

## HEALTH CAREER ADVISING FAQS AND ANSWERS

### **Q: What should I choose for my undergraduate major?**

A: Health profession schools have no stated preference with respect to choice of college major. You should major in an academic discipline that you enjoy and do well in, which increases your chances of earning high grades in those courses. In addition, you must do well in the *science* courses that are required for the health profession in which you are interested. Many students major in one of the sciences because the coursework required for most professional schools overlaps a great deal with the courses already required for Biology, Chemistry, or Biochemistry degrees.

### **Q: Will my application to professional schools be weakened if I take more than 4 years to graduate?**

A: Not necessarily, since students who have to work to pay their own way for school, or who double major, often take more than 4 years to graduate. During your interview, be prepared to explain why you took longer than 4 years to complete your undergraduate degree.

### **Q: What GPA do I need to be a competitive applicant to gain admission to professional schools?**

A: The higher your GPA, the better your chances are of having a competitive application. Average GPA data of accepted students are often available on the websites of health professions schools. For example, recent average GPAs of students accepted to medical school ranged between 3.5 and 3.8.

### **Q: What score do I need to make on the MCAT to get into medical school? ...on the DAT to get into dental school? ... on the OAT to get into optometry school? ...on the PCAT to get into pharmacy school? ... on the GRE to get into other professional schools?**

A: The higher your score, the better your chances are of attracting interest. Average MCAT, DAT, OAT, PCAT, and GRE scores for accepted applicants to medical, dental, optometry, pharmacy, veterinary medical, Physician Assistant, and other health professions programs are typically available on school websites. Scores on standardized tests typically correlate/complement GPAs. Disparity between GPA and standardized test scores often raises questions about the student's academic ability.

### **Q: What do I need to do to prepare for the MCAT?**

A: The new MCAT, which was given for the first time in the summer of 2015, is considerably different from the old MCAT. The Association of American Medical College MCAT Division provides many free resources

to help students prepare for the new test. These include guides to content, test preparation, and practice test materials. It is suggested that students planning to take the MCAT will want to take courses in Biochemistry, Psychology, and Sociology to prepare for questions from those areas of knowledge, in addition to the premedical requirements. See the following for information:  
<https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>

**Q: How much and what sort of volunteer work should I do?**

A: Medical schools are looking for applicants who have exhibited depth of commitment (passion) for service to others. Volunteerism could be health-related, although it does not have to be. Volunteering for Hospice, Habitat for Humanity, Planned Parenthood, and Reading Connections are some examples of volunteer agencies where UNCG students have served in the past. Dental schools like for students to volunteer with the Missions of Mercy (MOM) dental clinics. Professional schools are not looking for dabblers; that is people who jump from one type of volunteer work to another; rather they are looking for applicants who have challenged themselves to gain meaningful experiences. Both UNCG's Office of Service Learning and Leadership and Career Services Center have resources to help you find volunteer experiences.

**Q: How can I get more hands-on patient care experience?**

A: Hands-on patient care experiences are typically only available to students who have training and have obtained some sort of certification or credential to prove that they are trained. For example, students who have Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training/certification or are Certified Nursing Assistants/Aides (CNAs) can often obtain positions in hospitals, nursing homes, home health agencies, and free clinics where they can get substantive patient care experience. Medical scribe training through local companies is accepted by some institutions as "hands-on", while others consider this "watching" with an extra piece. Hands-on patient experience is extremely valuable (and for PA schools, REQUIRED) for an impressive application and interview experience.

**Q: Should I do research in a faculty member's laboratory?**

A: Research is not required for admission to medical, dental, or veterinary medical school, but statistics on admitted students confirm that it is highly desirable. If you are interested in a career in academic medicine, dentistry, or veterinary medicine, then it is very important that you do research. Health professions schools will be interested in what kind of research you did, but, more importantly, they will be interested in what you learned about yourself through your research experience. Doing a research project with a faculty member has the added benefit of possibly strengthening a letter of recommendation.

**Q: Which upper level science courses should I take?**

A: Upper level courses in biochemistry, cell biology, genetics, physiology, microbiology, neurobiology, immunology and histology are some of the courses taken by students who apply to medical, dental, and veterinary medical schools. They are often recommended, but are not necessarily required for admission. You should check the Admission Requirements section on the websites for the health professions schools that you are interested in for any specific science course requirements.

**Q: What conditions make it worthwhile for me to repeat a required course to try to make a better grade?**

A: Consider retaking prerequisite courses that you got “C” grades in, or lower, to show academic improvement. (See Financial Aid questions below: Normally Financial Aid does NOT cover repeated courses, so you would have to take at least 12 hours of “new” classes in any semester where you are repeating a course, or you’ll have to pay for that course out of pocket.) As an alternative to repeating lower level courses, getting excellent grades in upper level courses is another way to demonstrate academic success.

**Q: Who should I ask to write letters of recommendation/evaluation?**

A: Since UNCG does not use a committee for writing letters, you will need to ask individual faculty members to write letters for you. You want to get to know your professors so they will be able to write strong letters about you both as a student and as person. You do not want testimonial letters. Most health professions schools will specify the number and sources of reference letters. You will want letters from people who can comment effectively about your capabilities and your character. You should use the AAMC letter writer’s guidelines to decide who can address the particular attributes that medical schools consider important.

**Q: Should I take a Kaplan course or some other MCAT prep course?**

A: The decision on whether to take a test prep course is up to YOU. Test preparation courses, such as those for the MCAT, DAT, GRE, and PCAT are expensive. Students who are eligible for need based financial aid may qualify for a fee reduction. There are many available test preparation resources that you can purchase that are less expensive than taking a test preparation course, which can be found on the AAMC website. If you wish to purchase test prep materials, a discounted Kaplan MCAT prep course is now available for UNCG students in the spring of each year.

**Q: Who should I talk with who can help me with Plan B if my initial goals change or do not seem realistic?**

A: The best person to talk with you about your goals and aspirations is your Pre-professional advisor (listed second on your DegreeWorks advisor box). You can also speak to the Chair of the Health Careers

Advisory Committee (Robin Maxwell) and consult the Career Services Center in Elliott University Center to discuss alternative careers.

**Q: Is it required that my academic advisor be specially designated as a health careers advisor?**

A: No, but it can be helpful as you navigate your college career to be advised by someone with appropriate training and experiences. A trained health careers advisor can provide you with information and opportunities related to your desired path, since they have helped other students successfully navigate the process.

**Q: I'm a post baccalaureate student; should I finish a second degree?**

A: It typically takes two years for post-bac students to gain admission to their health professions schools. Some post baccalaureate students have finished second degrees in Biology, Chemistry or Biochemistry by taking required classes for those majors during a second full year of post baccalaureate study (the gap year when they are applying to medical or other health professions school). Most post baccalaureate students do not complete a second degree, but many take additional courses during the gap year. Taking more than the minimum number of courses often strengthens applications. Post baccalaureate students should persist with hands-on health care experiences and/or health-related volunteer activities during the gap year while they are applying to schools.

**Q: What is a gap year? Should I take advantage of a gap year?**

A: A gap year (sometimes referred to as a "glide" year or "growth" year) is a year between finishing your bachelor's degree and entering the professional program of your choice. One of the most attractive things about a gap year is that it allows you to spread your science classes out throughout your entire time in college, rather than compressing them all into the first three years. (Basically, if you want to begin your professional program in the fall following graduation, with no gap, you have to have all of your required science classes completed by the end of your JUNIOR year, in order to take the entrance exam and apply in the fall of your SENIOR year of college.) With a gap year, you can study for that MCAT/DAT/OAT/PCAT/GRE, get more hands-on or volunteer experience, perfect your personal statement, and potentially do research or take additional post-bac classes to beef up your science GPA. Only about one-third of all students applying to medical schools last year did so straight from college without a gap year, and the average starting age for health-related professional schools is 25 years.

**Q: What is a good way to stay informed about health-related programs at UNCG?**

A: If you are listed as a pre-professional student (second major), then you should automatically be a part of the Canvas organization "Pre-Professional Programs" group, which has announcements of upcoming

events and opportunities, as well as modules with information about summer enrichment, letters of recommendation, interview strategies, and resources for each pre-professional track. Not an official pre-professional second major? Be sure to declare that second major using the Change your Major function in UNCGenie's Student records. Then, send your UNCG email address to Robin Maxwell ([Robin\\_Maxwell@uncg.edu](mailto:Robin_Maxwell@uncg.edu)) and she will add you to the organization.

Information about health-related career events is often posted on the Biology Department website:  
(<http://biology.uncg.edu/about/healthmeet.html>).

A Health Careers bulletin board with useful information for all pre-professional students (and specific information about different tracks) is maintained on the lab hallway of 1<sup>st</sup> floor Sullivan Building. You should make a habit of checking this frequently when you are in the building.

### **To Prepare a Strong Professional School Application:**

#### **Q: How can I write an outstanding personal statement?**

A: Attend the Personal Statement Writing Workshop that is usually held in the spring semester. Also, you should consider starting an e-portfolio. You should title the e-portfolio "The Why I Want to be a Doctor (Dentist, Veterinarian, PT, PA, etc.) portfolio". Use your portfolio to document your thoughts, ideas, and, even more importantly, experiences that you have that show that you know why you want to be doctor or some other health professional. The portfolio will help you write your personal statement about why you want to be a doctor. It should also have some great personal stories/anecdotes that show your commitment to your future career. Once you have written your personal statement, make sure that you get plenty of feedback/criticism about it from a variety of individuals that you feel write well. You should also take it to the Writing Center for evaluation of your grammar, flow, and tense agreement.

#### **Q: How can I prepare strong secondary/supplemental applications?**

A: Secondary/supplemental applications will have more questions about you and your motivations for a particular health career. Your answers need to be carefully thought out and well written. Be sure to get feedback/criticism of your secondary application before you send it. Be sure not to "copy and paste" information from your personal statement into the secondary application questions!

#### **Q: How can I get help preparing for professional school interviews?**

A: The Career Services Center does mock interviews. Go to the Career Services and ask to schedule a mock interview for medical (or other health professions school). Also, check with your health careers advisor

to see if they would do a mock interview with you. Before any interview at a medical or other health professions school, be sure to review your primary and secondary applications. What you have written about yourself in those applications often forms the basis for an interviewer's questions. Develop and practice your "elevator speech."

**Q: Where can I find out specific information about the schools to which I am interested in applying?**

A: You should explore the websites of the schools that you are interested in to see what their requirements are as well as any other information that they may post. To organize and compare this information, we recommend that you create a chart or checklist of these requirements and recommendations. Include average GPA and average test scores for acceptance into each program, as well as important dates and deadlines, in addition to pre-requisite coursework. You might also find it helpful to consult with a health career advisor about the schools in which you are interested.

**Q: How many students does UNCG get into medical/dental/veterinary medical school every year?**

A: This is not an appropriate question to ask, since UNCG does not get any students into medical/dental/veterinary medical school. UNCG students get themselves into those schools by virtue of their academic performance, their performance on a high stakes national test, their letters of recommendation, the quality of their applications, and, most importantly, through their experiences that demonstrate to medical/dental/veterinary schools (and other health professions) that they know why they want to be doctors, dentists, veterinarians, etc. UNCG students enjoy the same, or slightly higher, average acceptance rate to professional schools as other, comparable institutions or programs.

## **Financial Aid Questions**

**Q: Can I receive financial aid for repeating a course to improve my grade?**

A: If you previously **failed** a course, you may be eligible to receive financial aid for the repeated course. If you have already passed the course (even at another school and you have transferred the credit(s) to UNCG), you are not eligible to receive financial aid for repeating the course. Repeated courses do NOT count toward the Overall Earned Credit Hours if no credit is awarded the semester the course is repeated. Repeated courses DO count towards attempted hours, and will be considered in Science GPA calculations by professional schools.

Financial aid will not be disbursed on repeat coursework once a course has been passed unless a course is deemed repeatable for credit by the University.

Please see the University Registrar's policy on Grading in the Undergraduate Bulletin.

**Q: I am interested in taking a (Dance, Spanish, Anthropology, etc.) course while completing the post-baccalaureate program in Biology. Am I eligible for financial aid?**

A: No, you are only eligible to receive financial aid for courses required to complete the degree you declared when you entered the post-baccalaureate program. Please review your DegreeWorks evaluation to see what the required coursework would be. More details specific to the post-bac program can be found at this site:

[http://biology.uncg.edu/ugradprograms/post-bac\\_pre-med.html](http://biology.uncg.edu/ugradprograms/post-bac_pre-med.html)

**Q: What is the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy for financial aid recipients?**

A: All students who wish to qualify for financial aid at UNCG will be assessed on certain criteria as required by both the federal and state governments. These criteria include minimum grade point average, minimum semester credit hour completion rate, cumulative completion rate, and completion of a degree within a maximum time frame. A student who meets the standards of the SAP policy for Financial Aid is considered eligible for financial aid. A student must also meet other financial aid requirements in order to receive financial aid.

Please review the SAP policy under the important forms section of the Financial Aid website for additional information: