

Getting into Medical School

A perspective from the Admissions Office

Rodrigo Gutierrez
Admissions
UC San Diego School of Medicine

Topics/Agenda

- ◆ What is the goal?
 - ◆ What are medical schools looking for?
 - ◆ Application process
 - ◆ Advising/addressing myths
 - ◆ Q&A
-

What is the goal?

- ◆ The goal is not just to get into medical school, but to start a career as a physician.
- ◆ Are you sure this is what you want?
 - How do you know?
 - “Well, I’m good at science..guess I’ll be a doctor”
- ◆ Or is it what you are expected to do?
 - Peer pressure, family pressures
- ◆ Medicine is a wonderful career, but it entails sacrifice and ongoing dedication to service.

A career as a physician

- ◆ The goal is not just to get into medical school, but to start a career as a physician.
- ◆ 4 years of medical school
- ◆ At least 3 years (and as many as 7 years) of internship/residency (paid, though not well)
- ◆ The 80-hour work week
- ◆ Licensure and practice
- ◆ \$\$\$\$

Admission to Medical School

- ◆ In most basic terms, medical schools are looking for evidence that you will become a good doctor
 - Excellent academic qualifications (GPA/MCAT)
 - Support of your faculty (Letters)
 - Extracurricular creative and scholarly activities
 - Meaningful exposure to medical profession (research, clinical volunteering, clinical “shadowing”)
 - Evidence of a commitment to service (broad definition)
 - Other (leadership, artistic endeavors, athletics, teaching)

Admissions

- ◆ Each school has its own approach, but many aspects are quite similar
- ◆ Large numbers of applicants (the last 4 years have averaged ~9,000 per year)
- ◆ For UCSD
 - Secondary applications around (~6000)
 - Interviews ~ 900 in 2023
 - Class of 140 (admit around 280)

Primary application (AMCAS)

- ◆ Pay attention to deadlines!
- ◆ Ensure accurate contact information (school queries)
- ◆ MCAT tests? Is it needed at all?

YES

- ◆ Wait for scores in August/September/October or submit without?
- ◆ Secondary applications are automatic for students with competitive grades/MCAT scores. ALL remaining applications are reviewed and some additional are granted secondary apps after careful review

Secondary application

- ◆ Details vary by school, but UCSD's has
 - Autobiographical sketch
 - Reformatted extracurricular activities
 - Family background information
 - Letters of recommendation
 - ◆ A minimum of three letters are required from individuals who can provide a well considered evaluation of your qualifications for the medical profession.
 - ◆ No requirements such as "Two science, one non-science" and in fact a letter that says little more than how well you did in professor's class is not new info to us
 - ◆ It is helpful if the letter writers know you well (personal touch more important than a "big name")

Secondary review

- ◆ Conducted by a subgroup of our admissions committee
- ◆ Very time-consuming – at peak time, can be a 4+ month wait for review.
- ◆ Review of LORs, activities, autobiographical sketch
- ◆ This determines whether you receive an interview
- ◆ Detail provided helps us give you credit for what you have done. Don't be humble!

Interview Day

- ◆ Multiple Mini Interview Format
- ◆ All Virtual (no in person)
- ◆ 8 “scenarios” for applicants to address
- ◆ Do you get nervous? Prepare!
Practice! Search for sample questions!

Admissions myths

◆ UCSD SOM doesn't admit students from my school!

- FACT: It's difficult, yes, but it's difficult everywhere. Applicants from UCSD in recent years have received offers at a rate comparable to undergraduate campuses in California
 - ❖ UCLA, UCSD, UC Berkeley, Stanford usually have the highest percentage of successful applicants, but even then these numbers are low. Usually around 4 - 5% of applicants from these schools are offered acceptance. This is higher than the overall success rate of ~3%
 - ❖ But, this does not mean there is a bias toward UCSD. You have to put in the work. The available resources and large pre-med community can be a huge help
 - ❖ There is definitely not a bias against UCSD
 - ❖ That low figure is not indicative of overall figures. UCSD Career Services has stats on overall success rate of UCSD students applying to medical school.

Admissions myths

- ◆ UCSD SOM is a “basic science” school and you have to be a life science major to be accepted
 - FACT: UCSD is ranked highly nationwide in research, AND in primary care
 - FACT: We consider and accept students from all undergraduate majors

Admissions myths

- ◆ UCSD SOM is a “basic science” school and you have to be a life science major to be accepted
 - Majority of incoming class will be biology or chemistry but this is a reflection of the applicant pool, not a strict preference
 - Recently matriculated students include students with majors in Management Science, Political Economy, Naval Architecture, Medieval Studies, Spanish, Linguistics, Philosophy, South Asian Studies, English, History, Religion, Music, Exercise Science, etc.

Admissions myths

- ◆ There is a “checklist” for a successful applicant, with regards to extracurricular activities
 - FACT: The admissions committee has hundreds of years of combined experience...they have seen a lot of applications! They are adept at distinguishing trivial volunteer experiences from those conducted in depth.
 - They are looking for applicants that have explored a career in medicine. We don't want students to discover in 3rd year of medical school that they don't want this career.
 - In depth experiences are generally preferred, as opposed to dozens of smaller experiences
 - ◆ More clearly defined as an applicant
 - ◆ More likely to achieve leadership positions
 - ◆ More likely to get stronger letters of recommendation

Admissions myths

- ◆ There is a “checklist” for successful applicant, with regards to extracurricular activities
 - Additional thoughts...
 - If it ever feels like a constant struggle to get motivated to do a chosen activity, is this the right activity for you?
 - In an certain sense, some of the strongest applicants are applicants that look like they are not TRYING to get into medical school – they are doing things out of a passion for doing them
 - As a pre-med, ask yourself what kind of career you see yourself having (physician-scientist doing research? Primary care/continuity of care/building relationships? Returning to your hometown? Outreach to underserved communities? Surgery? Emergency Medicine? Oncology?) Seek out those opportunities, take the initiative to “network” and to do things yourself.

Admissions myths

- ◆ There is a “checklist” for a successful applicant, with regards to extracurricular activities
 - We do not outline for applicants why they did or did not get to a certain step in our process because we want to maintain a system of evaluation in which an applicant’s accomplishments are self-generated and inherent to them, as opposed to being reactive to the process of applying to medical school itself.
 - The bottom line: Do what you like to do, not what you think you **HAVE TO** do (but yes, do **SOMETHING**).

Admissions myths

- ◆ “If my grades are weak, I can compensate with my MCAT scores”
 - What do you mean by “weak” grades?
 - Not strictly defined, but a cumulative GPA below 3.1 is typically not considered.

Admissions myths

- ◆ “If my grades are weak, I can compensate with my MCAT scores”
 - Typically not at UCSD...and probably not anywhere
 - A career in medicine is all about continuing education, hard work, diligence, responsibility
 - Caveat: sometimes other factors have prevented good academic performance
 - Caveat: an “upward trend” in GPA is something that is noticed by the admissions committee

Admissions myths

- ◆ UCSD SOM is only interested in students progressing directly to medical school from college
 - Mean age of 2023 entering class is 25: range is 21-40.
 - 23 students were age 27 or older.
 - 17 students entering with advanced degrees, many others have taken 1-2 years to gain work experience.
 - 18 years ago, over 50% the incoming class was coming directly from undergrad to SOM (no "gap year")
 - In the 2023 entering class, only 6%!
 - This 6% figure is probably impacted by COVID making it harder to gain pre-med experiences, but even so, in recent years, this numbers has been trending much lower...20-25%
 - Takeaways: GPA/MCAT not the only factors. Experiences matter!

What is the goal?

- ◆ Sometimes we can all get distracted by the process, admissions, medical school, residency training
- ◆ The goal is to have a career as a physician
- ◆ It is, for many, a wonderful career
- ◆ It is not for everyone

Health care professions

- ◆ M.D. programs
- ◆ Dentistry
- ◆ Veterinary medicine
- ◆ RN/NP/PA/PT
- ◆ Podiatry
- ◆ Optometry
- ◆ Clinical Psychology
- ◆ Pharmacy



QUESTIONS?