

Researching Allopathic (M.D.) Schools/Programs: Factors to Consider

- **Start date of program** – most medical schools start in August. Applications are started 15 months before matriculation, so if a student wants to attend medical school in August after they graduate, they would need to start applying in May/June at the end of their junior year.
- **Program structure, curriculum and grading policy:**
 - Would you prefer a more traditional/didactic/lecture-based style of learning, or problem-based learning (PBL), where professors focus on teaching in the context of clinical cases? It's important to look into what style the medical school you choose to attend uses. All U.S. medical schools will provide you with a great medical education, so it's more about what style you would prefer.
 - Would you thrive on a traditional letter grading system, or would you prefer a pass/fail system?
- **Research or Clinical Focus:** Most medical schools will classify their program as an academic research center or as having a primary care focus. Thinking about your long-term goals will help you choose which focus fits you best.
- **Residency Programs:** Residency is required for medical school, and residencies are generally 3-7 years after medical school, depending on the specialty. Some specialties or sub-specialties may require or offer a fellowship after a residency.
- **In-state vs. out-of-state:** Most medical schools reserve a certain amount of spaces for in-state residents, so be sure to look into that before applying. Determining state residency can vary by state, but in many cases, your home state is typically defined by where you went to high school, or a state you have lived in for a year or more without taking classes. You should always look at all of the programs in your home state, and also programs out-of-state that accept a good number of non-residents. If a school only accepts 1 or 2 non-resident applicants each year, it might not be wise to apply to that program, or if you do, be sure to include many other programs that are in your home state or accept a reasonable percentage of non-residents. This information can be found on each school's website or on the MSAR: Medical School Admission Requirements at www.aamc.org.
- **International students:** Not all U.S. medical schools accept international applicants to their programs. Some medical schools accept a small number. Because of the small number accepted, it can be quite difficult for international students to gain admission to allopathic medical schools. Only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are eligible for financial aid. In most cases, international students who are accepted to medical school will need to secure private or institutional loans, or in some cases, must prove they have sufficient financial resources to pay for all four years of medical school.
- **Location/Culture:** Think about what setting you would like to live in. Is the medical school in an urban location? Suburban? Rural? Is keeping in touch with friends and family important to you? If so, consider applying to programs closer to home.
- **Class Size:** Medical school class sizes do vary, so it's important to think about whether you would enjoy a small group or a larger class.
- **Rotations and Internships:** The location of your school can sometimes determine the quality and depth of your clinical rotations and internships. It's important to think about your long-term goals and whether the school provides the depth and breadth of experiences that you would like to have before becoming a physician.
- **Extracurricular activities (service-learning, international service opportunities, etc.):** Look for other opportunities/factors that are important to you, such as the ability to participate in research, service opportunities, strong student organization, faith-based (or not), etc.
- **Costs and availability of financial aid:** Make sure you compare all costs, not just tuition. Additional costs would include cost of living/housing, laptop or other data device purchase, software purchase, additional lab fees, etc.
- **Dual degree options:** Many professional programs offer dual degree options which provide an opportunity to pursue an additional degree in business administration, public health, law, research (PhD), etc. Dual degree programs may require additional time to complete, but many medical schools work with these programs so they don't take longer.
- **Go with your "gut":** When you go to interview, take notice of the atmosphere. Do you feel like you could be at home there? Do the students seem happy? Are you comfortable? Deciding where to attend medical school often comes down to a gut feeling when you interview at the school.