Health Professions Advising

Timing Your Application to Medical School

For students who aim to matriculate to medical school directly after graduation from Lehigh, the application process begins during their third undergraduate year: All prerequisite coursework must be completed by the second semester of junior year. The committee letter process (to obtain an institutional letter of support) and MCAT preparation get underway during that spring semester, too. The MCAT then is typically taken in late spring or early summer. The centralized medical school application (AMCAS/AACOMAS) is completed and submitted during the summer between junior and senior year, with interviews occurring from the fall to spring semesters of senior year.

It’s important to know, though, that many students at Lehigh—and at undergraduate institutions across the country—are applying later to medical school. Currently, the average age of first year medical students nationwide is 24. Applying to medical school in the summer after senior year results in one “gap” or “glide” year. Currently, over half of med school applicants (both from Lehigh and other colleges) take one or more gap years. Why? Some students seek to improve their applications: They recognize their need to prepare more fully for the MCAT, or to improve their GPA (through senior grades or postbaccalaureate coursework), or to develop relationships with professors (for strong letters of recommendation), or to enhance their extracurricular health-related experiences. Some recognize the challenge of completing the steps of the application process (writing essays, committee interviews, gathering letters of recommendation, preparing for and taking the MCAT, etc.) while also being attentive to their coursework and other college life responsibilities. Finally, some students come to the realization that they simply want time off to refresh and to engage in other significant activities before starting their medical education.

It is important to put together the strongest application possible for medical school admissions. Many students have a stronger application when they can include their senior year grades and extracurricular experiences and, moreover, have additional time to prepare for the MCAT. Waiting to apply until after graduation does not adversely affect admissions decisions. In fact, the pursuit of meaningful experiences after graduation can enhance an applicant’s qualifications, by, for example, improving academic standing (through postgrad study), providing meaningful health care-related volunteering or research, and contributing to greater personal maturity.

Remember:
• There is no rush to apply to medical or dental school after 4 years of undergraduate work. Many students choose to delay their applications to health professional school to engage in other opportunities such as Teach for America, other postgraduate study, research, or work.
• There is no one “right way” to get into health professional schools.
• Your four years at Lehigh offer you an exciting time of personal growth. Stay open to possibilities, explore new disciplines and activities, seek out people different from yourself. Figure out what it is that you’re passionate about. No matter where this journey takes you, the Lehigh faculty and staff are here for you—to help you accomplish your goals. Try to stay mindful of the path that will suit you the best.