

# Introduction to Preparation for Medical School at Reed

This is an outline of useful information if you are considering a career in medicine. It is not intended to be comprehensive, rather to give you highlights, get you thinking, and point you in directions for further planning. In it you find a summary of admissions requirements for medical school, a timetable of activities should you decide to apply, and an introduction to the role of the pre-med advisers at Reed.

## **Why medicine?**

More than any topic, this question cannot be adequately addressed in a brief handout. Some points to be made:

### **Medicine is not for everyone.**

It is a demanding career that requires vigorous, expensive, and ongoing training. Simply liking science or being a people person is not adequate. As the [American Association of Medical Colleges](#) puts it:

What does it take to be a physician? Briefly, it takes physical, emotional, and intellectual stamina; a good adjustment to any challenges; the desire to work with and for people; and, particularly, the ability to think logically and to use common sense. Deciding whether to apply to medical school must be the outcome of serious personal reflection about one's motivations and aspirations as these relate to the realities of medical practice such as working with sick people, continuing study for 7-11 years after college, and commitment to lifelong learning. (Medical School Admission Requirements, AAMC)

### **Pre-medical coursework does not inform you about the practice of medicine.**

As implied previously, the life of a practicing physician is far different than your experience taking biology, organic chemistry, humanities, or even anatomy. The only way to know if you would want to BE a physician (as opposed to just learning about medicine) is to gain exposure to it through shadowing professionals, networking, physician acquaintances, and volunteer or paid employment experiences. Ask yourself whether the pressures and issues a health-care professional faces on a daily basis are those that you would want to face. Is what this professional does on a day-to-day basis what you want to do? Also, take the time to seriously investigate alternative health careers as you explore; one of the alternatives may be better suited to your motivations and interest in health care.

## **Why Reed?**

The emphasis on independent learning, critical thinking, and the rigor of the academic environment are excellent preparation for medical school, should you choose this route. Reed provides a very different experience from typical pre-medical fare. Should you thrive in the Reed environment, your academic preparation and aptitude for a career as a physician will be top-notch. The rest will be shaped by your extracurricular experiences.

## **Requirements for Admission to Medical School**

### **Course work**

Exact requirements vary with individual schools, but in general the idea is to confirm one's interest in and capacity for proceeding further in fields fundamental to the study of medicine, as well as to prepare you for the MCAT exam, e.g., biology, chemistry, physics. Highly developed communication skills are also important.

Subjects required by virtually all medical schools:

- \* Biology, one year (e.g., Bio 101-102)
- \* Chemistry, two years, general and organic (e.g., Chem 101-102; 201-202)
- \* Physics, one year (e.g., Physics 101-102)
- \* Biochemistry, one year (e.g., Chem 391-392)
- \* Social Science, one semester (e.g., Psy 101)
- \* English (Hum 110 works but requires a letter from the head of Hum affirming that the course involves a considerable amount of English composition)

Subjects required by about half of US medical schools:

- \* Calculus (e.g., Math 111-112)
- \* Statistics (e.g., Math 141)
- \* Additional Psychology or social science
- \* Genetics (e.g., Bio 363)
- \* Microbiology (e.g., 358)
- \* Molecular or Cell Biology (e.g., Bio 372)

Since knowledge of calculus is fundamental to doing well in physics, we advise all premed students to take a year of calculus.

### **Grades**

Medical schools consider grades to be the most important predictor of performance in med school yet, give that, they are reluctant to give cutoff GPAs, in part because they do not want to exclude the occasional exceptionally talented student with a mediocre GPA. Moreover, med schools recognize that there is a lot of variation in grading policy between colleges. In general, the GPA of less than 3.2 is problematic unless it is offset by good a MCAT score and/or laudatory letters of recommendation, personal qualities, and experience. For the curious, the 20-year average GPA for Reed acceptees was 3.39, with a range from 3.96 to 2.59.

### **MCAT**

Medical schools typically say that MCAT scores are weighted at about a third, but this varies. Again, they are reluctant to give cutoff values, but the median scores of medical schools range from 500 to 522.

### **Letters of recommendation**

Their importance varies with the school, ranging from most important to weighting only a tenth. Generally, three letters from faculty who know you well meets this requirement. Refer to the

guidelines for letters of evaluation for important content information. An in-depth discussion with your faculty recommenders along with a copy of your AMCAS essay is extremely helpful to your faculty as they address not only your academic qualifications, also the equally important personal qualities that will make you a good physician.

### **Medically related experience**

Hospital or other medical experience is required by most schools and is highly weighted in the application process, and direct patient contact is preferred. Non-health care community service is also a plus. Medical schools are interested in candidates who will be community leaders and who have a demonstrated record of exploring the field of medicine and show civic involvement. More importantly, such experience is extremely valuable to your decision-making process about your own suitability for a challenging career in medicine. We find that applicants without community-based, civic, and leadership experience have a difficult time demonstrating a commitment to this career path. Volunteer opportunities can be researched through the Reed SEEDS Office and CLBR.

### **State residency**

Because they receive state taxpayer funds, many public schools are required to select a majority of in-state applicants. Some private schools have informal commitments to enroll a percentage of state residents. See Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR), published yearly by the Association of American Medical Colleges, and other publications available through an appointment with CLBR.

When you're ready to apply, please follow the instructions on the following page.

**Please consult with a faculty or CLBR premed advisor and provide the following information before beginning the application process.**

We also suggest that you provide similar information when you ask faculty or other individuals to provide letters of evaluation. You may also include your AMCAS essay or other pertinent information.

**Name**

**AAMC #** (required as part of the letters of evaluation)

Please address the following:

- Briefly describe your motivation to apply to medical school.
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses in your academic preparation for medical school?
- Have you had any work or volunteer experience in a medical or human services situation? If so, please describe.
- How have you spent your summers? Have any of these occupations contributed to your decision to attend medical school? If so, how?
- Is anyone in your family associated with the medical profession? If so, please indicate the person's job and his/her relationship to you. How has he/she influenced your decision to attend medical school?
- Have you participated in any extracurricular activities at Reed or in the community? (Indicate what was done, e.g., offices held, duties, and when you participated.)
- Are there any special circumstances, difficulties, or achievements in your academic record or personal history that should be noted?
- List the schools to which you plan to apply, and if available, your MCAT scores. State of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_
- Address, phone number, e-mail where you can be reached during the application cycle.

