

Are you interested in a Career in Health Professions?

The advisors at the University of Alabama Office of Health Professions Advising work with all students interested in pursuing a career in health professions (ex: medical, dental, pharmacy, etc.). We work with both current students and Alumni who are applying to health professions schools. We encourage all students that are interested in a career in Health Professions to attend workshops, familiarize themselves with our websites, join our email listserv, and to come to our office for an advising appointment every semester. We enjoy working with students at all stages of their pre-health journey.

What are health professions graduate programs looking for from their applicants? What criteria are most important to admissions committees and what is considered less critical? In our experience, health professions graduate programs are looking to answer two basic questions: “Can you do it” and “Should you do it”. How you answer these questions is demonstrated through your actions, behaviors, and experiences and is addressed in greater detail below:

Question One: Can you do it? Healthcare is growing and changing. The first question to ask yourself is easier to quantify; put simply, health professional schools expect academic excellence. Good grades; typically an undergraduate GPA of 3.0 *or better* is expected of competitive applicants (3.5 GPA or higher for some disciplines). Different professional schools vary somewhat in terms of their accepted student profile, but **all schools expect that you have performed to a standard that predicts success in professional school.**

Question Two: Should you do it? While grades and test scores are vital components of a successful application, it is also important that you demonstrate commitment to others through experiences outside of the classroom. Schools expect that you have engaged the community in meaningful ways, both on campus (through student organizations, undergraduate research, and other opportunities offered through The University) and off campus (medical/clinical experience, community service and outreach, etc.). Discover those activities and commitments that are important to you and pursue them enthusiastically. Not only will you be richer for it, but also you will approach your academic work refreshed.

Desirable Personal Attributes of Applicants:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Emotional Maturity
- Empathy/Compassion
- Industry/Motivation
- Sense of Purpose
- Personal Warmth
- Healthy Sense of Humor
- Resilience
- Service Oriented
- Cultural competence
- Communicate Ideas Clearly and Effectively
- Dependability

While these characteristics have been deemed significant by allopathic (MD) medical schools, they can easily apply to all other health professions. Health professional schools evaluate students based on academic performance (transcripts, standardized test scores) but also holistically review other pieces of your application (list of activities, personal essay, letters of recommendation, interview performance). This allows them to get a clear picture of who you are as a candidate both academically and in terms of your character.

What should I choose for my major? Study what you love. You should choose a major that reflects your interests, your passions, and your strengths, while at the same time providing you with adequate challenges. Many students choose to major in a science, primarily because people interested in health professions are typically interested in the sciences. However, we have successful medical school applicants each year that chose to major in the arts, humanities, business, or engineering. National applicant data reflect that no one major is given preference over another. Therefore, you should choose a major that fits your individual interests and abilities.

AP Credit. Health professions graduate programs vary on whether they will accept Advanced Placement (AP) credit as completion of a prerequisite requirement. ***Students with AP credit in science coursework will still need to complete science courses at the university level.*** In addition, many health professions programs will require you to take a year's worth of upper level lecture coursework to supplement the AP credit, but this can vary based on the subject matter. Some students choose to retake science coursework that they have already received AP credit for in order to prepare them for upper level coursework. Retaking courses has also proved helpful for preparation for entrance exams which may require a better understanding of the material than was expected on the AP exam. One possible exception may be the math requirement. If you have two terms of AP in math, many health professions schools will accept it in this subject. However, an extra class in math or statistics would still be recommended. Please check with the individual program for more information and make an appointment with your health professions advisor to discuss this.

Shadowing, Volunteering, Research and Clinical Experience. Strong academic credentials and high test scores are only a part of what admissions committees consider. **Medical experience**, whether gained as a shadow student or through internship or service programs, is a critical component of your preparations for professional school. Some graduate programs even require that students have a certain amount of direct patient care experience prior to applying to professional school (i.e. Physician's Assistant graduate programs). Additionally, involvement in laboratory or clinical **research** settings is highly desirable by some schools. Other commitments and responsibilities are also important factors. For example, some students may need to **work** to support themselves financially while in college. These experiences are important learning opportunities, too; working through school shows determination, work ethic, discipline, and self-reliance - all valuable characteristics to an admissions committee!

It is important that through these experiences that you gain a real-world perspective on whatever form of medicine that you are interested in. Many students who do some kind of clinical or service related experience during the semesters find it easier to keep the "bigger picture" in mind. Our office does not make a qualitative recommendation of hours for these experiences, but would encourage you to focus on the quality of the experience. This will help you gain a better understanding of the provider-patient relationship.

In short – maximize your free time. Invest yourself in activities that typify the person that you hope to become.

The Admissions and Interview Process: The application process to a health professions graduate program can be a lengthy and intensive process that begins approximately 18 months prior to your intended start date. For many of our students, the application process begins in the spring of the junior year, though many students choose to take a gap year (or more) between finishing at UA and starting graduate school. Medical, Dental and Optometry programs often require the submission of a "committee letter" from your undergraduate institution. The Health Professions Advising Office will write

a “committee letter” in support of your application after conducting an hour-long interview in our office. The committee letter process happens the year prior to when you plan to start professional school.

Pre-Health Student Organizations: Involvement with pre-health professional student organizations can be a valuable experience. The Health Professions Advising Office serves as advisors for several of these organizations. Please check with our office to gain more information about the specific pre-health organizations that are available. Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED) is the largest of several pre-health professional student organizations on campus. In our opinion, AED is *the best* way to stay connected to other pre-health students on campus. You will benefit by having a built-in peer group of people who share your goals, and have access to other students who are farther along in the process. AED and other pre-health professional organizations also help students find shadowing and other related experience opportunities on campus and in the community.

The Health Professions Advising Office is here to assist you in your preparation for a career in the health professions. Our goals are to help you make informed decisions as to which career path is best suited for you and your candidacy for admission to health professional school, while also encouraging involvement and engagement in valuable learning experience both in and out of the classroom. We also serve to advise you on course selection both for your undergraduate degree and course requirements for professional school. As “pre-med” or “pre-physical therapy” is not a major at our university, we will work together with your faculty advisor in a supplemental or secondary capacity. Your major academic advising is conducted through your major department, and our office is here to assist you with those preparations related to your transition to professional school.

Resources:

UA Pre-Health Website: www.prehealth.ua.edu

UA Pre-Health Listserv: <https://listserv.ua.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=prehealth-l&A=1>

UA Undergraduate Research: www.research.ua.edu

Baffi-Dugan, C., Cannon, R. E., Bingham, R., & Corder, B. W. (2011). *Health professions admissions guide: Strategy for success*. Champaign, IL: National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions.