

Advice for the First-Year Premedical Student at St. Olaf College

Ted Johnson (Chair, Health Professions Committee)

Jean Porterfield (Director, Biomedical Studies Program)

As an aspiring allopathic or osteopathic physician, you probably know that your four years here at St. Olaf will offer many opportunities for your growth and development in to someone who is academically and emotionally ready for medical school and beyond. However, it's easy to get caught up in the simple yet often daunting question:

“What do I need to do to get in to medical school?”

Of course the answer to this question is layered and complex! The condensed and simplified version is that you need to do well in the required courses, do well on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), demonstrate your knowledge of and fit for the medical profession, and convey your compassion for human care. As a first-year student, the most immediate of the above points is taking the required courses, so we will focus on that in this handout. As you adjust to college life, you can talk to your academic advisor, professors, and us about your individual path to becoming a physician.

What courses are required for admission to medical school? Each medical school differs somewhat in their exact list of courses required for admission, but it's convenient that St. Olaf's general education curriculum provides you with most of the non-science prerequisites on these lists! HOWEVER, where all medical schools are the SAME is in their requirement of an MCAT score. So, the question actually becomes...

What courses are required for successful completion of the MCAT? The current MCAT (in place since 1991) is based on material that you will learn in one year of general chemistry, one year of organic chemistry, one year of biology, and one year of physics. Additional course work in anatomy & physiology, genetics, and biochemistry is often helpful for students, but many students cover this material in their MCAT preparation materials. There will be a new version of the MCAT (expected to launch in 2015) that will include similar material to the current MCAT **plus** behavioral and social sciences principles, as well as a more intentional assessment of critical analysis and reasoning skills.

Which St. Olaf courses match best with the above MCAT requirements?

Required for current version of MCAT:

Year of general chemistry: CHE 125 and 126, or CHE 121, 123, and 126, or CH/BI 125 and 126

Year of organic chemistry: CHE 247 (lab CHE 253) and 248 (lab CHE 254)

Year of biology: BIO 125 (or CH/BI 127) and BIO 126

Year of physics: PHY 124 and 125

Optional for current version of MCAT:

Anatomy and Physiology: BIO 243 or 247 Genetics: BIO 233 Biochemistry: CHE 379

Probably required for new (likely 2015) version of MCAT:

Behavioral and social science: PSYCH 125 and a SOAN course (or social psychology course)

Critical analysis and reasoning: likely a STAT course (STAT 212)

How do I know which version of the MCAT I'll be taking? As a current (Fall 2011) first-year student, you might be taking the MCAT as early as Spring of 2014 (your junior year). However, many of you will wait until your senior year or later to take the MCAT, which means you will probably be taking the new version. This actually won't affect your St. Olaf courses as much as you might think, because most premedical students take a statistics course anyway, and the PSYCH 125 and SOAN courses count for St. Olaf general education requirements that you need anyway.

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How will I fit these premedical courses in with the rest of my academic plans? Because many of the premedical courses overlap with general education requirements and/or major requirements, it's less difficult than you might think. However, it's a good idea to talk with your academic advisor about your premedical courses in the context of your prospective major(s) and any potential study abroad plans.

So, what should I register for during my first year? In Fall, most first year science (including premedical) students are taking a first year course (either a REL or a WRI or a "conversations" course), a language course, and a math course. We highly recommend that the fourth course be a chemistry course (either CHE 121 or CHE 125 or CH/BI 125 depending on your chemistry placement results). Please note that if you are in the Great Conversations sequence, you cannot take CHE 121 (as it requires CHE 123 in the Interim), or the CH/BI 125 course (as it requires CH/BI 126 in the Interim); taking Biology 125/126 in your first year is a good choice in this case. Below are some **sample** schedules for the first year (with some plans for sophomore, junior and senior year included):

	FALL	INTERIM	SPRING
first year	CHE 125, REL 121, language, math	BIO 125	CHE 126, GE 111, language, BIO 126
sophomore	CHE 247/253, three other courses	any course	CHE 248/254, three other courses
junior	PHY 124, three other courses	any course	PHY 125, two or three other courses, perhaps taking the MCAT
senior	any courses	any course	any courses

	FALL	INTERIM	SPRING
first year	CHE 121, GE 111, language, math	CHE 123	CHE 126, REL 121, language, elective
sophomore	CHE 247/253, BIO 125, two other courses	any course	CHE 248/254, BIO 126, two other courses
junior	PHY 124, three other courses	any course	PHY 125, two or three other courses, perhaps taking the MCAT
senior	any courses	any course	any courses

	FALL	INTERIM	SPRING
first year	CH/BI 125, REL 121, language, math	CH/BI 126	CH/BI 127, GE 111, language, elective (could be BIO 126)
sophomore	CHE 247/253, BIO 126 if not taken, two or three other courses	any course	CHE 248/254, three other courses
junior	PHY 124, three other courses	any course	PHY 125, two or three other courses, perhaps taking the MCAT
senior	any courses	any course	any courses

Where can I get some more advice? Your academic advisor is the best place to start! Most science professors will be quite familiar with premedical planning. If your advisor is not as familiar, share this handout and discuss it together. The web sites listed below are just a few of many great ones, but we chose them because they may be best for the first-year student. For additional help, you are welcome to talk with one of us (email Ted Johnson at johnsont@stolaf.edu, or email Jean Porterfield at porterfi@stolaf.edu).

Ted Johnson has written an advising manual available as a PDF on the St. Olaf Health Professions Committee page: <http://www.stolaf.edu/services/hpc/>

You should know about St. Olaf's Center for Experiential Learning: <http://www.stolaf.edu/services/cel/>

"Explore Health Careers" is a great starting point for career research: <http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/home>

The American Association of Medical Colleges has a resource: <https://www.aamc.org/students/>

If you are you curious about the new (2015) MCAT: <https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/mr5/>