

DUS Conference, October 2020- A Health Professions Crash Course

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Q: Given their specific challenges for International Students...what suggestions/ alternatives do you have for international students who hope to go to medical school?

A: *Students can look at alternatives like dental school, which is slightly more open to international students. If medicine is the only path for them, they will likely have more success exploring international programs. This is best evaluated on a student to student basis since each student has slightly different situations.*

Q: Do you think there's a difference when a student earned their associate degree from community college and then matriculated to 4 year institution to complete the BS to prepare for med school/PA school? I would think a student that subsequently demonstrates strong ability in upper level science courses at 4 yr school and extra/co-curricular experiences would override science GPA courses earned at community college. Thoughts? We have students who will utilize our local CC to lessen the financial burden of college.

A: *In this particular case I think the student's choice shows maturity and a dedication to their future career. While I would still advise them to call the medical schools they are most interested in, schools will generally look favorably upon students who have carefully consider the best path for them. While schools are looking for some amount of certainty that students can handle a rigorous, science heavy curriculum, they are also looking for students who know themselves well, are mature, and think before they act.*

Additionally, schools are looking at the trend of a student's grades and involvement. If a student had a difficult semester at any point during their college education, medical schools are going to be looking at how they managed the crisis, recovered from it, and reflected on it/grew from it.

*Much of this process really boils down to how each student uniquely communicates their academic ability, altruistic nature, and long-term commitment to medicine. A simply high achieving student is not guaranteed a spot in a medical school class if there is any doubt as to their long-term dedication to the field of medicine (this can be shown with non-clinical experiences as well as clinical). **Applying to medical school should not be a spur of the moment decision!***

Q: Why would community college classes not be accepted if they are also Middle States or regionally accredited?

A: *Students should always check with several of the schools they intend on applying to—often times schools are more accepting of community college credits than we think they might be, but there are still some schools that hold hard and fast to that rule. They are looking for some assurance that students are coming in with similar academic preparation.*

Q: At my university, in the Academic Advising Office, we work with all freshman students. They will transition to a Faculty advisor in their sophomore year. Is there anything specific we should focus on with first-year, pre-med or pre-physician assistant students?

A: *Initially, giving students the information for courses they need to take, and emphasizing that there are many components apart from academic metrics that play into their future acceptance to medical school. For PA students, we would emphasize the importance of paid patient care hours. Students should be thinking from Day 1 about why they want to pursue this path (informational interviews and shadowing help with this, along with reflection), as they join clubs, involve themselves in their community, work, etc. they should be thinking about the narrative that will eventually illustrate to medical/PA/dental schools their longitudinal commitment to this path.*

Q: Can you please share when a student would select to do a "Post-Bac"?

A: *This is a bit tricky—post-bac programs can be beneficial for different reasons. Before advising a student to pursue a post-bac, we suggest having a more in-depth conversation about the strengths and weakness of their application. If there is an academic deficiency, a post-bac program might be a good option. Students should investigate the differences between programs—some allow students to take classes with first year medical students, some offer comprehensive advising while students only take the necessary classes to prepare them for medical school, and others have a strict curriculum with little variation. Additionally, some programs have a linkage program with a medical school with might be appealing to certain students.*

Some students might be on the cusp academically and a post-bac program would be overkill or rather low value for the cost. In their case, they might focus on more unique experiences that help communicate the narrative of “why me and why medicine” while taking a class or two to supplement their undergraduate record. Keep in mind that these classes will not contribute to their undergraduate GPA but are to boost the confidence of the admissions committee.

Q: Are the pre-health services at UP available to students at Commonwealth campuses?

A: *Yes! And to alumni as well. They are welcome to reach out to us individually, but they can also request access to our [Pre-Health Canvas Module](#) which has details on upcoming group advising sessions, as well as recordings of past sessions.*

Q: Have you seen much of a shift in expectations in our pandemic times? Things are so different right now, with our students not having a choice to choose in person labs (we are almost entirely remote). I advise a lot of pre-med/PA/PT students, and this is their biggest concern lately, especially as I have been advising them against it before now.

A: *We have not seen a great shift—schools are not able to compromise on the qualifications for their students and graduates. However, they have expressed a willingness to consider remote/online classes and labs for the time being, and they encourage students to get creative in how they demonstrate their clinical exposure and commitment to medicine. Virtual shadowing is just one way that can be accomplished, other ways are pen pal relationships with nursing homes, meals on wheels, informational interviews with physicians/PAs/dentists, etc.*

Q: For students coming from under resourced backgrounds who may be unprepared to jump feet first into BIOL 110/CHEM 110 semester one, besides sending them to pre-health advising, which we will, how do you work with these students to bridge the gaps in their knowledge and accomplish their career goals?

A: CHEM 108 can be a great option for students who need additional support as they start the chemistry course sequence. Additionally, students do have the option to audit a course to have some sense of expectations and course content before they attempt to take the course for a grade. Keep in mind that everyone has their own timeline and path to professional school. They should attempt these courses when they are ready, and if that means taking a gap year, then we strategize to come up with exciting ways to use that time. There is no reason to view a gap year as lost time, and there are many paid opportunities as well.

Q: What suggestions do you have for students who are seeking to gain hours/experience during the pandemic? The college I work at requires observation hours for our Physical Therapy Assistant program and many students have faced problems finding locations that will allow them to observe and complete hours

A: This is difficult! Students who are already certified (medical assistants, certified nursing assistants, EMTs, dental assistants, etc.) are having a much easier time with this since there are still jobs available and people who need care. Those who are not certified are having a much more difficult time. We have recently heard of <https://advclinical.org/> offering certification virtually, but these sorts of opportunities are far and few between. Students can also do informational interviews with professionals in their chosen area, as well as look for virtual shadowing opportunities ([WebShadowers](#) is a popular option).

Q: Do you have any recommendations for how low income students can pursue/pay for medical school?

A: Medical Schools are probably the best at answering this, but there are some loan forgiveness programs out there. On the pre-professional side of things, there are some fee assistance options that can be utilized during MCAT prep/application season. These can be found through the [AAMC Fee Assistance Program website](#), but this generally covers MCAT preparation materials and practice tests, fee waiver for MCAT, and fee waiver for medical school primary applications.

Links mentioned:

<https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvicing/prehealth-advising/pre-health-group-advising-canvas-module-access/>

<https://science.psu.edu/interdisciplinary-programs/premedicine/premedicine-and-prehealth-newsletter>