



PLANNING FOR A CAREER IN THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Mount Holyoke College

Career Development Center & Committee on the Health Professions

If you are interested in pursuing a career in the health professions, then you've come to the right place! As you already know, Mount Holyoke College offers top-notch academic preparation, research and internship opportunities. A liberal arts education is highly valued by health professions schools, and MHC has a well-deserved, excellent reputation. The Career Development Center and the Committee on the Health Professions offer extensive information, resources, programs, and opportunities to guide you in your choices and through the application process. This flyer is designed to give you an introduction to some of the things you should be considering as you plan for a career in the health professions, as well as outline for you the resources that are available to you.

Now it's up to you! It is rare for an entering student to know with certainty which specific branch of the health professions will be most suited to her talents. Your job is to explore those possibilities directly, while at the same time letting your experiences in classes, research labs, internships, workshops, sponsored visits and even informal conversations inform your decisions. Be PROACTIVE and DELIBERATE in this process!

Some general rules to follow in preparing for a career in the health professions:

- Major in what you want to. If you love it, you'll be good at it. A liberal arts background will serve you well.
- Understand what courses are required, and have a plan for fulfilling them in a timely manner.
- Understand the timetable for preparation, and have a plan for fitting that timetable with your goals.
- Do a research project. It doesn't have to be in a medical field. But it does speak to your problem-solving and analysis skills.
- Get clinical experience. This is important. *Really* important.
- Be critical/patient/honest/optimistic with yourself. There will be ups and downs, successes and disappointments. Use them to evaluate your intentions and adjust your planning.
- STAND OUT, though Honors work, Study abroad, Summer study, Internship, Community service, Leadership, Athletics, Campus involvement--wherever your strengths and interests lie.

A chronological overview for planning pre-health studies:

- As soon as you know you have an interest in health professions, begin a collaboration between you, the CDC, and your Academic Advisor. Learn what you need to accomplish, and design a plan for doing so.
- Second year:
 - Investigate internship and research opportunities. Evidence of both is essential to a strong application.
 - Formally request assignment to a Pre-health Advisor.
- Third year:
 - Identify programs and begin applications
 - Complete prerequisite courses
 - Take standardized exams
 - Complete a "Pre-Application" package
 - Request individual reference letters
 - Request a Committee recommendation letter
- Fourth Year
 - Complete secondary applications
 - Schedule a practice interview
 - Interviews

Note that this sequence can begin at any point during or even after your college career. In some cases, the sequence can be compressed—but don't cut corners! Some programs such as medical school have a lengthy application process that can take as much as 15-18 months. Plan accordingly.

Programs & Resources:

- **The Committee on the Health Professions** and the **Career Development Center** sponsor a number of programs each year for students interested in the various fields of health. We urge you to take advantage of these programs. Students from ALL classes, first years through seniors, are welcome at all events. These are listed on the **CDC Calendar of Events**.
- Sign-up for the **Health Professions Email List** -- receive information on workshops, programs, internships/jobs and graduate school visits.
- The **CDC Health Professions Web page** includes information about specific programs and resources, as well as links to relevant web sites related to careers in health.
- The **CDC Library** contains a wealth of valuable information, including:
 - directories of medical/health programs
 - books that help you to learn about a variety of health professions
 - internship opportunities
 - funding resources
 - test preparation materials
- **PreHealth Advising** is available to you beginning your first semester, primarily through the CDC. Beginning the spring semester of your sophomore year, you may request to be assigned an advisor from among the faculty who serve on the Committee for the Health Professions. The form to request assignment to a health professions advisor is available on-line and at the Career Development Center. For sophomores, the request must be received by March 15th, as assignments are made only once during the semester. Juniors and seniors may request a Health Advisor during the fall or spring semester, forms due by October 15th or March 15th, respectively.
- **All students who are applying to post-graduate programs in the health professions should formally declare their intentions to the Committee no later than March 30th of the year in which they are planning to begin their application.** Students declare their intent by completing a “pre-application” packet, available on-line and at the CDC. This packet is intended to help optimize the student’s efforts in completing an application that will be successful, and to aid the Committee in supporting the student’s application. Students who fail to submit a pre-application packet by the deadline may not receive the full support of the Committee.
- **Standardized Exams:** Most schools require you to submit results from a standardized exam as part of your application. The most commonly required exams are the MCAT and GRE, but certain programs will require different exams. A complete list, with links to the exam web sites, can be found on the CDC’s web page. Normally, you should plan to take standardized exams in the Spring of your junior year. However, don’t take any test until you have taken the necessary prerequisites. Wait until you have the courses under your belt. The CDC sponsors Kaplan prep courses for the GRE and MCAT.

Suggested Minimum Course Requirements:

Most schools in the Health Professions have structured requirements for admission that include a background in the sciences as well as English and social sciences. Many also expect you to accrue research and/or internship experience in the field. You should thoroughly investigate programs you are interested in to be sure you are fulfilling their expectations.

At a minimum, most schools require you to present the following undergraduate courses:

- Mathematics & Statistics: 1-2 semesters, often including calculus.
- Physics: 2 semesters, with lab.
- Chemistry: 4 semesters, with lab, to include a year of inorganic and a year of organic chemistry.
- Biology: 2 semesters, with lab. Some schools require more, and some require specific courses, such as microbiology and biochemistry.
- English: 2 semesters. These must be writing courses, not literature.
- Social science: Often 1-2 semesters are required in specific courses.
- Note that courses required for some programs--such as Animal Nutrition and Anatomy & Physiology--are not offered on the MHC campus. You will need to plan to take these at UMASS or another campus.
- **Again, investigate specific program requirements and plan early!**

Recommended Courses:

Introductory Biology, 2 semesters with lab:

- *Any section of 145 or 150 offered with a laboratory is suitable.*
- *Bio 145's are smaller classes than the 150's.*
- If you wish to major in biology, you are advised to take Chem 101 in your first year, concurrently with introductory biology. If Chem 101 must wait, take it in the fall of your second year, as it is required for a second-year biology course for biology majors (Bio 210).

Bio 150f/145f and Bio 200s

General Chemistry, 2 semesters with lab:

Organic Chemistry, 2 semesters with lab:

- Take the chemistry courses in the order listed here, ie, 101-201-202-302
- Those with a strong background in chemistry may place out of Chem 101 and take an advanced course (such as physical chemistry) as the second in a two-course sequence in general chemistry.

Chem 101f and Chem 201s

Chem 202f and Chem 302s

Introductory Physics, 2 semesters with lab:

- Physics 103f and 204s are designed specifically for premed students (they do not involve calculus and they cover the range of topics likely to appear on the MCAT). Physics 115 and Physics 216 also meet the requirements for medical school, are designed to form the foundation for a physics major, and use calculus.

Physics 103f and Physics 204s

or

Physics 115fs and Physics 216fs

English: Many medical schools require two semesters of English writing. All require you to demonstrate excellence in written and spoken English, so we recommend:

English 101fs and English 200fs

OR (if you can't take one of the 101s)

English 200fs and any 200-level writing course

Mathematics & Statistics: Most medical schools require one semester of calculus, some require two, and some indicate that statistics can be substituted for one semester of calculus. Our Mathematics department's online self-assessment will help you choose a best first course in mathematics.¹

Those with no prior calculus background, take Calculus I:

Those desiring precalculus, take enriched Calculus I:

For students with calculus experience who want Calc II:

For those wishing to take statistics

Math 101fs

both Math 100Af & Math 100Bs

Math 201fs

Stat 240f

Biochemistry: Very strongly recommended, sometimes required.

- Note that our Biochem 311 requires Bio 210 and Chem 302, which in practice means that premeds must have completed Chem 101-201-202-302 before taking Biochem 311.

Biochem 311f

Social and behavioral sciences: Some schools recommend or even require coursework in the social and behavioral sciences. Investigate specific requirements early in your planning.

You are strongly advised not to overload your schedule with premed requirements in any one semester. As a rule, two premed courses in any single semester of your first year is plenty. We *very strongly* advise you against taking calculus in combination with any two laboratory courses (chemistry, biology, or physics) in any one semester of your first year. If one of those subjects is a possible major, take the introductory sequence in that subject and (optimally) just one other science/math premed requirement at the same time. Many students planning to major in chemistry or biology take one chem course plus one bio course each semester of their first year. If you are considering a major in physics or mathematics, enroll in the intro sequence for that discipline and take one other premed course concurrently or leave other premed requirements until later. Remember, the goal is to do well in premed courses and also to explore the rich opportunities in other disciplines at MHC.

¹ For first year students, go to the First Year Curriculum Guide at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/firstyear> and click Mathematics Assessment on the left side of the welcome page. For continuing students, go to <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/math/pretest/pretest.htm> and follow the instructions about self-registering.

Other tips:

Spending your junior year abroad is possible and requires planning. It will also extend your timeline for applying to med school, because you'll be away during the year that you'd apply if you wanted to begin medical school the fall after you graduate from MHC. Most students do not begin med school right after they graduate, anyway, so you'd be in good company. The vast majority begin med school after one, two, or more years out of college. Keep your long-term goals in view but don't shortchange yourself of what you dream in the meantime, even if it isn't on the "premed requirements" list.

Advanced Placement (AP) credit may enable you to exempt out of an introductory Mount Holyoke course (departmental requirements differ). But medical schools usually do not accept AP credit to fulfill a premedical requirement. It's best to take the AP credit and use it to get into more advanced courses. For instance, if my AP score exempts me from Bio 145/150, I may ask to take Bio 200 in the spring and then Bio 210, a more advanced course, the following fall to complete my 2 required semesters of bio.

MCAT and GRE Testing: Allow time in your schedule during junior or senior year for MCAT or GRE preparation, whether you prepare by self-study or take a commercial prep course. The MCAT should be taken in the spring of your junior year (if you wish to begin medical school the fall after graduating from MHC) or spring of your senior year (if you wish to begin 1.5 years after graduating from MHC). GRE's can be aligned more closely with application deadlines.

International students face a special set of challenges in gaining entrance to a U.S. medical school. If you are an international student, contact either Sarah Bacon or David Gardner to discuss your options.

Coursework is only a piece of preparing for a career in health. Get involved in extracurricular activities, athletics, community service, leadership, research; go wherever your strengths and interests lead you. Admission to graduate training in the health professions is highly competitive, but also does not follow a set formula. Admissions committee's review an applicant's entire package, and while GPA and scores on standardized tests (GRE or MCAT, depending on the program) are very important, so are your essays, clinical experience and extracurricular involvement.

The current members of **Committee on the Health Professions** are:

Sarah Bacon, Biological Sciences, Chair of the Committee
Kathy Binder, Psychology and Education
Rachel Fink, Biological Sciences
James Harold, Philosophy
David Gardner, Career Development Center
Darren Hamilton, Chemistry
Jeffrey Knight, Biological Sciences
Will Millard, Psychology and Education
Megan Nunez, Chemistry
Stan Rashootin, Biological Sciences
Margaret Robinson, Mathematics, Statistics and Computer Science
Sharon Stranford, Biological Sciences

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