Pre-Health Care Planner

Many colleges and universities use the claim of very high acceptance rates to professional schools as a recruiting tool to impress prospective students. However, in order to achieve high acceptance rates the institutions screen students and those who cannot demonstrate they can make high grades are not allowed to call themselves pre-med students. Thus, only the best are encouraged to apply. The College of Science at Marshall University wishes to be inclusive and attempt to help students with a range of abilities. Students will be advised about multiple career pathways and if the grades are not high enough for medical school there are other health care areas that will accept students with GPA of approximately 2.70-3.00. The College of Science will assist students in selecting a successful career pathway. Admission to health care professional schools including medical, pharmacy, and dental schools is very competitive. Students must achieve at a high level to gain entry. It is the responsibility of the student to work hard and persevere. The College of Science Office of Student Services and the Associate Dean will advise and support students to help them achieve their goals. The following guidelines and planner will act as a reference to help students coordinate their efforts in order to be prepared to apply in the junior year.

The Pre-Health Care Planner is general enough to be useful in preparation in all areas of medicine. The dates and requirements for the Joan C. Edwards are used as specific examples because so many Marshall students apply there. Students should frequently go to the web pages of the schools they wish to apply to be certain all deadlines and requirements are met. Keeping track of current requirements and dates is essential, especially for students applying to more than one category of professional school, e.g., allopathic (MD) and osteopathic (DO) schools. Students often apply to more than one category of professional program to broaden their chances of admission. The student must be aware of current requirements because they may vary, deadlines for application may change, admission exams may be different, and there may be a requirement to use online credential submission services, depending on the branches of medicine to which applications are made.
FRESHMAN YEAR

- If you have any questions, feel lost, or just do not know where to find answers go directly to the College of Science Office of Student Services in Science 213/214.
- Make up your mind that you have a goal in life and personalize your goal. Let every step you take be toward your goal.
- Go to class and take notes.
- Study every subject every day.
- Form study groups.
- Turn in assignments on time.
- Remember that your GPA starts the first semester. You can not allow yourself to settle for C or lower. Strive for A’s.
- Avoid dropping classes. Too many W’s on your transcript make you appear not to be a finisher.
- Find the College of Science Office of Student Services in S213/214 and advised well in advance of registration for the next semester. The College of Science has mandatory advising. Listen to the advice and follow it in order to avoid mistakes that will slow you down.
- Visit the College of Science Web Page at http://www.marshall.edu/cos/ and explore the Student Services and Pre-professional links. You will find almost every resource you need there.
- Print a Pre-Health Care Curriculum Plan for your major from the College of Sciences Student Services web page and identify the science block courses (color coded). Attempt to complete all of them as early as the end of the sophomore year and no later than spring of the junior year.
- Drop in to the Dean’s Office S270 and talk with Dr. Wayne Elmore, Associate Dean of Science and Chief Pre-Health Care Adviser once each semester. The duty of the person in this role is to will write a personalized, tailored cover letter for your application to professional school. Ask about the resume you will be submitting at the end of the junior year and discuss how you can begin to accumulate items to build the case that you are a broad, well rounded, person who can multitask.
- Join Academic Clubs or organizations including the American Chemical Society, Biology Club, Physics Club, AED (Pre-Health care), Pre-AMSA (Pre-Med), and Marshall Ambassadors. Play a role in the organization and run for office.
- Volunteer or work at a medical facility or pharmacy.
- Perform service through a MU club or organization or volunteer off campus.
- If you finish the freshman year with 3.50 or higher you are doing well. If you have 3.00-3.49 you need to work harder. If you have 2.50-2.99 doors are closing but some professionals schools including chiropractic and podiatry do accept students with lower than approximately 2.70. If the GPA is 2.50 or lower things are not looking good for a health care career.
SOPHOMORE YEAR

- Begin or continue either to work, paid or as a volunteer, in a medical office, hospital, veterinary clinic, pharmacy or other location.
- Keep up the study groups and study every subject every day.
- Mandatory advising is required every student every semester. This close attention insures the student stays on track to finish all the science block courses by no later than the spring semester of the junior year.
- Continue to meet with the Dr. Wayne Elmore, Associate Dean of Science at least once as a semester.
- Begin to prepare your credential for submission of your application. Assembly of these items will require time and you do not want to put this off until the spring of your junior year when you will be preparing for the MCAT, PCAT, VCAT, OAT, etc.
  - Begin to prepare a resume that will be required when you open the Green Folder for your application credentials during the junior year.
  - Start thinking about the personal statement, a one-two page statement about anything you want to say related to why you want to go into medicine. You will upload the personal statement to the online credential submission service and deposit a copy in the Green Folder.
  - Think about which three professors you will ask for letters of recommendation.
  - If you plan to apply to DO programs you will need a letter from a DO. Begin to think about what physician you will shadow and make contact. Students may count shadowing as the Capstone for Biology Majors. Check with the person in charge of Capstones in your department.
  - When complete, the Green folder will contain:
    - Resume
    - three letters of recommendation and the checklist from
    - letter from the Chief Pre-health Care Advisor
    - copy of the personal statement
    - list of the schools to which you wish your credential be submitted
    - print out with a bar code from your online credential submission service (we need that to upload your folder).
  - When you apply, usually by July in the summer after the junior year, The College of Science will upload your credentials.
- Review the pre-health care professional link from the College of Science Web Page at http://www.marshall.edu/preprof/ again. Think seriously about your choices. Luckily, the science block courses prepare you for all health care professional schools. Information is listed there for all areas of medicine. Students must check the web sites of each school to which the student hopes to apply in case there are specific requirements or recommendations. As an example, the University of Charleston Pharmacy program requires a course in ethics but WVU does not.
JUNIOR YEAR

Fall Semester

- Take a free online practice MCAT to get a baseline of your projected performance. We will circulate information about this opportunity in fall. If you score well you still need to prepare. If you find you make a low score in one part, you need to study intensely. If you have a low score on the Verbal portion and/or if you feel that you need to improve your reading speed and comprehension, visit the Learning Center in the Marshall Community & Technical College for information regarding reading improvement skills. Medical schools will not consider you if you cannot read and comprehend large amounts of information very quickly.

- Be certain to take the last remaining science block courses because content from those courses comprise the admission exams.

- If you have already taken the science block courses enroll in science electives that will help you on the admission test. Most medical schools recommend biochemistry and cell biology but do not require them. Students usually say these courses help them immensely on the exams. Microbiology, histology, animal physiology, comparative vertebrate anatomy, also prepare the student well and give medical students an advantage in the first two years of medical school.

- Begin reviewing for MCAT, DAT, OAT, PCAT, or other health-care admission exam. Plan on spending at least three months and at least three hours a day studying for the exam, including weekends. Do not “try” the exam once to see how well you do. It costs money and although you can take the exam multiple times (only three attempts per calendar year), Admissions Committees do notice how many times you have taken the exam.

- If you can afford it, take the Princeton Review or Kaplan prep course. However you choose to study begin right away to prepare for the exam. Do not take it “cold”. It is senseless to fail to prepare for this 5.5 hr, online exam. You will not be ready; it will cost you money, and will delay completion of your application. You should submit your applications as early as possible—do not procrastinate.

- Approach professors you plan to ask to write recommendation letters. You will need at least three. Try to think in terms of who will write an effective letter on your behalf. People who know you and your desire and commitment to becoming a physician are best. You will need to have these letters completed and sent to the Dean’s Office by spring of the junior year to be placed in your folder.

- Complete your resume and thinking about your personal statement. For example, Google “medical school personal statement” to learn about how they are written. You do not want to wait to the last minute so get started.

Spring Semester

- Complete the Green Folder in the Dean’s Office.

- Ask professors who agreed earlier, to write letters of recommendation. Give them the check sheet you receive when you open the Green Jacket. They will submit them directly to the Dean’s Office. This is an absolute must before you leave at the end of the semester. Check at the front desk to be certain they are in place. Professors are forgetful.

- Set up an appointment with Vicki Cole in the Dean’s Office for your Junior Evaluation.

- Set up an appointment in February with your the Chief Pre-health Advisor in the Dean’s office to discuss your application. Discuss an admission strategy based on your goals and grades. If your records are marginal you may want to apply to both allopathic and osteopathic medical schools plus other professional schools, possibly chiropractic or podiatry. Another option is to attend one of the medical schools in the Caribbean.

- Apply for the spring MCAT or other appropriate admission test. Apply early in order that you may have time to take it a second time for consideration of your application.

- Continue to review for the admission exam.
March
- Ask the Dean’s office if your letters are in the folder. Make final decisions on where to apply. Go to the web pages of the schools to which you intend to apply and double check all specific requirements for each school.

April-May
- Take the MCAT or professional exam required for your chosen field.

May – June
- Submit your applications. It is imperative that you apply as early as possible because most medical schools place the applications in a queue and consider them according to date of their receipt. For MUSOM the earliest date you can apply is June 1 of the summer prior to the year you wish to matriculate. Even if you have not taken the MCAT by June 1 or if you plan to retake the MCAT later in the summer, submit your application anyway. Then take the MCAT ASAP.
- Review and critique MCAT results and GPA status.
- Obtain application for AMCAS, AACOMAS, or other admission service (check to see if you are eligible for a waiver of fees) and make first draft of AMCAS or another appropriate admission service essay. Google “medical school personal statement” again to provide an idea of what they are like. Do not copy and paste anything. This must be original.
- Make sure recommendation letters are coming in to the Dean’s Office.

June
- Finalize your essay. This should not be taken lightly. Give it a lot of effort. Have someone read it. Set up an AMCAS Letter Writer file so that the College of Science can submit your recommendation letters electronically. Your other letter writers should be listed as secondary writers in the packet. (You will be required to check either Letter Writer choices are Committee Letter, Individual, or Packet. If you are confused, check with the Chief Pre-health Care Advisor.
- Print out the AMCAS Letter Request form with the bar code, and bring it to the COS Office. Notify COS if any of the prospective medical schools you selected in Letter Writer do not have (LOE) after their name. (That means we will need to mail those schools a paper copy of your recommendation letters.)
- If you did not do well on the MCAT take the Princeton Review in the summer, usually in July. If you made below 24 on the MCAT, retake the exam. Plan with the thought in mind that you may need to take it over by checking the exam dates several months after the date you initially take it. If you did not feel confident, plan immediately to take it again. You will have your scores before you have to decide on whether to take it again.
- If you have a low score on the Verbal portion, seek to improve reading skills.
- Check with the admissions office of the schools to which you wish to apply to seek advice on anything that may not be clear to you. You do not want to fail to submit a complete application as soon as possible. It is best to apply on the earliest possible date, June 1, and to return your secondary applications as soon as possible when you are asked. Do not delay; your position in the queue is critically important.
SENIOR YEAR

September
- Enroll in classes.
- Although by the time the fall semester begins it will be very late in the application process, you can still apply to begin medical school in August after you graduate in May. However, the later you apply, the less likely you are to receive a position in the class.
- Ask for a senior evaluation for graduation in the Dean's Office.
- If you wish to take advantage of the Combined College and Professional Degrees program you must be certain that in both your junior and senior evaluation you inform the advisor who checks the completion of your requirements.

October
- Be patient.
- Begin to think of alternatives (just in case).
- Update your application to the schools as you accomplish more in your senior year.
- Send thank you letters to interviewers and letter writers.
- Interviews usually begin in early October. Schedule your interviews as soon as you are invited and take advantage of Health Care Admissions Workshops and mock interviews of which you will be made aware by the COS Pre-health Care LIST.

November-December
- Schedule interviews for which you are invited. Double check with medical school admissions if there is a chance your credentials are not yet in place.

January
- Complete FAFSA form for financial aid.

February
- If you have no responses by mid February, speak immediately with your Associate Dean about alternatives.

March
- If you are wait-listed, send letter expressing continued interest.

May
- Graduate from Marshall University with a bachelor’s degree.

April-August
- Institutions may still send acceptance letters as late as August, so stay calm.
- Make sure medical schools can reach you or a family member by telephone at all times. Sometimes an accepted student decides not to attend opening up a spot at the last second.
- If you have not received a letter of acceptance, you may want to take some more undergraduate courses, enter graduate school in Biology or Chemistry, or enroll in the Biomedical Sciences Masters Program at the Joan C. Edwards Medical School and plan to retake the MCAT and reapply.
FALL FOLLOWING GRADUATION FROM MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

- Enter allopathic medical, osteopathic medical, dental, pharmacy, veterinary medical, podiatry, physical therapy, optometry, or chiropractic school.