PLANNING FOR A CAREER IN THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS
Mount Holyoke College
Office of Pre-Health Programs & 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 Pre-Health Programs office provides 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 to 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, through 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:

- Second year:
  - Investigate internship and research opportunities. Evidence of both is essential to a strong application.
- 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 sponsors 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 announced on the Health Professions Email list.
- Sign-up for the Health Professions Email List — receive information on workshops, programs, internships/jobs and graduate school visits: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/prehealth/events_mailing_list.html
- The Health Professions Web page includes information about specific programs and resources, as well as links to relevant Web sites related to careers in health: http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/prehealth/
- The Pre-Health Programs office maintains a small reference library containing a wealth of valuable information. Please stop by and use these materials.
- Pre-Health Advising is available to you beginning your first semester, primarily through the Pre-Health Programs office. Later in your career here, you can request formal assignment to a member of the Pre-Health Committee who will, in addition to serving as an advisor, becomes the author of your Committee letter of recommendation. It is important for you to begin fostering a relationship with prospective advisors early in your time here so that they feel they know you well when you ask them to serve as your advisor.
- 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 Pre-Health Programs office. 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 Pre-Health Programs’ 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 Pre-Health Programs office 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 some or all of the following undergraduate courses:
- Biochemistry: Strongly recommended, and required by some programs.
- Biology: 2 semesters, with lab. Some schools require more, and some require specific courses, such as microbiology and biochemistry.
- Chemistry: 4 semesters, with lab, to include a year of inorganic and a year of organic chemistry.
- English: 2 semesters. These must be writing courses, not literature.
- Mathematics & Statistics: 1-2 semesters, often including calculus.
- Physics: 2 semesters, with lab.
- 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!
Tips for students interested in a career in the health professions:

You may major in any subject. Follow your interests, plan carefully to meet pre-health course requirements, and revise your plan as your needs, desires, and areas of expertise evolve.

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 committees review an applicant’s entire package, and while GPA and scores on standardized tests (GRE, MCAT, DAT, etc., depending on the program) are very important, so are your essays, clinical experience and extracurricular involvement.

Advanced Placement (AP) credit may enable you to exempt out of an introductory Mount Holyoke course (departmental requirements differ). But medical schools in particular usually do not accept AP or IB credit to fulfill a premedical requirement. Instead, consider meeting the requirements by taking more advanced courses.

Allow time in your schedule during junior or senior year for entrance exam preparation (i.e., MCAT, GRE), whether you prepare by self-study or take a commercial prep course. For the MCAT, take it in the spring of junior year if you plan to begin medical school the fall after graduating from MHC, or spring of senior year if you plan to begin 15 months after graduating from MHC.

Going abroad can be an incredibly rich experience, could complement your goals, and requires planning. Spending a year abroad often will delay applying to medical school, but many students do not begin med school right after they graduate, anyway, so you’d be in good company. Not ready for a full year abroad? How about a semester, J-term, or summer internship abroad? Visit the Center for Global Initiatives in Porter, or www.mtholyoke.edu/go/global

Keep your long-term goals in view but don’t deprive yourself of what you dream in the meantime, even if it isn’t on the “career requirements” list.

Students with interests in community health, in ethics, in the relationship between culture, society, and disease, in the mechanisms of disease transmission, or in biocultural approaches to health should consider the Five College Program in Culture, Health and Science, a certificate program designed to complement a traditional disciplinary major. Find out more at https://www.fivecolleges.edu/chs/

International students face a special set of challenges in gaining entrance to a U.S. medical school. If you are an international student, contact Pam Matheson to discuss your options.

Spring semester sophomores can sign up for a faculty pre-health advisor. Until then, attend one of the many workshops on health careers, or make an appointment with the Associate Director for Pre-Health Advising or a member of the Committee on the Health Professions (see list of members below).

The Committee on the Health Professions offers counseling on health-related careers. Please contact Pam Matheson or the committee chair with questions.

Jackie Collette (Clerk to the Committee)
Rachel Fink (Biological Sciences), Chair of the Committee
Darren Hamilton (Chemistry)
Jeffrey Knight (Biological Sciences)
Katie Lipp (Pre-Health Advisor)
Pamela Matheson (Director for Pre-Health Advising)
Stan Rachootin (Biological Sciences)
Jessica Sidman (Mathematics & Statistics)