

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PREMED**

### **1. What do I choose as my major?**

Grand Valley does not have a major called “Premedicine”. Medical schools do not require or prefer one major course of study over another. In fact, on average over twenty percent (20%) of the students entering medical school every year do not have a science major and studies have shown that non-science majors are as successful as science majors on the MCAT. However, it is important to include not only the required courses in your major but also additional science courses that will enrich your background and preparation for the MCAT and medical school courses. Two important considerations must be involved in choosing a major: 1) What do you like to learn about? 2) What will you do for a career if medical school is not in your future? Selecting a major that you enjoy will help you to earn a better academic record and may also provide an alternate career pathway for you should that be necessary.

### **2. What courses are required by medical schools?**

Generally, all medical schools require one year each of general biology (BIO 120 & 121 [some BMS courses may be substituted for BIO 121]), general chemistry (CHM 115 & 116), organic chemistry (CHM 241 & 242), physics (PHY 220 & 221), and composition (WRT 150 & 305 plus SWS courses). Some schools **may require** additional courses, most commonly biochemistry, which every student should complete. Other recommended courses include anatomy, genetics, histology, physiology, immunology, embryology, and microbiology.

### **3. What does it take to be a competitive medical school applicant?**

First and foremost, an excellent academic record (3.4 and above) and strong MCAT scores (30 and higher) are necessary to be a competitive medical school applicant. While students with GPA's and scores lower than these do gain acceptance to medical schools, it becomes much more difficult to gain acceptance as the GPA's and MCAT scores move farther away from these averages. A strong GPA will not make up for weak MCAT scores, and vice versa.

In addition, successful medical school applicants are those students who have taken the time to acquire extensive experience with and exposure to the field of medicine. This may be through volunteering in a hospital, clinic, or nursing home, shadowing physicians and other health practitioners and/or working in these settings. Most medical schools also expect students to have actively demonstrated their interest in meeting the needs of people by extensive involvement in community service organizations such as homeless shelters, food banks, service organizations like Habitat for Humanity, etc.

Finally, being involved in the life of the university is important. Extracurricular organizations, athletics, and research are examples.

### **4. When do I take the MCAT and apply to medical schools?**

The MCAT is now computerized and is offered multiple times per year. The application process for medical school begins in June of the **year before** you intend to enter medical school. For most students this means taking the MCAT in the Spring of their junior year and beginning the application process in June. It is a strong disadvantage to take the MCAT in August/September of the year in which you begin your application, although a low score on an earlier test will necessitate retaking the

MCAT in August/September **IF** the student intends to continue the application process that year. Students may take the MCAT up to three times and may apply to medical schools as many times as they wish.

**5. How do I obtain letters of recommendation? When should I begin to ask for letters and whom should I ask to write them for me?**

Letters of recommendation are a critical component of the application to medical school. Consequently, it is crucial that your letters of recommendation and evaluation are as strong as possible. It is generally recommended that applicants obtain three (3) **academic** letters, i.e., letters from professors who have taught you in a graded setting. Ideally, two of these letters should be from science professors and one from a non-science professor. In order for a professor to write a strong letter of evaluation, they must know you very well. Since some of the classes at the university are large, it is your responsibility to enable the professor to get to know you well. Interact with them during and after class; visit their office regularly for help or to introduce yourself; conduct research or special projects with them. As you take your classes, beginning with the first semester, you should be considering whether the professor might be someone with whom you can connect and whom you might want to ask for a letter of evaluation. If so, there are two options: 1) At the end of the class, ask the professor if he/she would be willing to write a strong letter of recommendation for your application to medical school. Obtain a letter request form from the premedical advisor or the CLAS Academic Advising Center and provide it to the professor. The letter will be sent to the premedical advisor who will keep it in a confidential file for you until the time of your application. 2) Approach the professor at the end of the class and indicate that you are hoping to ask him/her for a letter of evaluation for your medical school application in a couple of years. Ask him/her what you can do to help him/her get to know you better during the next few years and then follow through on those suggestions. When the time comes to request the letter, obtain a request form from the premedical advisor or the CLAS Academic Advising Center and provide a brief resume for the professor indicating your accomplishments, experiences, etc.

**6. May other letters of recommendation and evaluation be submitted.**

Yes, letters from volunteer supervisors, employers, physicians with whom you have shadowed or observed, research supervisors, and others are also very valuable additions to your application. Generally, a maximum of five (5) or six (6) letters are acceptable to most schools.