FAQ on how to prepare for medical and allied health professions

Q: What classes are the prerequisites for medical 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 101-102 (or CHM 103), CHM 205, CHM 254; BIO 100, BIO 213; PHY 103, 104 (or PHY 110, 111); MTH 133 and STAT 113 or 114; introductory coursework in psychology, sociology or a related course.

Q: Does Oberlin have a premed major?
A: No. Premed students complete a major of their choice as well as the requirements listed above. Students can major in any subject that is of interest to them.

Q: Should I be a science major? Won’t that look better to med schools?
A: Medical schools suggest that you major in an area that you are truly interested in learning about. Many of our premed students are science majors. However, about 1/3 complete non-science majors, including conservatory majors. Theses students are as successful in gaining acceptance into medical school as our science majors.

If you choose a non-science major, it is helpful to take one or two science classes beyond the minimum to further demonstrate your scientific abilities and your commitment to medical school.

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: Most of the prerequisites for these fields are similar. Some schools, such as vet schools and nursing schools, may have additional requirements and you may have to complete a few of them in the summer. Talk to the health career advisors to find out more about these different graduate programs and how best to prepare for them.

Q: Will Oberlin’s writing requirement meet the English requirement for medical school?
A: Probably not. Although some schools will accept this, many won’t. In addition, some medical schools now specify they want students to take an English literature-based course. To meet the English requirement you can take courses in the English, Comparative Literature, Creative Writing or Rhetoric/Composition Departments.
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 also need to take an additional math class to complete a full year of math. We recommend statistics for all students, so a semester of statistics plus MTH 131 and 132 will equal one year of math.

Q: I have AP (IB) credits for calculus (or biology, chemistry, physics, English, other). How does this fit into my premed schedule?
A: This is a tricky issue. Some medical schools accept AP credits and IB credits if they are listed on your Oberlin transcript. However, many will accept them only if you have advanced coursework in the same area. Most medical schools 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. Having only AP credit for the required courses is risky and could limit your options down the road.

It is also important that you have a very strong foundation in the basic science classes in order to do well on the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) and succeed in medical school. Any “skimming” of foundational material can cause you trouble later on in the application process.

AP credits in courses that are not required for medical school can be used.

Consult with a premed advisor to figure out how best to use your AP credits.

Q: I want to take some of my premed classes in the summer at my local community college. Is that OK?
A: This is another tricky issue. In general, medical schools want to see your pre med courses taken at your undergraduate institution or a comparable four-year school. Discuss your options with a pre med advisor before signing up for a class. The class needs to be comparable to one offered at Oberlin and you should limit the number of off-campus prerequisite courses you take.

Some other health professions, such as nursing, often accept community college credits. You should check with the specific programs you are interested in before selecting a class.

Q: What if things go wrong? What if I have a bad semester or I get low grades in the requirements?
A: Things can go wrong. It happens for any number of reasons. What you do about it depends on the specific circumstances. Very few students leave Oberlin College with a 4.0 GPA, so having some Bs on your transcript does not mean you won’t get into medical school. In addition, it is not uncommon for students to struggle in their first two semesters as they adjust to the demands of college classes. For example, if you earn a C
in a class, the most important thing is to show an “upward trajectory” and a consistent performance by the time you apply to medical school. Demonstrating perseverance and commitment to your goal is impressive to medical schools.

If your overall GPA is an issue you may need to consider other options, such enrolling in a program designed for pre-med students after you graduate or developing your own plan for completing additional coursework.

You should talk with a premed advisor to think through your particular situation and determine what is best for you.

**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 “gap year” in which you do something else, such as work or volunteer, before you start medical school.

The Pre-Medical Program Director offers an information session each fall for students thinking about applying the following summer (June). The general requirements to apply include:

1. finish the prerequisite courses
2. prepare for and take the MCAT
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 at least 1 non-science professor and 1 volunteer supervisor.

**Q: Does Oberlin offer an MCAT prep class?**
A: Commercial companies such as Kaplan and ExamKrackers often 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: Do most Oberlin applicants get into medical school?**
A: Yes, the majority of applicants are accepted into medical school each year. The national average for accepted applicants is around 44% while that for Oberlin students is about 80%.
Q: How do I know if I am a qualified applicant?
A: As a general guideline, you are a strong candidate if your Oberlin GPA is above a 3.4, your MCAT score is over 509 and you have relevant experiences. However, it is important to note that not all Oberlin students who are accepted to medical school have such high GPAs and MCAT scores. (On the other hand, others have higher GPAs and MCAT scores, but do not get into medical school.)

It is very important to remember that in addition to grades and test scores, you need substantial volunteer and research experience as well as excellent writing and interviewing skills. MD/PhD applicants should have multiple semesters and summers of research experience. In all cases, you need to articulate 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.

Oberlin students are attractive applicants because of their strong science preparation and broad liberal arts background. Oberlin students also tend to engage in multiple extracurricular activities and get involved in community service. Medical schools appreciate students who have interests beyond the science classroom and a commitment to serving others.

Q: I have more questions. What should I do?
A: 1) Talk to one of the advisors on the Health Career Committee

   Lynne Bianchi, Pre-Medical Program Director;
   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)

   Cheryl Cottine, Religion Department
   Maureen Peters, Biology Department
   Lisa Ryno, Chemistry and Biochemistry Department
   Rebecca Whelan, Chemistry and Biochemistry Department

2) Visit the Career Center: 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, search databases for internship opportunities, write resumes, and practice your interview skills.