontario School of Medicine
Faculty of Medicine
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1
Telephone: (807) 766-7463

*For more information, Refer to the “Guide to Professional Programs in Canada” in our resource area (Reference Desk).
## Medical School Contact Information

### Canadian Faculties of Medicine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Alberta</th>
<th>University of British Columbia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton, AB T6G 2H7</td>
<td>Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: (780) 492-6621</td>
<td>Telephone: (604) 822-2421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax: (780) 492-7303</td>
<td>Fax: (604) 822-6061</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University of Calgary</th>
<th>Dalhousie University</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine</strong></td>
<td><strong>Clinical Research Centre</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary, AB T2N 4N1</td>
<td>Halifax, NS B3H 4H7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: (403) 220-4262</td>
<td>Telephone: (904) 494-1874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax: (403) 210-8148</td>
<td>Fax: (902) 494-6369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:ucmedapp@ucalgary.ca">ucmedapp@ucalgary.ca</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:medical.communications@dal.ca">medical.communications@dal.ca</a></td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Université Laval</th>
<th>University of Manitoba</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine</strong> (French)</td>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec, QC G1K 7P4</td>
<td>Winnipeg, MB R3E 3P5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: (418) 656-2492</td>
<td>Telephone: (204) 789-3499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax: (418) 656-7706</td>
<td>Fax: (204) 789-3929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:fmed@fmed.ulaval.ca">fmed@fmed.ulaval.ca</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:registrar_med@umanitoba.ca">registrar_med@umanitoba.ca</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>McGill University</th>
<th>Memorial University of Newfoundland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine</strong></td>
<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreal, QC H3G 1Y6</td>
<td>St. John’s, NL A1B 3V6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: (514) 398-3517</td>
<td>Telephone: (709) 777-6615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax: (514) 398-4631</td>
<td>Fax: (709) 777 – 8422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:admissions.med@mcgill.ca">admissions.med@mcgill.ca</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:munmed@mun.ca">munmed@mun.ca</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Université de Montréal
Faculty of Medicine
Montréal, QC H3C 3J7
Telephone: (514) 343-6265
Email: admission-md@umontreal.ca

Université de Sherbrooke
Faculty of Medicine
Sherbrook, QC J1H 5N4
Telephone: (819) 564-5208
Fax: (819) 820-6809
Email: admission-med@usherbrook.ca

University of Saskatchewan
College of Medicine
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5E5
Telephone: (306) 966-8554
Fax: (306) 966-6164
Email: med.admissions@usask.ca

*For more information, Refer to the “Guide to Professional Programs in Canada” in our resource area (Reference Desk).
ALTERNATIVES TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

The following list of health care related careers is broad and comprehensive and is intended to provide a starting point in identifying and exploring health career alternatives to medicine. We developed this list because so many people find it hard to identify career alternatives to the role of physician, a role that has far too many talented and well-qualified applicants for the limited opportunities available.

We have organized the list according to five principal roles that physicians often play in the life of patients and/or the health care system. We hope that people will use this list as a starting point to consider and explore alternatives in light of the reasons they are interested in medicine and health care careers.

Career fields are arranged within the five main categories according to the level of academic preparation typically required for entry. The multiple listings of some occupational categories at different levels of training reflect the reality that some kinds of work can be accessed in different ways and at different points in an individual’s academic development. Additionally, it is often true that professionals with different academic levels of training assume varying duties and levels of responsibility. The degree level of a particular program does not necessarily reflect ease of entry, or indicate the nature of the academic performance required for a person to be regarded as a strong candidate for admission.

Again, we hope that people use this information as a starting point in clarifying and investigating the kinds of work and opportunities that interest them. Wise career and life planners recognize that careers in health care, as is true of most fields today, are dynamic, quickly changing, and much affected by technological innovation and limited financial resources.

**CLINICIANS/PRACTITIONERS**

**BACHELOR’S LEVEL**
- Cardiac Rehabilitation Specialist
- Child Life Specialist
- Dietician/Nutritionist
- Exercise Physiologist
- Head Injuries Counsellor
- Kinesiologist
- Midwife
- Nurse/Nurse Practitioner
- Pharmacist
- Social Worker
- Physician Assistant
- Ultrasonographer

**MASTER’S LEVEL**
- Audiologist
- Chaplain
- Clinical Nursing/Specialist
- Genetic Counsellor
- Occupational Therapist
- Psychological Associate
- Psychotherapist
- Art/Music Therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Social Worker
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Orthoptist

**DOCTORAL LEVEL**
- Acupuncturist
- Chiropractor
- Dentist
- Naturopath
- Optometrist
- Orthodontist
- Osteopath (U.S. for training)
- Psychologist
- Psychotherapist
- Veterinarian
### RESEARCH/INVESTIGATIVE

**BACHELOR’S LEVEL**
- Environmental Health Worker
- Exercise Physiologist
- Geriatric Specialist
- Gerontologist
- Kinesiologist
- Nurse
- Pharmacist
- Pharmacologist
- Research Assistant

**MASTER’S LEVEL**
- Biostatistician
- Clinical Nursing Specialist
- Clinical Pharmacist
- Clinical Trials Coordinator
- Community Health Investigator
- Epidemiologist
- Food Scientist
- Psychometrist
- Research Associate

**DOCTORAL LEVEL**
- Coroner
- Forensic Scientist
- Medical Anthropologist/Sociologist
- Medical Ethicist
- Medical/Health Historian
- Research Scientist

### HEALTH EDUCATION / PROMOTION

**BACHELOR’S LEVEL**
- Dietician/Nutritionist
- Environmental Health Worker
- Fitness Consultant
- Kinesiologist
- Lactation Consultant
- Medical Illustrator
- Medical Journalist
- Midwifery
- Nurse
- Pharmaceutical Sales Rep
- Social Worker

**MASTER’S LEVEL**
- Clinical Nursing Specialist
- Community/Public Health Worker
- Environmental Health Worker
- Health Promoter/Educator
- Industrial Hygienist
- Medical Librarian
- Medical Journalist
- Occupational Health and Safety

**DOCTORAL LEVEL**
- Chiropractor
- Dentist
- Naturopath
- Optometrist
- Podiatrist
- College/University Instructor
- Medical Historian
- Sexologist

### HEALTH TECHNOLOGY / DIAGNOSTIC

**BACHELOR’S LEVEL**
- Biomedical Engineer
- Sales Representative
- Physiotherapist
- Radiation Therapist

**MASTER’S LEVEL**
- Biomedical Engineer
- Clinical Pharmacist
- Medical Physicist
- Psychometrist

**DOCTORAL LEVEL**
- Dentist
- Optometrist
- Veterinarian
POLICY / ADMINISTRATION

BACHELOR’S LEVEL

Development Officer (Fundraiser)
Health Quality Control Analyst
Volunteer Coordinator

MASTER’S LEVEL

Health Care Administrator
Health Information Systems Manager
Health Policy Analyst

OTHER

Athletic Trainer
Cardio-pulmonary Perfusionist
Cytotechnologist
Dental Hygienist
Dialysis Technician
Medical Laboratory Technologist
Respiratory Therapist
Medical Supplies Sales Representative
Operating Room Technician
Orthotics / Prosthetics Technician
Paramedic / Emergency Ambulance Technician
Radiographer
Ultrasonographer

* In some areas you may also need to be trained as a medical doctor.
WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT

The writing of autobiographical information in support of applications to employment or academic opportunities could well be called a rite of passage for university students. The overall trend in application processes for academic programs is discernibly in the direction of autobiographical information being increasingly relied upon to distinguish between candidates. How this information is used still varies widely amongst programs, and even amongst different schools offering similar or identical programs. For example, experience profiles, autobiographical application forms or statements of interest are prime considerations to some schools and programs once academic credentials are met. To others, they are one factor of many, including marks, letters of reference and admission test results.

What does it take to prepare good answers to application questions? To be successful, you need to first be knowledgeable about the institution, program, and your attributes and goals. Next, you should have a good understanding of the questions (what’s really being asked), have relevant experience to draw upon, good writing skills and sufficient time to prepare sincere, thoughtful and concise answers.

So where do many applicants go wrong in preparing autobiographical statements, supplementary application forms and experience profiles?

• By basing their responses on a superficial understanding of the nature and intent of the questions, together with insufficient information about the programs to which they are applying, and the careers that follow.
• By providing an exhaustive review of experience without showing its value and link to career goals.
• By failing to have a clear career goal.

The good news is that the steps to creating a fabulous application are strikingly similar to writing an essay. As in essay writing, it is essential to present your information in a logical order, provide proof to support the content, and unify points around an underlying theme. The remainder of this document should help demystify the application process. Consider attending the “How to Write your Personal Statement Workshop” at the Student Success Centre to get additional guidance on this process.

STEP ONE: UNDERSTAND THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PROCESS

For the moment, let’s step into the shoes of the folks who design and administer admission and selection processes, and let’s imagine what their concerns must be. Their role is very similar to those of employers, who have a real stake in the successes and outcomes of the people they hire. What characterizes an ideal applicant for a professional or graduate school program? For every admissions coordinator or team the answer is the applicant who demonstrates clear potential for completing the program and succeeding in the workplace as a graduate.

STEP TWO: DO YOUR RESEARCH

A common mistake made by applicants is beginning to write before doing the necessary research. It is easy to overlook the need for research when we begin to write about a topic as familiar as ourselves. But application processes ask us to write about particular information about ourselves in a way that is new and uncomfortable. How often do we sit down to communicate our hopes for the future and successes from our past to someone we’ve never met? How often do we
practice doing that in writing?

There are clearly three research tasks facing an applicant:

1. The career/profession,
2. The program and school to which the application is being made,
3. Experience, qualifications, and qualities of the applicant.

RESEARCHING THE CAREER / PROFESSION

Setting aside the time to research the career/profession will help you fully understand what the necessary skills and characteristics are to be successful in the position. Furthermore, it will help clarify whether this career is a good fit with your interests, personality, values, and lifestyle expectations; thus help you with step three in the research tasks.

- Review job descriptions to determine themes in requested competencies.
- Access Career Cruising to research up-to-date, comprehensive, Canadian sources of career information (located in the Resource Centre section at http://careers.mcmaster.ca).
- Conduct informational interviews and make contacts in the field; for a database of contacts access mentorLINKS on the Student Success Centre website.

RESEARCHING PROGRAMS & SCHOOLS

The goals of conducting program research are twofold: to gain clarity and insight into the criteria that programs will use to determine applicants’ potential fit and to gain the information required to answer questions that directly measure applicants’ knowledge of a program. To accomplish this task consider:

- Reviewing literature provided by the programs themselves.
- Speaking with program staff, faculty, students and grads.
- Reading alumni publications and school newspapers to find up to date information on campus issues, strategic directions, new research grants and resource allocation
- Reviewing articles and books that provide program rankings.
- Arranging a personal visit.

ASSESSING YOURSELF

This is the effort that generates most of the content of an autobiographical application form, while research into the career and the program is necessary to determine the criteria for making selections amongst this content. Completing a thorough, systematic review of past life experiences (including experiences in school, at work, and in extracurricular) pays big dividends. It provides the detailed data necessary to answer application questions and can be instrumental in developing insight into the value of these experiences as evidence of your skills, abilities, strengths and suitability to a given career and program.

Consider first constructing a detailed, comprehensive list of activities over the past five or more years, broken into sensible categories such as Education, Employment, and Other. Next, analyze each experience by writing answers for each of the following seven questions:

- Why did I choose to participate in this activity?
- What did I do?
- What did I learn?
- What did I enjoy?
• What did I contribute?
• What did other people say I did well?
• What did I accomplish, succeed at or achieve?

Of the utmost importance in assessing yourself is arriving at a career goal. However, defining a goal often seems to be the most elusive aspect of all – but it too is achievable when broken down into a series of steps involving the careful consideration of personal and career information.

STEP THREE: DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGY

Reviewing autobiographical information to develop an application strategy and determine one’s qualifications is the final step before beginning to write. It is simply the step of putting together information about past experiences with knowledge of the kinds of skills, knowledge, characteristics and experiences a program considers vital to success.

A simple table is often helpful in organizing the information, for example, by listing in one column all the program criteria or requirements, and in another, all the possible experiences an applicant could use as proof of fulfilling them. Many criteria can be determined by a close reading of the application form.

Others may be more subtle and apparent only to the applicants who have taken the time and effort to do the thorough research outlined in Step Two. The purpose of a table of this kind is to first list all the possibilities in order to strategically choose amongst them for best overall effect.

To make choices about the possible experiences an applicant could include, students should consider using the 3 R’s of experiences: those that are the most related (similar environments, people and tasks), the most responsible, and ideally also the most recent.

STEP FOUR: NOW YOU ARE READY TO WRITE

With research done and a sound strategy in place, it is finally time to begin the writing process. The collective experience and wisdom of many writers and reviewers of application forms suggests the following:

• When you do write, remember to be insightful – to focus on what you learned or demonstrated through a situation, rather than simply listing the details or duties involved.
• Be sure to make the links between the skills and the experiences clear by showing proof. Before you write about any experience, be sure of your purpose in including it. A simple formula to consider is: “Through _________ (an experience) I demonstrated/learned _________ (a skill, an insight) with __________ (a successful result).”
• Consider the approach of being selective, rather than comprehensive. To the reviewer of many applications, comprehensive means reading about everything, which means hard work.
• Remember to focus on the peaks of your experiences – your reader will assume you’ve done the preliminaries.
• Be sincere, concise and to the point. Don’t over or undersell yourself.
• And above all, do answer the questions. Be sure to include, wherever possible, the situation/task, the action you took (be specific, especially if you worked in a group) and the result.
• And the bottom line: it almost goes without saying that your application must be letter perfect in grammar, spelling and style.
RESOURCES FOR APPLICATION WRITERS

• Sign up for workshops on Writing Personal Statements on OSCARplus
• If you need information about specific careers and the educational requirements to get into them, access MentorLinks, Career Cruising and the Resource Centre in the Student Success Centre.
• Review print resources on writing winning personal statements

FINAL TIPS ON WRITING AN EXCELLENT APPLICATION…

• Give yourself lots of time. Start early
• Approach it like a research project on the topic of “My Qualifications”
• Research before you begin to write
• Know why you are including an experience before you begin to write about it.
• Be clear about your goals and your reasons for admission.
• Remember to be analytical rather than simply descriptive – it’s your job to identify and communicate the value of your experiences.
• Be selective. Show them your best stuff.

Be yourself. Use your own words and your own style.