



Considering a Clinical Health Care Career?

As you begin to think about your collegiate years and where you might wish to be following graduation, you may be considering a career as a health care practitioner. This typically will require application to a professional school following your baccalaureate experience. As you may already know (or will soon begin to hear through the grapevine), there are many personal and academic qualities and experiences that professional school admissions committees will be seeking in their applicants. Though there is no one “right way” to prepare for professional school, this guide is meant to assist you in being thoughtful about planning your experiences both inside and outside of the classroom.

Coursework:

Pre-health students can and do major in any academic discipline without adversely affecting their admission into a health professions school. However, there are some basic pre-requisite courses that must be completed prior to matriculation into your professional school of choice. Most commonly, this includes a full year of biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics (all with labs), as well as a year of calculus-based math and English. You may also wish to consider courses within the psychological and behavioral sciences as well. Various health professions programs may have additional requirements as well (for example, veterinary programs usually require animal behavior/biology), so we would encourage you to visit a website like www.ExploreHealthCareers.org to learn about additional requirements.

Please remember that when planning out your academic schedule, you should **always** consult with your Academic Adviser. Your UCIHP advisers can provide broad advice regarding what the health professions schools are seeking, but your Academic Adviser will know how to interpret any AP scores, placement results, and to be sure you are meeting the requirements for both your major and your degree. Please also consult the health professions section of the online College Catalog: <http://collegecatalog.uchicago.edu/thecollege/preparationforprofessionalstudy/#healthprofessions>.

Due to the length of the application process, applicants can begin applying to health professions schools beginning after their junior year for immediate matriculation post-college. However, many people also take time off after graduation to work, explore other areas of interest, etc. We have created a guide for your curriculum that is just one example—the timeline for when you take certain courses will depend on the requirements for your major and/or when you choose to apply to medical school.

Qualities Sought by Professional Schools

Though many applicants focus heavily on their GPA and test scores, admission to a professional school is **NOT** simply a numbers game. Schools also look for certain personal attributes in their applicants, such as those listed below:

Academic Achievement: Significant breadth in curricular choices • Strong performance in your courses • Pushing to higher-level courses as appropriate • Substantive letters of recommendation from carefully chosen instructors who know you well • Participation in research experience • Strong performance on standardized tests.

Emotional maturity, character, and integrity; sensitivity to and compassion for others: Volunteer activities • Depth and duration of involvement, not just a “checklist” approach • Demonstrated experiences of caring for others, including those unlike yourself • Ability to describe impact of your experiences on your personal growth and development.

Understanding of a Career in Health Care: Significant exposure to patients through in-depth volunteer work in a clinic/hospital, and/or as an EMT, and/or shadowing physicians, etc. ● Participation in programs that offer clinical preceptorships as part of their summer programs (for example, the AAMC's SMDEP summer research programs) ● Ability to speak knowledgeably about the challenges facing health professionals today ● Experience testing out any other career field of interest to be sure health care is the right fit.

Excellent Communication Skills: Writing compelling, genuine, focused application essays that will encourage the schools to interview you ● Performing well in an interview situation.

Leadership: Active involvement on campus and in your community ● Leadership roles in your organization (president, social chair, community service rep, etc.) ● Demonstrate that you have been “in-charge” of a specific event or organization ● Remember that leadership also includes being a role model—consider tutoring, mentoring, becoming an RA, etc.

So How Do I Begin to Tackle This?

First Year: First and foremost, focus on getting settled into life at U of C. Make friends, learn where your buildings are, and adjust to the quarter-based system of academics. Learn how to study—and if you find you aren't doing well, GET HELP immediately. It is much easier to get help as soon as you think you might need it than to wait until you have gotten yourself into a pretty deep hole. Once you feel pretty stable, start exploring RSOs (for a list of health-related RSOs, click here), sign up for the UCIHP email list and attend programs of interest, and begin thinking about summer plans. If you would like, make an appointment with a UCIHP adviser and we will help you think about the best plan for YOU.

Second Year: Continue to focus on academics. Seriously explore RSOs and begin to narrow down on 2-3 that you are most excited about. Remember that depth trumps breadth as far as professional school admissions are concerned so it's better to do 3 things really well than to be a “member” of 15 things. Look for ways to engage in research, and remember that all research “counts”—it doesn't HAVE to be basic science research. Have you gotten off campus yet? Start volunteering within the community, especially in ways that help you engage in the health care environment.

Third Year: Continue to focus on academics. Make sure your course selection is on track not only for admission purposes but also for degree/major requirements. Think about when you will take your professional school standardized exam (MCAT, GRE, DATs, etc.). Seek leadership positions within your RSO/Volunteer experiences of choice. Talk with your PI about an independent project within your research experience. If you are applying to matriculate immediately following college, the UCIHP application process starts in early November. Be sure to attend all mandatory meetings.

Fourth Year: Continue to focus on academics—they still count even if you are already in the application process! If you will be taking 1-2 gap years, talk with UCIHP about your timeline and what you should be doing and when. Begin the job search as appropriate. Continue involvement with your RSOs, volunteer experiences, and research. Consider writing an honors thesis if appropriate.

ALL ALONG THE WAY...Remember that UCIHP is here to help you! Please attend our events, email us with questions, and come in to see us throughout your 4 years in college!