FAQ on how to prepare for medical and allied health professions

Q: What classes are the prerequisites for med school?
A: 1 year of Biology, 1 year of Physics, 2-2.5 years of Chemistry, 1 year of mathematics (including statistics), 1 year of English, and demonstrated knowledge in psychological, social and behavioral sciences

Q: What specific courses does Oberlin use to meet these requirements?
A: The most common premed sequence includes: CHM 101, CHM 102, CHM 205 and CHM 254; BIO 100, BIO 213; PHY 103, 104 or PHY 110, 111; MTH 133 and STAT 113 or 114; introductory coursework in psychology or sociology or related course

Q: Does Oberlin have a premed major?
A: No. Premed students complete the requirements listed above and also complete a major and 9-9-9-9 requirements.

Q: I don’t want to be a doctor, I want to be a vet (dentist, chiropractor, pharmacist). How will my program be different?
A: For the most part, the prerequisites for all of these fields are generally the same. Vet schools actually have some additional requirements, and you may have to complete a few of them in summer school. Unfortunately, vet program requirements vary quite a bit from school to school, so you have to figure out where you want to apply and make sure that you do what is asked at that specific school. Most of these programs will take the MCAT, but some allow you to substitute a different test—usually the GRE. Dental schools have a separate test. Talk to the health career advisors to find out more about different career options and how to prepare for them.

Q: Should I be a science major? Won’t that look better to med schools?
A: Obviously, many of our premed students are science majors. However, about 1/3 of Oberlin premed students complete majors in other areas, including conservatory majors. Medical schools suggest that you major in what you wish, provided you also learn the basic science required for admission to medical school.

Q: I already have AP (IB) credits for calculus, biology, (whatever). How does this fit into my premed schedule?
A: This is a tricky issue. Some medical schools accept AP credits and IB credits exactly as if they were from Oberlin. However, most want 1 year of Biology, 1 year of Physics, 2 years of Chemistry, 1 year of mathematics and 1 year of English classes to come from your undergraduate or a comparable four-year institution. In that case, they can accept upper division classes instead of entry-level classes, but having only AP credit for English, math or physics is risky and could limit your options down the road.

Q: I want to take some of my premed classes in the summer at my local community college. Is that OK?
A: You should look for a course at a four-year institution instead. The majority of medical schools want premed classes either from your undergraduate institution or from a comparable four-year school.
Q: I just was placed in CHM 103. Will that count as a one-year chemistry class for medical schools?
A: Usually. In addition because you need additional chemistry and you can meet the 2 years of college chemistry requirement if you complete chemistry through biochemistry.

Q: I am going to take MTH 131 instead of MTH 133. Will that count as a semester of calculus?
A: No. MTH 131 and 132 together count as one semester of calculus. You will need to take an additional math class for a full year of math. We recommend statistics for all students, and a semester of statistics plus your calculus will equal one year of math.

Q: I don’t see that Oberlin even has an English requirement. If I finish the writing proficiency with classes in other departments, will med schools be fine with that?
A: Some of them will, but many won’t. Why take the chance? Why not find a place for an interesting English class or something in the rhetoric/composition department so that you don’t need to worry later?

Q: I’m taking a first year seminar in the neuroscience (biology, physics, chemistry) department. Will that credit count as one of the premed requirements?
A: No.

Q: Why is there so much emphasis on specific science classes?
A: The reason we suggest that you take the particular science course sequence listed above, and the reason we do not suggest taking these courses at a community college, or by using your AP (IB) credits to fulfill them is because of medical school admission requirements and the MCAT exam. The MCAT is the test all med school applicants must take before admission to med school and, although it only tests “basic” science information, it is very difficult and you must do well on it. Therefore, any skimming of that foundational material can really cause you trouble later on in the application process.

Q: So how should I decide whether to use my AP (IB, etc) credits or whether I should just take those entry-level classes?
A: Please talk to the professors in the science area in question and get a look at the syllabi of the courses you are considering skipping. Of course you don’t want to spend a semester being bored in a class covering stuff you already know. But it would probably be better—in terms of medical school admission, anyway— for you to get an A in a class covering some familiar content as opposed to getting a B- in an upper division class that you are a little unprepared for. If you plan to major in the area where you are thinking of using AP (IB) credits, it may make sense to use them because you are probably especially strong in that area already, and because that would allow you to take another elective later on. Talk to your professors! Of course, using AP (IB) credits outside of the pre med requirements works just fine, because medical schools do not have specific requirements for those courses and that material doesn’t show up on the MCAT.

Q: Do most Oberlin medical school applicants get into medical school?
A: Oberlin sends many qualified students to medical schools each year, and we support students in every way we can throughout the admissions process. But the onus is on the student first, not the institution. You must work very hard; you must do very well in your course work, especially in the sciences. You must get some science research experience and you must get medical volunteer experience. Additionally, you must really think hard about this decision and have very clear reasons to want to be a doctor, and you must be able to articulate them. At every medical school there are roughly 150 slots for new students each year. Most schools get about 4000
applicants for those few slots. What is going to make you stand out? It’s up to you to prove that you should be one of the people they accept, and it is up to Oberlin to try and help you do it.

The reason so many medical schools like getting Oberlin grads is because Oberlin medical students usually do terrific work. When your time comes, please do the same!

Q: What do you mean by a qualified medical school applicant?
A: You are a good candidate if your GPA is above a 3.3 and your MCAT scores are 31 or better. In the recent years, the average Oberlin GPA and MCAT scores of accepted students were a 3.6 GPA (overall GPA) and 33 on the MCAT. If you want to get an MD/PhD, you generally need a 3.6 GPA or better and MCAT score above 36.

However, not all accepted students had such high GPAs and MCAT scores. On the other hand, others had these scores, but did not get into medical school. It is very important to remember that in addition to grades and test scores, you also need substantial volunteer and research experience. For MD/PhD-bound students you need to do as much research as you can. Do not overlook the importance of shadowing doctors and volunteering in medical settings. You need to be able to articulate your reasons for going to medical school and explain why you want to be a doctor. You should be able to draw on personal experiences to demonstrate to admissions committees that you are knowledgeable about the medical field and truly want to be a physician.

Q: What if things go wrong? What if I have a bad semester or I get low grades in the requirements?
A: Things can and do go badly sometimes, and what to do about that depends a lot on the specific circumstances. Sometimes you can explain why you had a low grade and how that motivated you to do better. An important question is whether you have had trouble in a specific semester, or whether your overall GPA is not what you need. Sometimes it helps to repeat a class outside of Oberlin, regardless of whether or not that appears on your transcript here. Sometimes people need to take extra time in a program designed for premed students after they graduate. What you certainly should do is talk to a premed advisor ASAP. Once you see what your options are you can either try to rectify the problem(s) or find a related career path that works better for you.

Q: Does Oberlin offer an MCAT prep class?
A: Very often commercial companies such as Kaplan and Princeton offer classes on campus, but outside of offering them classroom space, we do not work with them. Currently they cost around $2000. You do not have to take such a course, but you can if you wish. Generally these companies want a minimum of 8 students to sign up before they will offer a class. Students can also go to nearby sites if there is no convenient class here. Some students work independently or with a student-run group using ExamKrackers. However you choose to prepare for the exam, plan to spend at least as much time on MCAT preparation as you do on a semester-long science course.

Q: When do I apply to med school?
A: You will start the process about 15-18 months before you want to actually begin. If you want to go directly to medical school after Oberlin, you must begin all this in your junior year. If you want to wait until your senior year, you will have a year to do something else before you start medical school (gap year).

The Health Career advisor offers an information session each fall for students thinking about applying. The general requirements to apply include:
   1. finish the prerequisite courses
2. prepare for and take the MCAT (or other appropriate entrance exam)
3. fill out the paper work to schedule an interview with the Oberlin Health Career Committee for a committee letter, Oberlin’s process of endorsement for medical school applicants
4. get recommendations from at least 3 science professors, and if possible 1 non-science professor and 1 volunteer supervisor. You can get more.
5. fill out the application form for AMCAS.
6. fill out requests for further information (called secondaries)
7. 

Q: **Is it important for me to get into the very top tier medical school?**
A: That depends on what you want to do later. If your goal is to be the president of a medical school or a faculty member, then your choice of medical school matters—at least it matters that you go to a school that can offer you substantive research opportunities. But for most other people, they are happy wherever they go. Schools where you have in-state residency are usually far less expensive and usually give preferential treatment for their residents as far as admissions goes. Look at how the curriculum is taught and where graduates go for their residencies. Remember, every medical school graduate has to take exactly the same USMLE exams, and standards are rigorous for every one of the schools.

Q: **I have more questions! What should I do?**
A:
1) Talk to one of the **Health Career Advisors**

Lynne Bianchi, Coordinator, Health Career Programs;
   Neuroscience Department, Science Center K102 x58369
   **Sign up sheet for appointments is on her office door.**
   (appointments cannot be made via email due to the number of requests)

   Jason Belitsky, Chemistry and Biochemistry Department
   Katie Oertel, Chemistry and Biochemistry
   Maureen Peters, Biology
   Jesse Rowsell, Chemistry and Biochemistry

2) Go visit the **Office of Careers Services:** Stevenson Hall-Longman Commons; M-F 8:30-5:00; 440-775-8140

This office has resources to help you identify and apply for fellowships, write resumes and personal statements, and practice your interview skills.