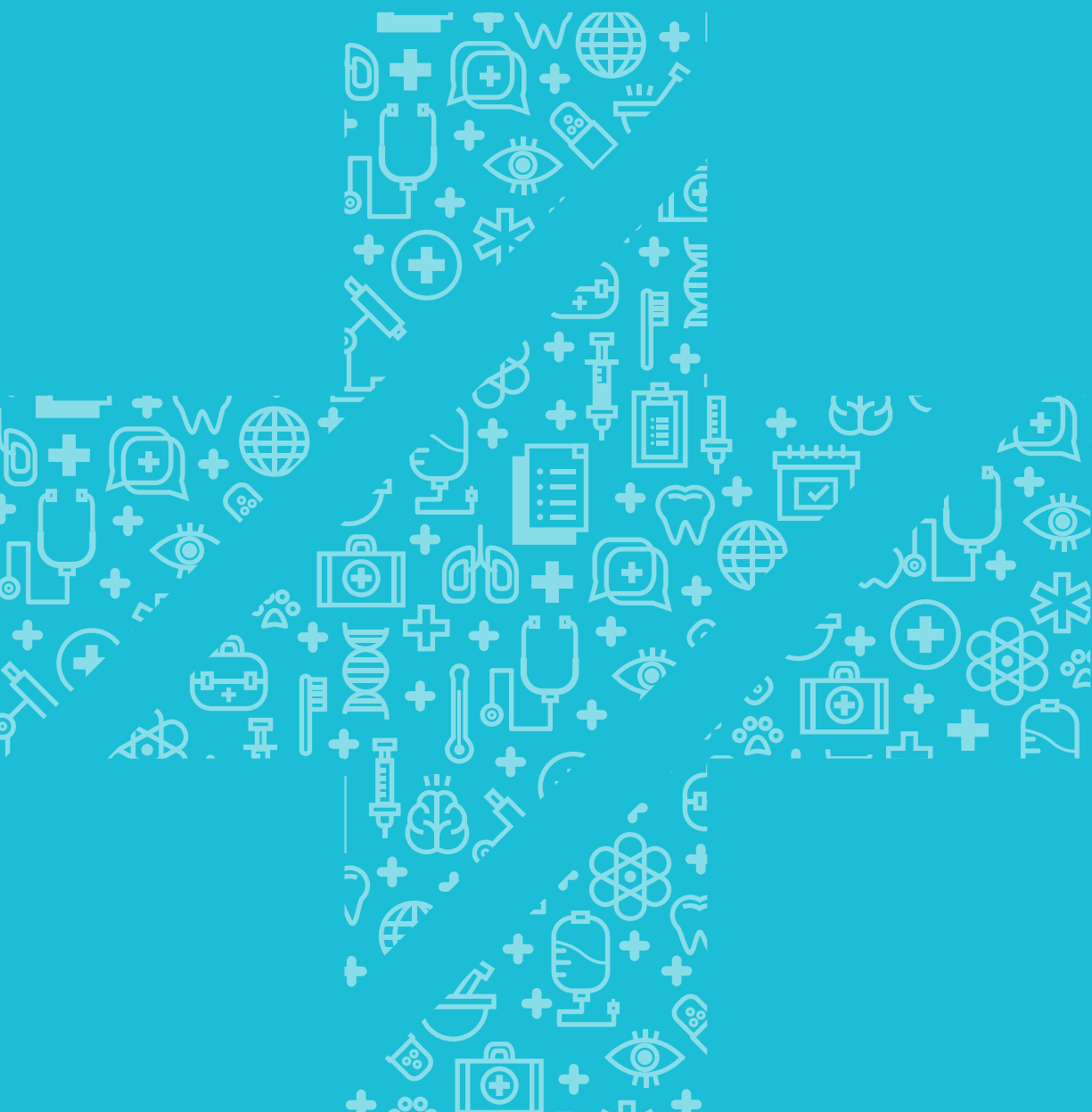


HEALTHBEAT CAREER GUIDE



NAVIGATING THE **HEALTH PROFESSIONS**

Welcome, pre-health and pre-med Tritons!

Now that you are considering a future in the health professions, there are a few things you should start thinking about—from navigating the different types of health professions to gaining the types of experiences that will set you apart in an application. Fortunately, the UC San Diego Career Center's Health Beat team of pre-health and pre-med advisers have developed this guide to help you do just that.

Work through these pages with a Health Beat adviser to uncover your path and build your application to become a competitive candidate for medical school or any other health professional school.

Note: Information in this guide is subject to change. Please check with health professional schools that you are interested in applying to for the most current information.

For more information, visit us at healthbeat.ucsd.edu

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WHY HEALTH?

Before we fully dive in, take a moment to consider if a health profession is the right path for you. Start by asking these questions and then meet with a Health Beat adviser to talk through your options.

1 What kind of health care do you want to provide? (e.g. preventative, primary, secondary/specialty, tertiary care)

2 Who do you want to provide this health care to? (e.g. babies, children with disabilities, seniors)

3 How do you want to provide this health care? (e.g. treat and diagnose, rehabilitate a patient, help with fine motor skills, comfort patients)

4 Where do you want to provide this health care? (e.g. hospital, clinic, hospice, pharmacy, ER, rehab facility)

5 Do you have a strong aptitude in science?

6 How competitive are you? (e.g. grades, test scores, experiences, letters)

7 What kind of lifestyle do you envision for yourself?

8 Do you need additional training or education prior to applying for a health profession?
(e.g. post-baccalaureate, master's program)

9 How long will it take to accomplish your goal? (i.e. training/education, residency)

10 What will be your return on investment in training or education? (i.e. debt accrual vs. salary)

Understanding Your Options

Okay, now that you are confident in your decision, let's get started. First, you'll want to narrow in on your preferred type of health profession based on your interests and goals. Take a look at these descriptions of common focus areas to give you a sense of the health field but know that there are even more options if the right path doesn't jump out immediately.

TYPES OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

MEDICINE:

Are you curious, compassionate, and a problem-solver with a strong scientific aptitude? Medicine may be the right fit for you. Expect to spend an additional 7–10+ years for more training and education after your bachelor's degree.

ALLOPATHIC MEDICINE (MD)	OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE (DO)	PODIATRY (DPM)
Diagnosis and treatment of disease	Diagnosis and treatment of disease with a focus on prevention	Diagnosis and treatment of foot disorders
Treating the symptoms	Treating the whole person (bio-psychosocial)	Treating below the knee
Many specialties and sub-specialties. Talk to a Health Beat adviser about your options	Over 50 percent in primary care. Learns technique: Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine (OMM)	Can specialize in surgery, orthopedics, public health ,sports medicine, and more

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT:

Physician assistants have a similar role as primary care doctors. They treat, diagnose, and prescribe medication, but are under the supervision of a medical doctor.

NURSING:

Nurses assist patients with managing and coping with their illness. They are advocates for their patients and educate them on disease prevention and health promotion. While doctors focus on the disease and patient's symptoms, nurses focus on how the disease impacts what a patient can and cannot do for themselves.

DENTISTRY:

Dentists are responsible for preventing, treating, and maintaining the oral health of their patients. The American Dental Education Association (ADEA) describes a successful dentist as someone who is artistic, easy to talk to, a leader, and likes to work with their hands.

PHARMACY:

Pharmacists are known as “medication specialists” and are health-care providers who educate patients on medication—when and how to take it as well as its side effects. They must be detail-oriented and meticulous.

OPTOMETRY:

Optometrists evaluate a patient's overall vision health as well as examine, diagnose, and treat patients for any conditions affecting vision. This includes prescribing corrective lenses such as glasses and contacts.

PHYSICAL THERAPY:

The role of a physical therapist is to restore mobility, reduce pain and the need for surgery or medication, and to improve overall function.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST:

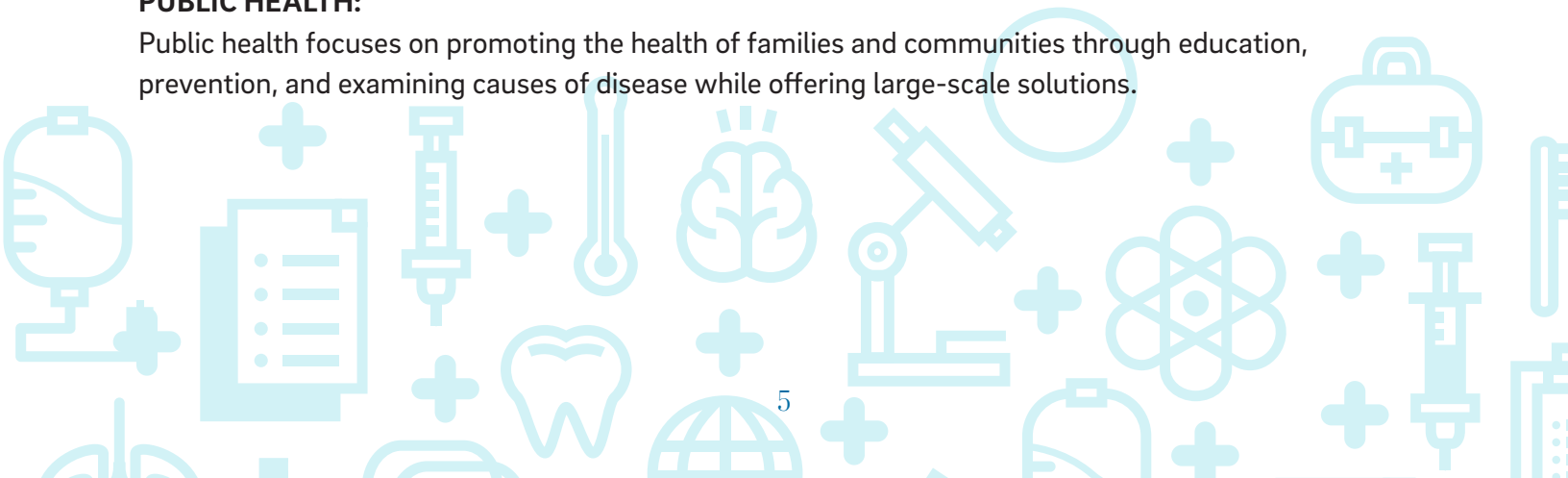
An occupational therapist engages in rehabilitation therapy to help patients in everyday activities. Examples include helping patients return to normal level of functioning after an injury or helping children with disabilities participate in school and social situations.

VETERINARY MEDICINE:

Veterinarians are responsible for the prevention, treatment, and diagnosis of disease in animals.

PUBLIC HEALTH:

Public health focuses on promoting the health of families and communities through education, prevention, and examining causes of disease while offering large-scale solutions.



HEALTH PROFESSION COMPARISON MATRIX

This chart will give you even more information when comparing the various health professions, including length of training/education, standardized tests, salary, and overall competitiveness.

HEALTH PROFESSION COMPARISON MATRIX

	ALLOPATHIC MEDICINE (MD)	OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE (DO)	PODIATRY	PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT
PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS ACCEPTED NATIONALLY	40%	31%	56%	30%
AVERAGE GPA	3.73 overall; 3.66 science	3.4 overall; 3.3 science	3.4 overall; 3.2 science	3.49 overall; 3.45 science
ENTRANCE EXAMS	MCAT	MCAT	MCAT	GRE (depends on school)
LENGTH OF EXAM	7.5 hours	7.5 hours	7.5 hours	4 hours
MEDIAN SCORE PERCENTILE/SCORE	511.5	502.17	494.6	Verbal: 154 quantitative; 153 analytical writing; 4 after 154 and 153
LENGTH OF TRAINING	4 years	4 years	4 years	2 years
RESIDENCY	3–7 years depending on specialty	3–7 years depending on specialty	3 years	Optional
HOURS OF EXPERIENCE NEEDED PRIOR TO BEGINNING PROGRAM	Approx. 150–300 hours of clinical experience: shadowing, internship with MD	Approx. 150–300 hours of clinical experience: shadowing, internship with DO	Approx. 50 hours shadowing a podiatrist, volunteering in a health-care setting	2000–4000 hours patient contact experience; 1500 hours health-care experience
LETTERS OF EVALUATION/ REC	4–6 letters (2 science, 1 non-science, PI, MD, supervisor)	4–6 letters (2 science, 1 non-science, PI, DO, supervisor)	3 letters (check school)	2–3 letters (depends on school)
APPLICATION SERVICE	AMCAS	AACOMAS	AACPMAS	CASPA
ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS RESOURCE	MSAR (\$28/year)	AACOM Student Guide (Choosedo.org)	AACPM	PAEA Online directory (free)
APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS DATE	Approx. June 1 (1 full year prior rolling)	Approx. May 3 (1 full year prior)	Approx. August (1 full year prior)	Approx. April 27 (opens 1.5 years prior. Check individual schools for hard deadlines; varies greatly)
APPLICATION FEES	\$160 first school; \$39 add'l	\$196 first school; \$46 add'l	\$180 first school; \$45 add'l	\$179 first school; \$55 add'l
LICENSING EXAMS	USMLE	COMLEX-USA	APMLE Part I, Part II written, Part II CSPE, and Part III	PANCE certification
NATIONAL AVERAGE SALARY	\$197K–\$747K	\$204K–\$443K	\$191K	\$95K

HEALTH PROFESSION COMPARISON MATRIX

	NURSE PRACTITIONER (ELMSN-NP)	DENTISTRY	PHARMACY	OPTOMETRY
PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS ACCEPTED NATIONALLY	N/A	51%	84%	73%
AVERAGE GPA	3.0–3.5 (typically earn points the higher the GPA)	3.56 overall; 3.49 science	3.2.–3.6	3.0–3.4
ENTRANCE EXAMS	GRE or HESI A2 (depends on school)	DAT	PCAT (only some schools require)	OAT
LENGTH OF EXAM	4 hours	5 hours	4 hours	5 hours
MEDIAN SCORE PERCENTILE/SCORE	Varies greatly. Check individual schools.	21	400	310
LENGTH OF TRAINING	3 years	4 years	4 years	4 years
RESIDENCY	No	Optional; 2–6 years depending on specialty	Optional, but many students are doing a 1–2 year residency	Optional
HOURS OF EXPERIENCE NEEDED PRIOR TO BEGINNING PROGRAM	Approx. 80 hours of volunteer work or health-related experience	Approx. 80 hours of shadowing a dentist or obtaining a dental x-ray license, dental assisting	Approx. 80 hours of shadowing a pharmacist or getting pharm tech license, other hospital experience	Approx. 50 hours of shadowing an optometrist
LETTERS OF EVALUATION/ REC	2–3 letters (depends on school)	4 letters max	3–4 letters	3 letters
APPLICATION SERVICE	NURSLINGCAS	AADSAS	PHARMCAS	OPTOMCAS
ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS RESOURCE	AACN Guide to Graduate Nursing Programs	ADEA Guide to Dental Schools (\$15 online copy or free in our library)	PSAR	ASCO
APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS DATE	Approx. August 23 (deadline varies depending on Fall or Spring entry)	Approx. June 1 (1 full year prior)	Approx. October/ November (NOT rolling)	Approx. June 28 (1 full year prior)
APPLICATION FEES	\$70 first school; \$40 add'l	\$251 first school; \$108 add'l	\$175 first school; \$55 add'l	\$180 first school; \$70 add'l
LICENSING EXAMS	NCLEX-RN	NBDE Part I, II, clinical examination	NAPLEX (practice) and MPJE (law)	NBEO Part I, II, III, TMOD
NATIONAL AVERAGE SALARY	\$102K	\$214K	\$126K	\$143K

HEALTH PROFESSION COMPARISON MATRIX

	PHYSICAL THERAPY	OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY	VETERINARY	PUBLIC HEALTH
PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS ACCEPTED NATIONALLY	49%	39%	50%	69%
AVERAGE GPA	3.52	3.0	3.56	3.0–3.3
ENTRANCE EXAMS	GRE	GRE	GRE	GRE
LENGTH OF EXAM	4 hours	4 hours	4 hours	4 hours
MEDIAN SCORE PERCENTILE/SCORE	N/A	153, 144, 3.5 varies greatly. See individual schools.	155, 154, 3.9	Varies greatly. Check individual schools.
LENGTH OF TRAINING	3 years	2–3 years	4 years	2 years
RESIDENCY	No	No	Optional, but 1-year residency will boost salary	No
HOURS OF EXPERIENCE NEEDED PRIOR TO BEGINNING PROGRAM	100+ observation hours shadowing a PT (varies by school)	80+ observation hours with OT (varies by school)	180 hours minimum (UC Davis) but avg is 2000 (1000 Colorado State)	Approx. 30 hours of experience in public health
LETTERS OF EVALUATION/ REC	2–3 letters (4 max)	2–3 letters (depending on school)	3–6 letters (max)	3 letters
APPLICATION SERVICE	PTCAS	OTCAS	VMCAS	SOPHAS
ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS RESOURCE	CAPTE	AOTA	VMSAR	SOPHAS
APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS DATE	Approx. June 29 (1 full year prior)	Approx. mid-July (varies; some schools offer admissions 3x/year e.g. St. Augustine's)	Approx. May 11 (1-year prior)	Approx. mid-August
APPLICATION FEES	\$155 first school; \$60 add'l	\$150 first school; \$65 add'l	\$220 first school; \$115 add'l	\$135 first school; \$50 add'l
LICENSING EXAMS	NPTE	NBCOT	NAVLE	None
NATIONAL AVERAGE SALARY	\$84K	\$80K	\$101K	\$54K–\$100K+ (wide range)

Still not sure what direction to head in? Consider setting up a few informational interviews so you can get a first-person perspective on some of the different paths. For more information on conducting informational interviews, flip to page **27**.

PREPARING TO APPLY

Applying to medical school or other health professional schools is highly competitive. You'll need to show a strong scientific aptitude through your GPA and test scores, plus a depth and breadth of experiences, strong letters of evaluation, and a compelling personal statement. We'll get to most of this in the next chapter, but for now the most important thing you can do is to get in the right classes, excel in them, and start getting some real-world experience.

Gaining Extracurricular Experiences

The types of experiences that you have not only help you hone in on the best professional fit, they also show a commitment to your chosen profession when it comes time to submit your medical or health professional school application. Typical experiences that may help build and strengthen your application include a variety of health-care, service, leadership, and research opportunities.

HEALTH CARE/CLINICAL	SERVICE/VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE
<p>This includes volunteer work in a hospital, student-run clinic, pharmacy, dental office, or other health-related setting. Paid experiences include scribe, certified nursing assistant (CNA), medical assistant, pharmacy technician, and EMT. We recommend accruing 150–300 hours.</p> <p><i>Note: Physician assistants and veterinarians should have 1,000–3,000 hours of paid experience (may vary by school)</i></p>	<p>Many health professions expect applicants to have volunteer experience or work with underserved and disadvantaged communities. Service demonstrates compassion, empathy, and commitment to helping vulnerable communities with limited access to health-care and vital resources.</p> <p>Examples include providing health care to low-income communities, volunteering at food banks, and helping the homeless or other communities with limited access to health care.</p>
LEADERSHIP	RESEARCH
<p>Demonstrating leadership is essential in any health profession. Admission's committees want to see applicants who take initiative, manage a project, or execute an innovative idea.</p> <p>Consider taking on a leadership role within a health-related student organization or becoming an Undergraduate Instructional Apprentice (UGIA).</p>	<p>Many students participate in some form of research during their undergraduate years. Research experience can help you better understand the connection between research and medicine. It can also help you develop valuable mentorships.</p>

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE: A LITTLE MORE ON WHY IT MATTERS AND HOW TO GET IT

The health field is constantly changing—to provide patients with the best care, health professionals must be able to understand and apply the latest research. Participating in research projects as an undergraduate is an invaluable opportunity to get first-hand experience, make connections, and learn the language. You'll see how new discoveries are made and get a better sense for the current state of the field—and where it is headed.

Fortunately for pre-med and pre-health Tritons, UC San Diego is one of the best research institutions in the world and is located in a hub of biotech and biomedical companies. You can apply to volunteer or intern at any lab at UC San Diego, the School of Medicine, or any of the surrounding companies or institutes nearby! Keep in mind, the lab does not have to be medicine- or biology-related to be valuable—choose something that interests you personally.

There are also a few paid lab opportunities, as a lab technician, lab assistant, or research assistant. Use the institute or organization's "Careers" or "Jobs" page to find opportunities. For UC San Diego opportunities, use Handshake or the REAL portal.

ARE YOU READY TO INTERVIEW FOR A RESEARCH POSITION?

01/ Do you have a résumé prepared?	YES	NO
02/ Have you written a cover letter before?	YES	NO
03/ Have you applied to a job before?	YES	NO
04/ Do you have a list of which labs you will be applying to?	YES	NO
05/ Do you have basic lab skills? (e.g. pipetting, dilutions, making solutions, using a microscope, keeping a scientific notebook, etc.)	YES	NO
06/ Have you taken any lab courses at UC San Diego?	YES	NO

If you answered YES to three or more of these questions, you're almost ready to apply.

If you answered NO to three or more questions, stop by Health Beat drop-in advising Monday through Friday, 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. and meet with a Peer Adviser. Please review the Health Beat Drop-in Calendar for the most up-to-date advising information as well as virtual advising options.

FINDING—AND LANDING— THE PERFECT RESEARCH POSITION

Using the following prompts, develop your criteria for the ideal research position:

What are your research goals?

What research topics would you be interested in working with (many labs expect a 1–2 year commitment)?

How much time can you devote to the position, given your other commitments?

Do you want to work with a big lab or a small lab?

What kinds of experiences are you looking to gain? What do you want to do day-to-day to get the most out of the position?

Once you have identified a particular position that meets your criteria, consider these additional questions:

- Does this position allow for personal growth and increasing responsibilities?
- Will you have the opportunity to publish or present your research?
- Can you see yourself continuing research in the field outside of the particular lab?

TIPS FOR APPLYING TO LABS

1 ALWAYS WRITE A COVER LETTER.

Even if it isn't required! This shows the lab that you are genuinely interested, invested, and ready to start.

2 PERSONAL OUTREACH CAN MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE.

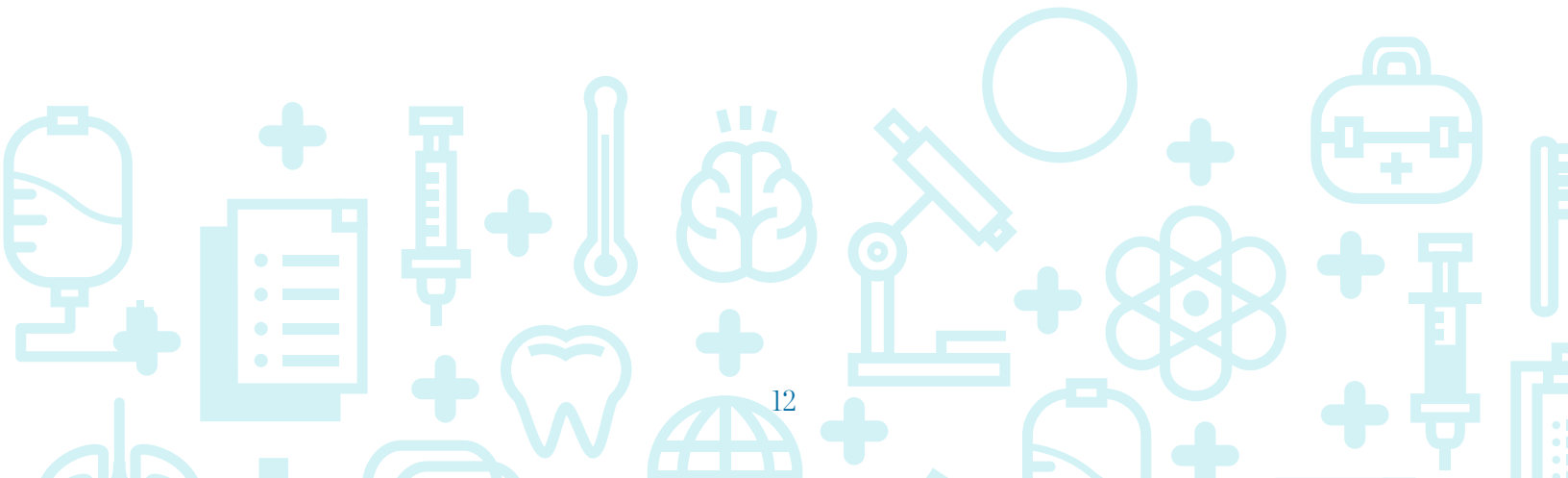
Research the labs you're interested in and find the contact information of the principal investigator (PI) and the lab manager (if applicable). Then, send them an email and let them know you'd like to be considered for the position. Just make sure the email is personal and unique—if you're using a templated email, they will know.

3 GET CONNECTED!

Talk to your TAs, classmates, and professors to get to know them. They may provide insight on which labs are looking for undergraduates and what you might expect in a research position in the lab. Everyone's experience is different so do your own research before applying and don't feel obligated to join a lab you don't feel passionately about!

4 KEEP AN OPEN MIND AND BE FLEXIBLE.

You may not get your first choice. Be open to pursuing different opportunities in various fields that you may have not initially considered. Keep in mind that not every task or experiment will be interesting, but you will learn valuable skills such as being adaptable, anticipating needs, solving problems, and more.



Documenting Your Experiences

Journaling is an important part of preparing for a health profession—not only will it help you remember all of the things you’ve done and learned but it can also help you identify themes and trends in your experiences. These patterns can help reinforce your desire to pursue a particular health-care area.

Journaling will also help save time and energy when it comes time to applying to medical and other health professional schools, who will want to see that you have taken the time to truly reflect on why you selected a particular field. Journaling early will create a catalog of examples that you can pull from to show your motivation and commitment in your application, personal statement, or interviews.

Consider these prompts:

- What did you do? What did you learn?
- What was challenging/inspiring?
- Did today’s experience reinforce your desire to enter the health professional field? Explain.
- Did you have a meaningful experience with a patient or health-care professional? If so, explain.
- Did anything happen that made you question your desire to enter the health professional field?

DATE	# OF HOURS	LOCATION
10/24/2025	4	UC San Diego School of Medicine
Today in my research lab, I learned how to sort through a public patient database to find potential stem cell lines for our project. It really fascinates me how we have the ability to combine modern databases with research efforts so we can reach more patients with diverse backgrounds. I think there is still a shortage of data available for certain groups of people and hopefully my portion of the research project (recruiting volunteers) will help ameliorate this.		

Now you try—practice journaling one of your experiences here and then share it with a Health Beat adviser for advice on how to make the entry more efficient or useful in the future.

DATE	# OF HOURS	LOCATION

DATE	# OF HOURS	LOCATION

Different Paths

As you prepare to apply to medical or other health professional school, remember there isn't one set path you must take. Students are increasingly taking "gap" or "bridge" years after completing their undergraduate degree to gain additional health-care experience, take course prerequisites, improve their GPA, prepare for the MCAT or standardized test, and more.

Post-Baccalaureate, Pre-medical, and Special Masters Programs can be completed during gap year(s) and may be used to strengthen your medical or other health professional school applications.

CONSIDERING A GAP YEAR?

If you apply for medical or another health professional school at the end of your junior year, you will **NOT** have a gap year and will begin your health professional school a few months after you graduate. If you apply at the end of your senior year, you will take at least one gap year.

Consider these factors when deciding if a gap year is right for you:

GAP YEAR	NO GAP YEAR
Application will show all four years of academic progress	Application will show three years of academic progress (only one year of upper division course work)
More time to develop relationships with faculty	Will not have the opportunity to submit letters from faculty during your senior year
More time to gain clinical, service, research, and leadership experience	Need to start getting experience ASAP (first year)
More time to prepare for the required standardized test	Less time to prepare for the required standardized test
Interviews will take place during your gap year when you have more free time	Interviews can take place during fall, winter, and early spring quarter of your senior year

POST-BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS

A post-baccalaureate program is additional education that begins after your undergraduate studies and helps you transition to a medical or other health professional school. This option may make sense for you if you are nearing the end of your undergraduate degree and don't feel like your GPA is where you need it, want to pivot to a different health-care focus, or just aren't ready to take the next step for a variety of reasons.

TYPES OF POST-BACCALAUREATE PROGRAMS

ENHANCING YOUR ACADEMIC RECORD

This is a good option for you if your undergraduate GPA is between 2.9–3.4

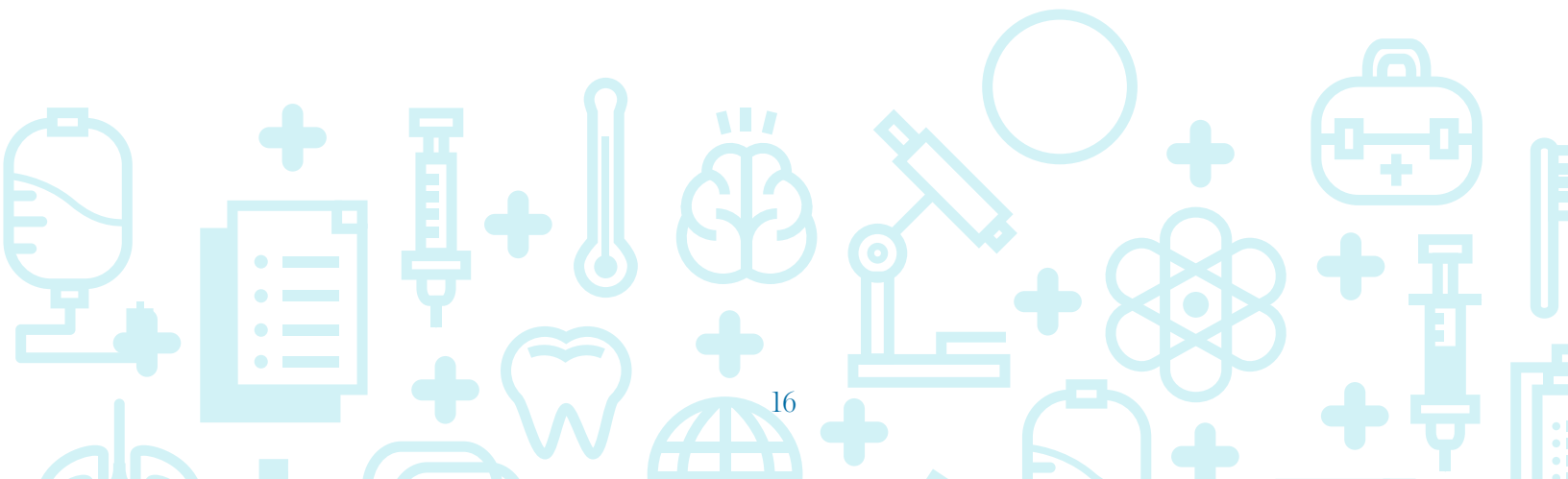
MAKING A CAREER CHANGE

Consider this if you are adjusting your path and need all or most science prerequisites for medical school or other health professional school

PURSUING A PARTICULAR AREA

Some post-baccalaureate programs are designed for specific health professions, like Dentistry, Physician Assistant, or Nursing

Note: Programs may also be designed for economically, educationally, disadvantaged, or underrepresented minority students.



Selecting the right program will depend on your individual needs. Take a look at these different structures to determine which option will help you put your best foot forward.

	FORMAL/STRUCTURED POST-BACCALAUREATE	INFORMAL/UNSTRUCTURED POST-BACCALAUREATE	SPECIAL MASTER'S PROGRAM (SMP)
LENGTH OF PROGRAM	1–2+ years; certificate offered for some programs	1–2+ years	1–2 years; master's degree in different areas
CURRICULUM	Adheres to a set curriculum and time to complete the program. Can be expensive	Allows for more flexibility—courses can be taken à la carte at a community college, four-year college, etc. and can be completed on your schedule. Can be less expensive	Typically adheres to a set curriculum but some programs may be flexible; cost varies by program
STUDENT SERVICES	More support services (application support, academic resources, etc.)	Limited support services	Support services will vary by program
EXPERIENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES	Offers opportunities to gain research, clinical, and service experience	Opportunity to gain experience is dependent on the specific program	Offers opportunities to gain research, clinical, and service experience
COMMITTEE LETTER	Committee letter may be provided if certain program requirements are met	Committee letter may or may not be provided; varies by program	Committee letter may be provided if certain program requirements are met
MCAT	MCAT prep may be available	MCAT prep may not be available	MCAT prep may not be available
CONNECTION	Connection to medical and health professional schools	May have connection to medical and health professional schools	Connection to medical and health professional schools

Not sure if a post-baccalaureate program is for you? Use Handshake to make an appointment with an adviser to discuss your options.

Build Your Roadmap

The last few pages should have given you a sense of what you need to do to prepare to apply for medical and health professional school. Now let's put that information into practice and build your roadmap. Consider where you are right now and map out what you need to do to ensure you stand out when it comes time to apply.

Use this template and support from a Health Beat adviser to map out the course work and experiences that you will need to stand out in your medical school or other health professional school application.

FALL YEAR 01

Course work:

Experiences:

WINTER YEAR 01

Course work:

Experiences:

SPRING YEAR 01

Course work:

Experiences:

SUMMER YEAR 01

Course work:

Experiences:

FALL YEAR 02

Course work:

Experiences:

WINTER YEAR 02

Course work:

Experiences:

SPRING YEAR 02

Course work:

Experiences:

SUMMER YEAR 02

Course work:

Experiences:

FALL YEAR 03

Course work:

Experiences:

WINTER YEAR 03

Course work:

Experiences:

SPRING YEAR 03

Course work:

Experiences:

SUMMER YEAR 03

Course work:

Experiences:

FALL YEAR 04

Course work:

Experiences:

WINTER YEAR 04

Course work:

Experiences:

SPRING YEAR 04

Course work:

Experiences:

SUMMER YEAR 04

Course work:

Experiences:

Here are some sample milestones—adapt them to fit your goals and add them to your roadmap:

YEAR 01 / Join a student organization that aligns with your health interests. Do your research and make a note of one or two that you want to join.

YEAR 02 / Get some clinical experience/ hands-on experience with patients in a clinical or hospital setting. Make sure to start looking for research opportunities by the second half of the year (Do this in Year 2 and every year until graduation).

YEAR 03 / Remember that student org you joined in Year 1? By Year 3, you should run for a leadership role. Consider your strengths and think about what role might make sense for you and your future goals.

YEAR 04 / If you plan to take a gap year, do the following: take the standardized test, fill in any gaps in experience, identify letter writers and make your letter requests, and finalize your school list.

APPLYING

Becoming a health professional requires a lot of planning, dedication, and organization—and applying to medical or health professional school is no different. Typically, you want to submit your application a year before you plan to attend so get ahead of it now. Use the following few pages to ensure you have what you need to develop the core materials for any application.

The standard medical or health professional school application typically includes:

- **ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPTS**
 - **STANDARDIZED EXAM SCORES**
 - **LIST OF EXPERIENCES**
 - **SECONDARY/ SUPPLEMENTAL APPLICATION**
 - **LETTERS OF EVALUATION OR RECOMMENDATION**
 - **PERSONAL STATEMENT**
 - **INTERVIEWS**
-

Standardized Tests

Every medical and health professional school requires that you take a standardized test that assesses your problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, as well as your knowledge of scientific principles. Before you take the exam, you should complete all of the prerequisite courses prior to taking the exam and give yourself plenty of prep time. Try to set aside at least three months to study for the exam and take several full-length practice tests from resources like Kaplan or Princeton Review.

Required exam by health profession:

	ALLOPATHIC MEDICINE (MD), OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE (DO), PODIATRY (DPM)	DENTISTRY	PHARMACY	PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT, NURSING, PHYSICAL THERAPY, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY, VETERINARY, PUBLIC HEALTH	OPTOMETRY
EXAM	MCAT	DAT	PCAT	GRE	OAT
EXAM LENGTH	7.5 HOURS	5 HOURS	4 HOURS	4 HOURS	5 HOURS

List of Experiences

Remember all the time you spent journaling? This is where that effort really pays off. The experiences section of your medical or health professional school application provides the admissions committee with a snapshot of who you are, how you spend your time, and what you value. Aim to share at least ten work and other types of experiences, such as health care, service, research, leadership, hobbies, and other jobs.

This is a vital section of your application so take some time early on to practice crafting a few of your experiences. Remember, Health Beat advisers are here to help—make an appointment on Handshake to get feedback on your experience statements.

Use the following prompts to practice developing an experience statement.

01/

Start off with an introduction to the activity. Write down your role and what you did/accomplished. (e.g., *I was a teaching assistant for free Saturday enrichment classes in writing, math, science for underserved/low income elementary and middle school students.*)

TIP: If you can, select experiences that demonstrate commitment to your chosen health-care area of focus.

02/

Categorize the activity. Select one of the multiple options below:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| • ARTISTIC ENDEAVORS | • INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS | • PRESENTATIONS/POSTERS |
| • COMMUNITY SERVICE/
VOLUNTEER – Medical/Clinical | • LEADERSHIP | • PUBLICATIONS
(e.g. journal articles) |
| • COMMUNITY SERVICE/
VOLUNTEER – Not Medical/
Clinical | • MILITARY SERVICE | • RESEARCH/LAB |
| • CONFERENCE | • OTHER | • TEACHING/TUTORING |
| • EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES | • PAID EMPLOYMENT – Medical/
Clinical | |
| • HOBBIES | • PAID EMPLOYMENT –
Not Medical/Clinical | |
| • HONORS/AWARDS | • PHYSICIAN SHADOWING/
CLINICAL OBSERVATION | |

03/

Share a story that illustrates what you did or saw. Articulate the impact it had on you. (e.g. *I worked with a refugee student who was struggling with English. She told me about how she and her family fled from their home country because of a civil war, and we connected through our mutual love of plants. She taught me a new way of thinking about the struggles that new immigrants and refugees face and how she had to serve as an interpreter from a young age for her parents on important health and government documents.*)

04/

Summarize what you learned from the experience. (e.g. *I learned to have a greater understanding of global context and cultural sensitivity. I will strive to be understanding and compassionate with all my patients in the future regardless of culture, race, or background.*)

TRY ANOTHER ONE HERE:

Intro

Category

Story

Learning

Letters of Evaluation or Recommendation

Having a health professional or professor vouch for you is invaluable—and necessary—in your medical or health professional school application. Depending on where you choose to apply, you will need between three and six letters of evaluation or recommendation. These letters should be from professors, PIs, or other health professionals who can speak to your qualifications—but make sure to check with your selected schools, as they may have specific expectations with regards to who writes these letters.

REQUESTING YOUR LETTERS OF EVALUATION OR RECOMMENDATION

1 CONSIDER WHO AND HOW TO ASK.

The best letters will come from someone who is familiar with you. If they know you well and have already promised to write you a letter, send them an email with your résumé and personal statement for reference. If you haven't already discussed the request, or they might not know you as well, consider asking in person after you've spent some time with them.

2 ALLOW PLENTY OF TIME TO DEVELOP THE LETTER.

Consider asking your professor to write your letter after you've completed their class—while you are still fresh in their mind. You can store letters for a small fee at **interfolio.com** until you're ready to apply. If you choose to wait until closer to your application, make sure to give your professor at least two to three months to write the letter. If they decide to decline, you'll still have time to seek out another letter.

3 GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO WRITE ABOUT.

Take initiative, lead a project, be reliable—make an impact and develop a relationship with your professor so they remember you when the time comes to write your letter.

4 SEND A SINCERE THANK YOU MESSAGE TO SHOW YOUR GRATITUDE TO YOUR LETTER WRITERS.

TIP: You may have ideas about what you'd like included in your letter. If they've already agreed to write your letter, it is totally acceptable to ask your professor to emphasize specific activities or qualities that would strengthen your application. Offer to meet with them in person to talk about what you're looking for.

Whether you request your letter in person, or not, your professor will appreciate if you follow up with the relevant details via email. Use the template on page **25** to ensure you're providing the necessary information.

TO:

SUBJECT: EXAMPLE EMAIL

Dear **[Title of Letter Writer]**,

[Remind them how you know each other and include a recent interaction] My name is Jess Triton and I was in your BIMM 134 course on the Biology of Cancer last quarter. I was grateful for the opportunity to speak with you during our Coffee with a Prof meeting about my goal of becoming a physician. I was very interested in your research on the genetic risk factors of pancreatic cancer and how the scientific and medical community is shifting to a prevention and early detection model to treat cancer.

[Respectfully request a letter of recommendation and include why you are asking them] I am applying to medical school this cycle and your class encouraged me to continue pursuing my dream of becoming a radiation oncologist. I look forward to the day when I can use what I learned in class to treat patients. I am hoping you would be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for medical school.

[Reference relevant attachments with background information, such as your résumé and personal statement] I have attached my résumé and a draft of my personal statement for reference and would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this further. I am available this quarter on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., or alternatively, I can stop by your office hours.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Best,
Jess Triton

SEND

Personal Statement

Your personal statement is where you share why you want to pursue a career in the health professions. To do this, provide evidence of your commitment to health care and show a trend of service toward others. We highly recommend sharing stories and anecdotes—this is your opportunity to give the admissions committee a sense of who you are.

Consider these questions as you draft an outline of your personal statement in the space below.

01/

What experiences have motivated you to pursue this particular health profession?

(This is one place where that journaling you've been doing will come in handy!)

02/

What sets you apart as an applicant?

03/

What is your story—what compelled you to take this path?

To get feedback and support with your personal statement, schedule an appointment with **The Writing Hub at Teaching + Learning Commons at UC San Diego.**

Interviews

Got an interview? That is great news. If you've made it to the interview stage, you have passed multiple screens and met the basic criteria. Now, you need to impress people with a strong interview! Successful interviews reflect on past experiences, express an understanding of your motivation to pursue medicine or other health professions, and provide concrete examples that illustrate learning.

There are different types of interviews but these two types are the most widely used: **TRADITIONAL** and **MULTI-MINI INTERVIEW (MMI)**. Many health professional schools are adopting the MMI style of interviewing so it's important that you are prepared for both.

01/

TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW:

Typically one-on-one, small panel, or with a faculty member

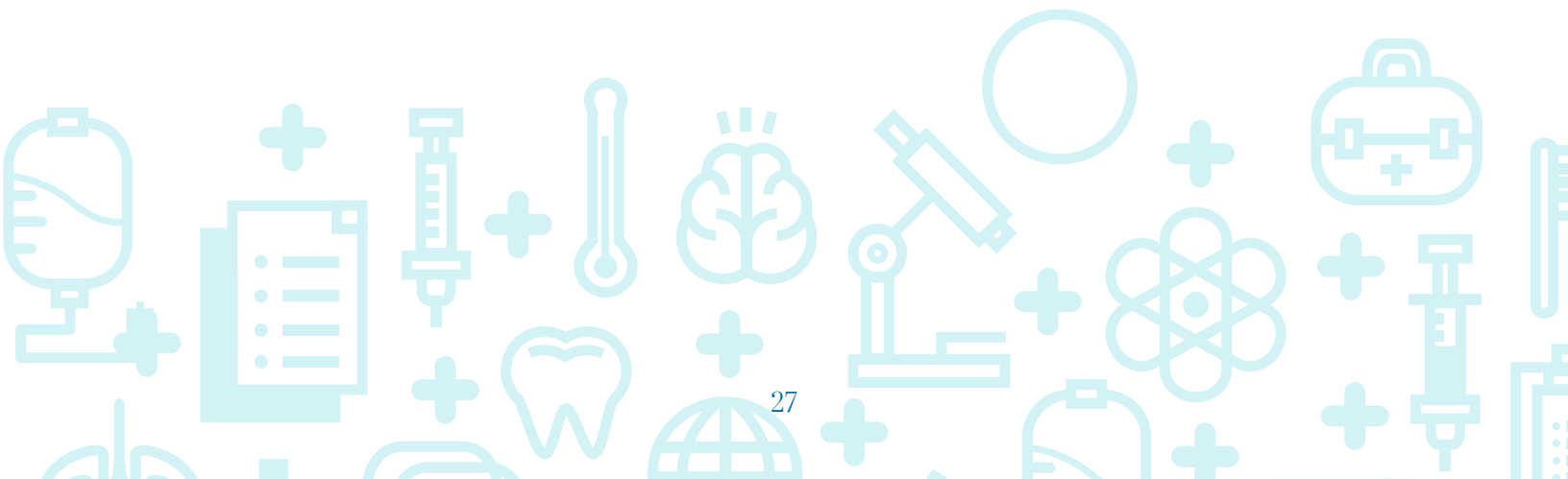
02/

MULTI-MINI INTERVIEW:

8–10 interview stations

- At each station, you are given two minutes to read the prompt and seven to eight minutes to respond
- Questions can vary from ethical, situation, and behavioral to role play with a “standardized patient” (an actor)

Note: Many medical schools and other health professional schools will require you to take CASPer. CASPer® is a selection tool run and developed by Altus Assessments Inc. It is used by academic programs to help assess applicants for non-academic attributes or people skills.



TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

Practice developing a response to one of these traditional questions using the STAR method:

SITUATION: What is an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome?

TASK: What were the tasks involved in that situation?

ACTION: What action did you take?

RESULTS: What results directly followed because of your action?

SAMPLE TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- What experiences have you had that inspire you to pursue this health profession? *Be specific.*
- Give an example of a time you failed. What did you learn from it?
- Give an example of a time you overcame an obstacle.
- Tell us about a time when you demonstrated empathy and compassion?

MMI QUESTIONS

Practice developing a response to one of the MMI questions using the following structure:

01/

Synthesize the situation—articulate that you understand the question and have insight.

02/

Assess all sides of the argument. Who are the stakeholders you need to consider?

03/

What factors do you need to consider to make an informed decision?
What questions do you have that might help you make a decision?

04/

Make a decision. You can include the appropriate caveats but show that you can act based on what you know and have learned.

SAMPLE MMI QUESTIONS:

- A member of your family decides to depend solely on alternative medicine for treatment of his or her significant illness. What would you do?
- What is your take on physician-assisted suicide?
- A biotech company was hired by the military to develop a cure for COVID-19. They successfully developed a vaccine to treat the symptoms of the virus and lowered the mortality rate for infected patients. Discuss the implications of this on a global scale.
- What is your opinion about stem cell research using fetal tissue?

For more sample questions, visit healthbeat.ucsd.edu. You can also find helpful resources on Handshake like Big Interview, where you can practice mock interviews that are tailored to your specific industry, job, and experience level.

UNIQUE POPULATIONS

Everyone comes to UC San Diego with different experiences, prerequisites, and interests. Let us help you develop the tools and experiences to get you on a path to medical or health professional school. Use Handshake to make an appointment with a Health Beat adviser for tailored guidance that will get you moving upward and onward toward your goals.

Transfer Pre-Health Tritons

Did you know that one third of each year's medical and health professional school admits were transfer students? While you may have less time at UC San Diego, the following recommendations can help you make the most of it.

TIPS:

- Make a plan that is right for you. Work with your major, college, and Health Beat advisers to develop your roadmap to graduation and your health professional goals.
- Don't overwhelm yourself by trying to make up time. Take a manageable amount of units for your first quarter—it goes fast, and you want to do well! We recommend 12–14 units (three 4-unit courses and maybe a 2-unit seminar course.)
- Hone in on what drives your desire to work in health care—and where you want to focus your efforts. What populations or people do you want to work with?
- Find your support network. Make connections with students with similar goals—form study groups, consider living in transfer residence halls, or get involved in a club!
- Take advantage of campus-facilitated networking opportunities, like Coffee with a Prof, to get to know your professors. And, don't forget to develop relationships with your TAs.
- Remember, not everything has to be health-care related. Your dedication to your extracurricular activities tells a story of how you are unique and will be better prepared as a health-care provider.

Get started by thinking about some of your experiences and how they might translate to your medical or health professional school application. The following prompts can help you think about how you might build on your past experiences—and what incremental experience you need to gain moving forward.

EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING	DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITY	HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT IT?	HOW CAN YOU CONTINUE OR GROW THIS EXPERIENCE AT UC SAN DIEGO?
EXPERIENCES GAINED BEFORE UC SAN DIEGO	<i>e.g. Tutored high school students in science/math.</i>	<i>I liked working with high schoolers!</i>	<i>I can be a tutor for the Preuss School to help underserved high school students.</i>
EXPERIENCES TO ACCOMPLISH BEFORE GRADUATION FROM UC SAN DIEGO	<i>e.g. Gain research experience.</i>	<i>It will help me gain understanding of how research is conducted.</i>	<i>I will apply for five labs by week 4 and write a résumé and cover letter.</i>

MAKE TIME FOR SELF-CARE

There is a lot to consider when deciding to pursue a career in health care—now, and throughout the process—so make sure to find balance. Taking care of your physical and mental health will help you stay focused and perform better overall. If you're feeling overwhelmed, talk to Student Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), your professors, or a friend. Self-care is an essential part of building your endurance for the rigor of medical and health professional school.

Disadvantaged Backgrounds or Underrepresented Minority (URM)

If you are from a disadvantaged background or are an Underrepresented Minority (URM), navigating through a pre-health program as well as your undergraduate studies may be challenging—but your life experiences and perspectives could help you stand out in a medical or health professional school application. Take advantage of the resources available to help you achieve your goals.

OASIS (Office of Academic Support and Instructional Services)

oasis.ucsd.edu

Supports students who are first-generation, high financial need, and/or underrepresented.

TRITON COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (TCLI)

getinvolved.ucsd.edu/ccl/tcli.html

This is a yearlong program for new UC San Diego freshmen students who are primarily first-generation college students and/or have financial need.

STUDENT SUCCESS COACHING PROGRAM

students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/success

Partnership program with the seven undergraduate colleges to develop a unique student success plan.

CAMPUS COMMUNITY CENTERS

diversity.ucsd.edu/centers-resources/community-centers.html

These centers build affinity among a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff.

TIP: Activities and experiences gained through participation in these groups can be great additions to your medical or health professional school applications. Look back at page 13 for tips on how to document your experiences for future reference.

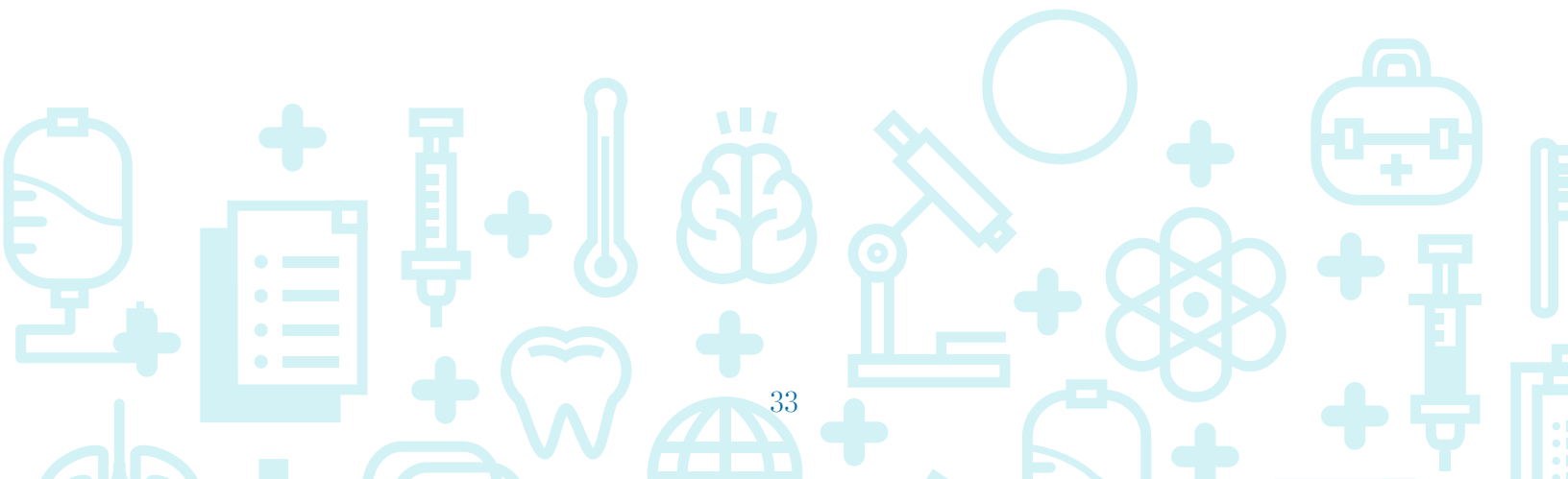
International

International students face two major obstacles to pursuing a medical or health professional degree at a medical school in the United States: limited number of available slots and scarcity of funding. Many medical schools do not accept any international applicants (i.e., not a US citizen or permanent resident); other schools may accept only a few.

In 2019, 48 schools indicated in the Medical School Admission Requirements that they accept applications from international applicants. In the 2019 application cycle, 1,890 foreign applicants applied to MD granting programs in the United States and 325 of those applicants were accepted. Of those accepted, 272 matriculated into medical school. (This includes applicants who applied via AMCAS and TMDAS)

While it is not impossible to get into medical or health professional school as an international student, it is challenging. Review each school for specific requirements—and meet with a Health Beat adviser to talk about your options.

TIP: Check out the Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) database online. This tool allows you to compare the application requirements of hundreds of United States and Canadian medical and health professional schools.



Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Undocumented Pre-Health Students

For many DACA and undocumented pre-health students, navigating the path to medical and health professional school can be challenging and confusing, but the UC San Diego Career Center is a safe place for you to talk about how to achieve your goals. Make an appointment with a Health Beat adviser to discuss your questions, interests, and goals of becoming a future health-care provider.

Here are a few things for you to be aware of and consider:

- Admission is highly competitive, as fewer medical schools and health professional programs accept DACA and undocumented applicants.
- Some schools may offer need-based funding or financial scholarships but DACA and undocumented applicants will not be eligible for federal financial aid. You may need to secure a private loan.
- You may need to provide documentation confirming financial funding for your entire medical school education.
- The political climate policies may change at any time.
- Make sure to check the admission policies of the medical or health professional schools for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

Additional resources for DACA and undocumented pre-health students

- **UC San Diego Undocumented Student Services (uss.ucsd.edu)** helps undocumented students navigate obstacles that arise from their immigration status and achieve personal and academic success.
- **Pre-Health Dreamers (phdreamers.org)** is a community of health career bound undocumented students, who provide career development information and advocate for more progressive institutional and governmental policies for undocumented students.

Remember, the UC San Diego Career Center is a safe place for ALL students to discuss their questions, interests, and goals of becoming a future health-care provider.

Additional Resources

PRE-HEALTH AND PRE-MED ADVISING (HEALTH BEAT)

If you are a junior or senior interested in a health profession, professional staff advisers are available for thirty-minute appointments. Schedule through Handshake.

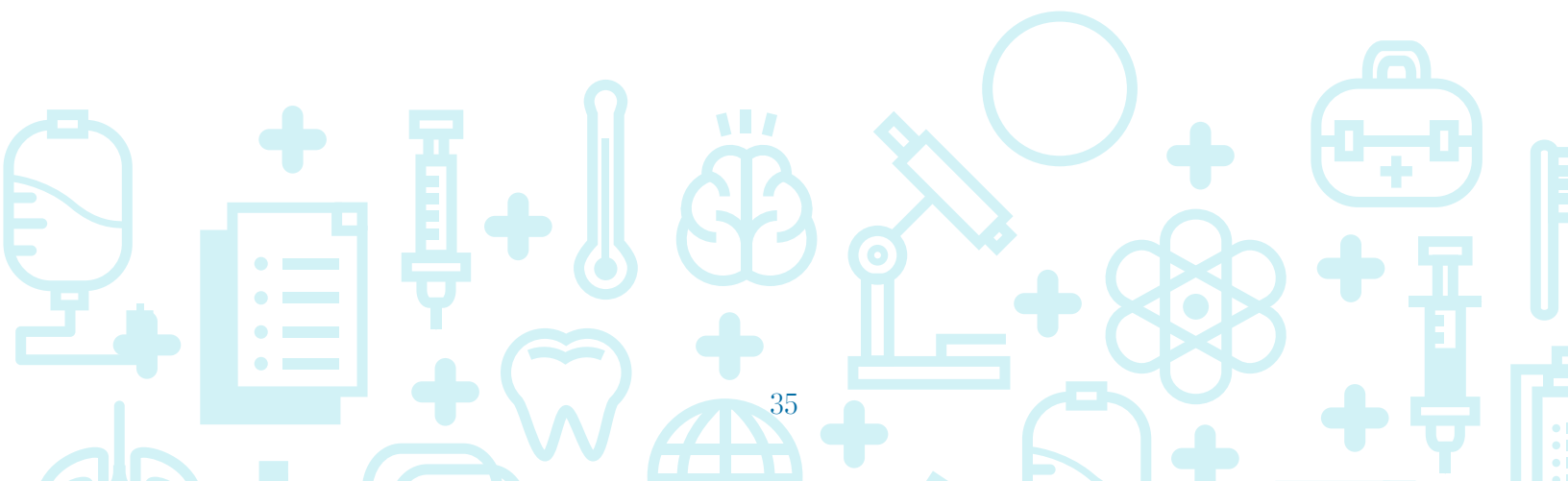
Drop-ins are also available with Pre-Health Career Peer Educators (Health Beat CPEP) and professional staff advisers. For the schedule, visit career.ucsd.edu/advising/pre-health-med.

HANDSHAKE

Handshake is a recruiting platform for UC San Diego students and alumni. Use Handshake to search thousands of jobs and internships, register for events and advising appointments, and access professional development resources. To get started, visit ucsd.joinhandshake.com.

STUDENT EMPLOYMENT OFFICE

Located in the Career Center, the Student Employment Office helps you identify and secure on-campus work experience that can help you reach your professional goals. For more information, visit career.ucsd.edu/student-employment.



Student Organizations

There are over 50+ different organizations at UC San Diego but use this list of medical and health-care focused groups to get started.

Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED) — ucsdaed.com

A national pre-health honor society dedicated to helping undergraduate students prepare for all professional health careers.

Chicanx/Latinx for Community Medicine — ucsdccm.weebly.com

A pre-health undergraduate organization committed to providing support, guidance, and education in the pursuit for higher education in medicine.

Emergency Medical Services at UC San Diego — emsatucsd.com

An organization focused on improving cardiac arrest survival by offering CPR certification courses as well as free hands-only CPR events throughout the quarter.

Global Medical Brigades at UC San Diego — medicalbrigades.org

An international movement of students and medical professionals working alongside local community health workers, community members, and staff to implement sustainable health systems. They work in remote, rural, and under-resourced communities in Honduras, Panama, Nicaragua, and Ghana who have limited to no access to health care, setting up medical and public health infrastructure.

Health and Medical Professions Preparation Program (HMP3) at UC San Diego — hmp3.ucsd.edu

An organization that serves to deliver meaningful community service experience, personal development, and access to standardized test preparation, mentoring, career insight, and unique philanthropic endeavors for the benefit of the greater UC San Diego community.

Insight — ucsdinsight.wixsite.com/insight

The only pre-optometry club at UC San Diego, Insight acts as a resource for students interested in the field of optometry by holding general body meetings, providing valuable information about optometry schools, OAT, admissions, and more.

Medical Literature Society at UC San Diego — mlsucsd.com

A society of students who strive to promote the understanding of a career in medicine by publishing online articles that explore the field through a biomedical, psychological, and social perspective.

Morning Sign Out: UC San Diego Chapter — msoatsd.weebly.com

A student-run branch of Morning Sign Out, an online biomedical publication dedicated to promoting literacy in the health-care, science, and medicine fields to the general public.

Nursing Hearts at UC San Diego — ucsdnursinghearts.weebly.com

Nursing Hearts at UC San Diego is the only club dedicated solely to the nursing profession on the UC San Diego campus. Their goal is to raise awareness and inform on the broad subject of nursing. They aim to support pre-nursing students with various resources and community through a network of other nursing-bound students.

Pilipino Undergraduate Society for Health (PUSH)

pushucsd.wixsite.com/home

An organization that believes in the academic empowerment of Pilipino(a) American students. They strive to be an active presence through service, establishing networking opportunities and collaborations, and promoting education and awareness of health issues in order to productively direct themselves toward future goals in health professions.

Pre-Medical Asian Pacific American Medical Student Association (APAMSA) at UC San Diego — apamsa.ucsd.edu

An undergraduate chapter of APAMSA, a national organization of medical and pre-medical students committed to addressing the unique health challenges of Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) communities.

Pre-Pharmacy Society (PPS) at UC San Diego

facebook.com/ppsucsd

An organization that promotes the career of pharmacy through a variety of resources that include workshops, volunteer opportunities, guest speakers, and networking to compliment the interests of our members.

Pre-Student Osteopathic Medical Association (SOMA) at UC San Diego — facebook.com/preSOMAatUCSD

An organization dedicated to increasing osteopathic medicine awareness at UC San Diego, dispelling any misconceptions or prejudices about osteopathic medicine, and serving as a support group for those applying to osteopathic medical schools.

Pre-Veterinary Student Association (PVSA) at UC San Diego

ucsdprevet.wixsite.com/pvsa

A nonprofit organization dedicated to introducing the idea of veterinary medicine to interested students, providing peer networking and support for pre-veterinary students, and offering opportunities to gain experience in the veterinary field.

Speech, Physical, Occupational Therapy (SPOT) at UC San Diego

spotatucsd.wordpress.com

An organization that raises awareness about the therapy and rehabilitation health-care field, guides students to appropriate graduate programs, and provides networking opportunities with informed professions who are either currently or have worked in the SPOT field.

The International Health Collective (IHC) —

internationalhealthcollective.org

A youth-driven, 501(c)(3) organization run entirely by students and recent alumni, IHC strives to alleviate disparities in the San Diego-Tijuana region and abroad using an approach that is culturally sensitive, holistic, and sustainable through free clinics and public health projects.

Transfers & Non-Trads (TNT) for Health at UC San Diego

bit.ly/tntucsd

An organization dedicated to bringing together a community of unique, transfer/nontraditional pre-health professionals on campus. They provide educational resources, leadership opportunities, and volunteer opportunities to students who have a limited amount of time to prepare for applying to pre-health schools.

Undergraduate American Medical Women's Association at UC San Diego

facebook.com/UCSDAMWA/

A pre-medical division branch of the National American Medical Women's Association, AMWA is a multi-specialty organization dedicated to advancing women in medicine and improving women's health.

