

What Do I Do Now?

You are probably overwhelmed with everything that is going on in your life right now – finishing high school, graduation, finding a summer job, and this whole college thing. You have had a huge amount of information thrown at you over the last few months and it is all beginning to buzz around in your head, perhaps making you feel completely unprepared for this next step in your education. Don't worry. Although it may not look like it, nearly everyone around you is feeling the same way. Yes, there is a lot to do and you have a lot to learn, but you also have the next four years to accomplish everything that you need to do in order to graduate. So relax, ask questions anytime, and review the material you have been given.

Along the way, there are many things that you need to accomplish. Each year is different and has its own set of unique requirements which need to be accomplished. However, **the first thing that you need to do is to adjust to college life and college-level expectations.** Give yourself the first semester, if not the first year, to get your feet on the ground and to adjust to this huge change in your life. Once you have accomplished that goal, you will begin to work on the other items that are critical to being a successful pre-professional student. Remember, being a successful student starts with maintaining a successful academic record. The average GPA of students accepted to professional school is in the 3.2 – 3.7 range, depending on the type of school to which you are applying!

What to do now:

1. Start a personal “Professional” file.

It is important for pre-professional students to accumulate experience within the field, as well as, community service. You will list these activities on your application in three years, so you want to remember them. In your “Professional” file, have a section for “clinical experience” and another for “community service” and another for “extracurricular activities”. Every time you do something in those areas, write down what you did, how long you did it, and with whom and where. File it in the appropriate section. You will then have these as reminders of everything you have done when you get to the point of filling out your professional school application.

2. Start reading.

The professional admissions tests (MCAT, DAT, PCAT, etc) are as much tests of critical reading skills as they are tests of science knowledge. Besides doing your best in your academic work now so you will remember the material when you are ready to take the test, you can start to prepare for the test now by developing your reading skills. Reading also helps to develop your vocabulary, an important attribute for professionals. I suggest that at least **three times each week** you read the editorial and/or syndicated columnists in the newspaper. When you have finished the editorial you should be able to do the following:

- a) In one concise sentence describe the position of the author.
- b) List as many of the arguments as you can that the author uses to defend his/her position.
- c) List as many arguments that you can think of that would weaken the author's position.

3. Plan ahead.

At freshman orientation, you created your class schedule for your freshman year. However, it is time to also start thinking about your schedule for the following years and perhaps summers so that you are sure to complete the required courses in time to ensure proper preparation, and timing for the required professional entrance exam. Although your schedule will most likely change several times, planning ahead can reduce a lot of the anxiety of being prepared. It is also reasonable to begin thinking about how you can get involved in extracurricular organizations, community service, and medical experiences.