What does “pre-health” mean?
Pre-Health is an umbrella term for the diverse careers in the health professions that students may pursue, from acupuncture to veterinary medicine. Although most Princeton students pursue medical studies, we hope that students are open-minded to learn about other potential career paths in the health fields and beyond.

What’s the “pre-health track”?
You will hear Princeton students referring to the pre-med or pre-health track. Since pre-med/health is not a major, students call it a “track” to signify the fact that there are certain courses you have to take in preparation for health professional school. This track is very flexible – you’re welcome to hop on or off at any time, but you may want to check in with HPA if you decide to do so.

What services does Princeton University offer to its pre-health students?
Whatever you’re looking for, we’re willing to help you find it! Aside from the myriad support structures and services offered to all students at Princeton, here are some specific to incoming pre-health students:

- **The Health Professions Advising Office (HPA)** – two full-time, professional staff members who advise students as they clarify their health professional goals and help them reach these goals, in part by assisting them in the health professional school application process. Advisers are available through drop in hours and individual appointments.
- **HPA Peer Advisers** – upper-class students affiliated with residential colleges who work with first-year students on any academic concerns. Peer advisers can give you their perspectives on the courses, application processes, etc.
- **20+ Health-Related Student Organizations** – these student-run groups provide support, resources and programming for fellow pre-health students; they allow students to explore interests in the medicine and health.
- **First-Year and Sophomore Info Sessions** – geared specifically to students new to the “pre-health track,” these sessions give students a basic understanding of what it means to be pre-health.
- **The Doctor Is In Speaker Series** – a series featuring distinguished alumni physicians who participate in informal discussions with students. Alums share their experiences from all stages of their careers and from diverse perspectives in health fields.
- **Health Professions Resource Library** – a borrowing library of books, videos, handouts, and other materials.
- **HPA Website** – a wealth of information is available through our website, www.princeton.edu/hpa
- **HPA on Facebook** – we send reminders for events, and share links to interesting news stories, at www.facebook.com/princetonhpa
- **HPA Vitals** – a weekly newsletter featuring Questions of the Week, internship and research opportunities, health-related events on campus, and other information relevant to pre-health students.

What services does Princeton University offer to students applying to health professional schools?
As students (and alumni) navigate the complex process of applying to medical, dental and veterinary schools, additional support is provided by the following resources:

- **Applicant Guide and Checklist** – a comprehensive handbook to provide structure in the application process.
- **Workshops** – a general Applicant Workshop outlines the process of applying to schools and utilizing the services of HPA. Additional workshops are available on topics including the Standardized Application; Writing the Personal Statement; Selecting Schools; and Interviewing.
- **Pre-Application Interview (PAI)** – HPA interviews each applicant in a low-stress, twenty-minute session. The interview helps HPA become familiar with the applicants, and provides the applicants with interview practice, and feedback on strengths and weaknesses of their candidacies.
- **Composite Letter of Recommendation** – The letter of recommendation from HPA is often called a committee or composite letter since it incorporates information from multiple sources. A composite letter holistically encapsulates the student's candidacy to health professions schools. Many schools prefer composite letters over individual letters, which may not be as comprehensive.

What are health professional schools looking for in applicants?
Schools are interested in well-rounded, mature, and intellectually curious applicants with excellent academic abilities, strong interpersonal skills, clear motivation for medicine, and demonstrated compassion and concern for others. In additional to critical thinking, reasoning, and scientific ability, medical schools have endorsed nine interpersonal and intrapersonal core competencies for entering medical students: 1) service orientation; 2) social skills; 3) cultural competence; 4) teamwork; 5) oral communication; 6) ethical responsibility to self and others; 7) reliability and dependability; 8) resilience and adaptability; 9) capacity for improvement.

We highlight five factors that are of particular importance in the application process: 1) a well-rounded, high-achieving academic orientation (with competitive GPA and standardized test scores); 2) meaningful co-curricular activities and the ability to demonstrate familiarity with and suitability for medicine; 3) positive letters of recommendation; 4) deliberate timing in the application process; and 5) strong performance in the interview.
What are the course requirements for admission to health professional programs?
Most medical and dental schools require one year each of lectures and labs in General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Biology, and Physics, two semesters of English (Writing Seminar counts as one), and one to two semesters of college-level mathematics. Many now require or strongly encourage Biochemistry. Other health professional schools’ requirements differ, especially for students in veterinary medicine, so contact the HPA early to explore these requirements.

Can I use AP credit to fulfill my pre-health requirements?
It depends on the schools and the courses. If you use AP credit to place out of an introductory science course, it is in your best interest to “replace” it with an upper level course with laboratory in that discipline. HPA advisers work closely with students to be sure that their course work plans will fulfill their pre-requisites for health professions schools.

How does the English requirement work?
Most medical schools require two semesters of English. Princeton’s Writing Seminar requirement fulfills one of the two semesters of required English. The other course should be a literature-based course. Many students take a literature-based course that also fulfills the Literature and Arts distribution requirement.

Do I have to major in a science?
No. Beyond the required science courses, a broad humanities and liberal arts background is encouraged and expected, as is majoring in the field that most interests you.

How will I get all the courses done?
Read through our “Preparing for a Career in the Health Professions” handout, available on our website and in hard copy at the HPA office. It provides more information about possible timelines by which you can complete courses, take your standardized test, and apply to health professions school.

What if I’m not doing as well as I thought I would in my classes? Maybe I’m not cut out to be a doctor.
The level of rigor and the expectations at Princeton will be far beyond what many students experienced in high school. It’s fairly normal to experience some “culture shock” as you make the adjustment. It is critical to “diagnose” any potential problems areas early and “treat” them via things like changing your study habits, visiting office hours, meeting with McGraw Center learning consultants, going to study groups, and adjusting your time management. Talk with an adviser at HPA or in your residential college to assess what steps might be best for you to take as you adjust to Princeton. HPA advisers believe that everyone who got into Princeton has what it takes to become a physician – many students discover that there are other opportunities that better suit their talents and interests, but if you are sure that medicine is right for you, we will help you find a way to get there (even if it may not have been the way that you intended when you arrived).

What do most pre-health students major in?
Quite a few major in the sciences because that’s where much of their interest lies, but applicants to health professional school each year come from diverse disciplines.

Can I study abroad and be pre-health?
Yes, it’s a wonderful experience that shouldn’t be missed, if it interests you. An overseas experience can complement and enhance both your general program of study and your pre-health interests. Moreover, fluency in a language other than English and cross-cultural experience can enhance your application to a health professional school. Generally, students work with the Study Abroad advisers to plan their trips and with HPA advisors to plan their pre-health prerequisite courses around their study abroad experience.

What kinds of grades will I need to be accepted?
The higher the better, obviously, but a good balance of competitive GPA and strong performance on the MCAT will serve you well. Currently, with an average in the 3.4-3.6 range, an MCAT in the 80th-90th percentile, and impressive non-academic experiences, you can consider yourself competitive. However, there are many individual factors that come into play in the admissions process, and there is no magic formula that will get you accepted. Health professional schools are aware of the quality of our students and academic programs, which can work in your favor as an applicant.

What is the MCAT?
The MCAT is a full-day, multiple-choice standardized test required by all medical schools. It tests verbal reasoning, biological sciences, physical sciences, and concepts from psychology and sociology that address the importance of socio-cultural and behavioral determinants of health and health outcomes. You will be best equipped to take the MCAT when you have completed the chemistry, biology, biochemistry and physics requirements, and have gained familiarity with basic research methods and statistics, and psychology and sociology concepts. Similar tests are administered for most health professions. You can also learn more by consulting the AAMC website: http://www.aamc.org/mcat/.
What score do I need on the MCAT to get into medical school?
Again, there is no magical formula. The MCAT is in transition, so we do not have as much data right now as we normally do about MCAT. A score in the 80th percentile is generally considered competitive, but it’s only one factor of many for gaining admission. The average MCAT for accepted applicants nationally in 2013 was around the 80th percentile.

Does Princeton University offer test-prep classes?
Kaplan and Princeton Review offer classes on or near campus, but Princeton is not affiliated with either, and does not endorse any specific test prep company. Students should research what these courses offer based on personal study habits and learning styles. Many students do fine by saving their money and creating a self-study program. It's a matter of personal preference – but make sure that you do study!

ACTIVITIES

What kinds of co-curricular experiences should I seek?
You should pursue anything that interests you. Medical schools are interested in students who have been active contributors on campus, and who have a range of interests. You should choose a few things to do meaningfully and well, and always focus on your academics first.

Do I need to have medically-related experiences?
It is important that you involve yourself meaningfully in a medical setting, to show medical schools (and yourself!) that you have observed medical practice first-hand and have a realistic understanding of the career to which you're committing. Students often do this through volunteer work in hospitals and clinics, summer jobs, internships, formal pre-health summer programs, or shadowing physicians in their private practices.

Was volunteering in high school enough?
It's a good start, and you're encouraged to draw on these experiences and the people that you met through them to gain even more clinical experience as a college student.

Princeton doesn't have a medical school. How do Princeton pre-health students gain clinical experience during their undergrad years?
As an institution committed to the liberal arts and focused on the undergraduate experience, we do not have a medical, law or business school on our campus. But, this in no way precludes relevant, timely clinical exposure. Many students volunteer at the University Medical Center of Princeton at Plainsboro (the green line Tiger Transit bus goes directly to the hospital), or gain EMT certification as members of two local volunteer rescue squads (PFARS and Twin W). There are also many opportunities to care for others in health-oriented positions; go to http://pace.princeton.edu, and you can access a number of health related opportunities, including volunteering, through the Student Volunteer Corps (SVC). Sometimes students find it easier, though, to devote 20 hours per week during vacation, than to negotiate classes, studying, other activities, and volunteering during the academic year.

What else can I do to serve the community?
Community service is a means to demonstrate your concern and compassion for others, and gives you an opportunity to work with those different from yourself, which is important in getting ready to see patients of all backgrounds. The PACE Center for Civic Engagement (pace.princeton.edu) can help to connect you with additional volunteer service projects, alternative break trips, and other endeavors that meet your interests.

Do I need to do research to get into medical school?
As with any other experience, try it if you think you would enjoy it, but don’t do it just because you think it’ll give you an “edge.” Health professional schools want you to engage in activities that interest you, while helping you develop the skills and values that will improve your practice as a health care provider. That said, working in a faculty member's lab, or in an intensive summer experience, can provide you with insight into the world of research, hands on skills, and strong letters of recommendation.

LETTERS

Who will write my letters of recommendation?
When you apply to medical school, you will need to have four to six letters of recommendation from faculty and others (such as research mentors and supervisors in clinical work) who can speak to your candidacy and readiness to become a health professional. All of these letters are submitted to the HPA, and a composite letter of evaluation is written for you.

What if I don’t know any of my professors well enough to ask for a letter?
From your first year, take time to walk into office hours and start conversations; the more practice you gain, the easier it will be. Starting in your first semester, make it a goal to get to know one faculty member well; by the time you apply, you’ll have developed relationships with at least six professors.

Can you describe the composite letter of recommendation?
The composite letter speaks to your unique characteristics and experiences that have prepared you for a career in the health professions. We draw on multiple sources to paint this picture, including: a pre-application interview; letters of recommendation from faculty and other individuals; an essay that you’ll write and submit as part of your application; co-curricular activities; and your academic record.
When should I apply to medical school and how do I go about it?
Ideally, you should not apply until you are certain that you’re ready to make a lifetime commitment, and are a strong enough candidate to merit serious consideration by your chosen schools. Pragmatically, you should have:

- Completed (and done well in) all pre-requisite courses.
- Gotten to know enough faculty, staff, and others to garner strong letters of recommendation.
- Gained some clinical experience in your chosen field.

Once you determine the year in which you plan to matriculate, it is to your advantage to apply as early as possible. Many schools have rolling admissions and begin admitting students even before the application deadline, so get your name in early! Medical schools begin accepting applications on or near June 1st for matriculants to the following year’s class; that is, about fifteen months before you hope to begin your professional school program.

Also, the earlier you start the application process within your application year, the sooner we can begin writing your composite letter of recommendation. You’ll learn more about this in the Applicant Workshops as you prepare to apply.

Is it okay to take time off between graduating from Princeton and medical school?
Yes! Over 70% of Princeton applicants opt to take at least a year between graduation from college and matriculation to health professional school. This allows students to avoid taking MCAT during the school year, to have their thesis completed and a letter of recommendation based on the thesis experience, to have more flexibility to study abroad and engage in co-curricular activities, to gain work experience, and just to give themselves a break between two rigorous academic endeavors. The average age of a medical school matriculant is 24 – plenty of others are opting for some time off to regroup and pursue other interests. All of the services that Princeton offers are available to you as an alumnus.

How well do Princeton University students do on the MCAT?
In the last four years of the MCAT (Jan 2011-Dec 2014), the national mean for examinees was a 25.1 (a little over 8 in each of the three multiple choice sections), and about 32% of examinees nationally scored in a competitive range (i.e. 29-45). Princeton’s mean score was a 32.6, with 81% scoring in the competitive range.

What percentage of Princeton University applicants get into health professional schools?
Nationally, Princeton’s acceptance rate for students to MD schools in recent years has been about double the national average (82-90% vs. 43-45%), and we are similarly successful with applicants to osteopathic medical (DO), dental, and veterinary schools. More importantly, our students feel well-prepared for their professional school, and do well once they’re accepted.

Which medical schools do Princeton students apply to and attend most often?
Many choose to attend public medical schools in their home state, where financing options are favorable and support networks close at hand. Many also choose urban areas with diverse patient populations. Med schools matriculating the most Princeton applicants over the past four years are Columbia, U Penn, Rutgers – Robert Wood Johnson, Johns Hopkins, UCSF, New York University, Harvard, Case Western, and Weill Cornell.

When should I meet with HPA advisers?
Come and find us early and often! Attend a Freshman Information Session in the residential colleges in October, and then bring your follow-up questions to an individual appointment or to drop in hours (or invite us out for a meal in your college)! We look forward to meeting all of you, and the earlier we get to know you, the more we’ll be able to help you set and reach your goals. Our contact information is below.

Where is HPA?
Our office is located 36 University Place. We are at the back of the 2nd floor – take the elevator in the University store to floor 2M, or walk in past Career Services to our front entrance.

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