

**PRE-MED FAQs**  
**PRE-PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS IN UNDERGRADUATE ADVISING & RESEARCH**  
**SWEET HALL, 1ST FLOOR \* APPOINTMENTS: (650) 723-2426 or online at [premed.stanford.edu](https://premed.stanford.edu)**

**What are medical schools looking for?**

Medical schools are interested in applicants with excellent academic abilities (as shown in collegiate transcripts and MCAT scores), strong interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, strong faculty recommendations, and a clear motivation for medicine. The American Association of Medical Colleges has defined four core competencies for entering medical students: Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Thinking and Reasoning, and Science. More information on these competencies can be found at: <https://www.aamc.org/admissions/admissionslifecycle/409090/competencies.html>

**What Stanford courses will meet the pre-med requirements?**

See the Academic Planning Guide available in UAR (Sweet Hall) and online for detailed information about the courses offered at Stanford that meet the pre-med requirements: [premed.stanford.edu](https://premed.stanford.edu)

**Can I use AP credit to fulfill my pre-med requirements?**

Medical schools are not consistent with how they view AP credit. A good place to start would be to take the placement tests offered for introductory science and math courses. We recommend you take an additional course at the more advanced level if you transfer the AP units in math or physics. Please refer to the Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) guide through the [AAMC website](https://www.aamc.org) for information about all U.S. and Canadian medical schools.

**Do I have to major in a science?**

No, major in the subject(s) that interest you. Medical schools appreciate any academic major, as long as you also perform well in the required pre-med science courses.

**Can I take courses credit / no credit (pass / fail)?**

Medical schools want to see that you have challenged yourself academically and that their required science coursework be taken for a letter grade. Consult with an academic advisor if you are considering choosing a credit/no credit option.

**Can I take another reading and writing course in place of English?**

This requirement can be completed by taking PWR1, PWR2, and any upper division English course. Some schools will accept a writing intensive course in the major or specific Thinking Matters courses. Consult the Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) guide for requirements for a specific medical school.

**What kinds of grades will I need to be accepted? Is there a GPA cut-off for getting into medical school?**

The expectation regarding grades for applicants varies from school to school and from year to year. Strong grades in the science requirements show mastery of the material. Use the Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) guide or individual medical school webpages to see specific school ranges for GPA and MCAT scores.

**What can I do if I'm determined to be a doctor, but my grades aren't good enough?**

Many applicants take a few years after graduation to strengthen their academic record. They may choose to take additional science courses at a local university, or to enroll in a formal post baccalaureate program for students interested in medical school who need to improve their credentials. If you find that you are doing poorly in your science courses at Stanford, it may be a wise strategy to put your pre-med plans on hold, concentrate on subjects you like and do well in, and then complete the science requirements after graduation if you are still interested in going to medical school. Be sure to consult with UAR's pre-med advisors about your individual situation.

**Do I need to have medically-related experiences?**

Yes, it is critically important to work with patients, to show medical schools that you have observed medical practice first-hand. Students do this through volunteer work in hospitals and clinics, summer jobs, internships, formal pre-med summer programs, or shadowing physicians at work, either during the school year or during school vacations.

**Are there opportunities to volunteer in a hospital at Stanford?**

Yes. See our handout *PRE-HEALTH VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES* available in UAR (Sweet Hall) and online: [premed.stanford.edu](https://premed.stanford.edu)

### **Do I need to do research to get into medical school?**

Although research is not necessarily a requirement, involvement in research is a valuable experience that many medical schools view as a plus. If you are interested in pursuing an MD-PhD or you are considering applying to a school that values research (consult the MSAR), research is essential.

### **Can I take required pre-med courses in summer school?**

Yes, but we recommend that you consult with a pre-health advisor before doing so, as summer is often a good time to delve in depth into valuable extracurricular activities that may not be available during the school year. If you choose to take a science course at another institution, be sure that it is at an accredited four-year U.S. college or university, and it is a course with lab normally taken by that school's pre-med population. If you intend to transfer credit to Stanford, fill out the transfer credit form on the Registrar's Office web site and check with your department if you plan to count the course for your major. Note that you do not need this transfer credit for medical school application purposes.

### **Can I study abroad?**

Yes, for interested students, it is a valuable experience that shouldn't be missed. Medical schools like to see that students have had broad, interesting experiences, and studying abroad demonstrates that you can excel in a culture different from your own. Many BOSP destinations offer programs that are of particular interest to students interested in health-related careers. See: <https://undergrad.stanford.edu/programs/bosp>

### **What kind of extracurricular experiences should I seek?**

Choose your activities based on your genuine interests and become an active contributor so that these experiences become meaningful to you. Focusing on a few pursuits, going in depth for a sustained period of time, and making an impact on the broader community is likely to be more valuable than accumulating a long list of activities. Community service is an important way to demonstrate your commitment to improving the welfare of others. A wide variety of opportunities can be found through the Haas Center for Public Service.

### **What is the MCAT?**

The Medical College Admission Test is the standardized test required by all medical schools. It is a 7 ½ hour long computer-based test that includes: Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills. Consult with a UAR pre-med advisor about how to prepare for and when to take the MCAT.

### **Who will write my letters of recommendation?**

When you apply to medical school, you will need approximately five letters of recommendation from faculty and other individuals who know you well. At least two of these letters should come from science faculty, and one should come from non-science faculty. Some schools ask specifically for a recommendation from a Biology professor. Coaches, work, research or volunteer supervisors can also write letters of recommendation.

### **What is the timetable for applying to medical school?**

Students who hope to enroll in medical school immediately following graduation should begin the medical school application process in late spring/early summer as they approach the end of their junior year. Those who hope to enroll in medical school with a one-year gap after their graduation should plan to apply in late spring of their senior year. Many students are now taking a year (or more) after graduation to strengthen their applications. There are many individual factors that come into play in the decision to apply and the timing for applying to medical school. Please consult with a pre-med advisor in the UAR.

### **Is it okay to take time between Stanford and medical school?**

Yes, many of our applicants are now opting to take at least a year between Stanford and medical school, to take a break between two intense academic experiences, to spread out the pre-medical requirements, to acquire some work experience, to gain experience working in a health setting, or strengthen their applications. Medical schools appreciate applicants with maturity and life experience. UAR pre-professional advisors are happy to work with Stanford alumni.

### **When should I meet with a UAR Pre-Med Advisor?**

Whenever you have a question or concern, contact UAR in Sweet Hall, 1st Floor, telephone (650) 723-2426. The pre-med advising team – Patricia Lewis, Katie Wang, and Kathy Wright – look forward to supporting you through your pre-medical journey!