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, a major, and the college distribution 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 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: Should I be a science major? Won’t that look better to med schools?
A: 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 (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 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. Having only AP credit for the required courses is risky and could limit your options down the road. AP credits in courses that are not required for medical school, such as History, can be used. You should discuss this with Professor Bianchi 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: 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. Some other professions, such as nursing, often accept community college credits. You should to check with specific programs you are interested in, before you take the courses.
Q: I just was placed in CHM 103. Will that count as a one-year chemistry class for medical schools?
A: Usually. You need additional chemistry for medical school 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 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 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 so you meet the greatest number of medical school admission requirements and are well prepared for the MCAT. 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: 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. In recent years about 80% of students who worked closely with the Pre-Medical Program Director were accepted into medical school (the national average is 44%). However, it is important to note students who were accepted did what they needed to do in order to become exceptional, well-rounded candidates. You must work very hard; you must do very well in your courses, especially in the sciences. You must get medical/volunteer experience and complete research if you can. 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 clearly. At every med school there are roughly 150 slots for new students each year. Most schools get over 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 we will help you as much as we can.
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 (overall GPA) and 33, respectively. If you want to get an MD/PhD, you generally need a 3.5 GPA or better and MCAT score above 34.

However, not all accepted students had such high GPAs and MCAT scores. On the other hand, others had better 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 as well as excellent writing and interviewing skills. Do not overlook the importance of shadowing doctors and volunteering in medical settings. MD/PhD-bound students need to do as much research as possible. 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 or find other ways to improve their total application. Not everyone is meant to go to medical school, but no one’s entire future is determined by a couple of college semesters. You should talk with a premed advisor to think through your particular situation and determine what is best for you.

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: 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 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 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 (secondary applications)
7. QUESTION: Is it important for me to get into the very top tier medical school?
   ANSWER: That depends in part on what you want to do later. If you seek a career in academic medicine for example, going to an established program with a large research center may be necessary. But for most people, they are happy wherever they go. Schools where you have in-state residency are usually less expensive and usually give preferential treatment for their residents as far as admissions go. Look at how the curriculum is taught, special programs offered, 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. In general, even top applicants receive a limited number of acceptances, so it is important to keep an open mind when applying.

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)
Gunnar Kwakye, Neuroscience
Katie Oertel, Chemistry and Biochemistry
Maureen Peters, Biology

2) Go 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 personal statements, and practice your interview skills.