**Holli**:

If you have chosen to go into the field of medicine I know that your passion must consume you. I know this because choosing such a demanding job is not something just anyone can do. I could preach to you in this paragraph about how you need to volunteer, shadow, earn leadership positions, and keep your grades up but these are things I know every single advisor has already told you. The main advice I have for you guys is to hold onto your passion. There will be days when you want to give up or feel like you just aren’t smart enough to be a doctor. This happens to everyone. What separates those who become physicians from those who don’t is the perseverance to get back up after you fall. Something I like to do when I’m feeling low is to think about how I will feel in the moment I save a life. Because as a doctor that’s what you get to do someday...how awesome is that? For most of us the journey to becoming a physician will be the most challenging event of our lives. However, I’m here to remind you it will be worth it. So if you’re reading this: you will dissect cadavers one day, you will master giving a physician exam one day, and you will be a healer one day. Good luck!

**Jackie**:

The three of us could fill a book with advice for y’all but we have a limited number of pages. I could tell you to volunteer, shadow, run for leadership positions, live a life, etcetera, but you’ve heard it before. So I’m going to give you some detailed advice.

Finding shadowing opportunities is hard, especially if you don’t already have a network of contacts to draw on. Don’t let that stop you. Ask our speakers if you can shadow them. Send out physical mail if need be. Physical letters actually work if you send out enough of them. Pull up your local hospitals website and find the directory page. Choose several fields you’re interested in and send a letter to the office of every doctor on the list. It only takes one yes. Once you form a relationship with one doctor, they can help you find more.

If you’re a freshman or a sophomore, I urge you to look up SHPEP. It’s an amazing PAID internship where you learn from professors and doctors at a medical school, shadow and attend workshops. I was lucky enough to get in my freshman year and can’t praise the program enough.

Never forget your passion. Being pre-med is difficult; being a medical student even more overwhelming. It’s your passion that give you the strength and willpower to manage it. My suggestion is this: write down memorable moments from when you shadowed or practiced hands-on skills. Make it easier so that when you want to break down and cry, you can smile instead. There was, or will come, a harps-strumming,angels-singing, this-is-exactly-where-I’m-supposed-to-be moment. The memory of it, and the desire to feel that way again, can help you through anything that comes your way.

Never forget your non-medical passion. Burnout is real and it is okay to take time for yourself. Mental health days will help you recover and bounce back quicker. It’s okay to sit in your PJs, eat ice cream, and ignore the giant stack of textbooks every once in a while. It’s okay (and wonderful), to go out and do something you love. It’ll help you stay sane while impressing medical schools. They want a person, not a just a student.

Finally, don’t rush things. You will become an amazing physician. You will be a compassionate, skilled cornerstone of your community and do amazing things. So enjoy this hectic, stressful, glorious journey. Time flies by and you’re only going to be an undergraduate at A&M once. Have fun, enjoy yourself, because one day you’ll be looking back on this time fondly.

**Shaelynn**:

Truthfully, Holli and Jackie have offered some of the best advice, and tough lessons that I’ve had to learn through this path to medical school. If we had infinite space I would reiterate all of it, because it is so, so important. Unfortunately, that isn’t the case, so I’ll share some other lessons I’ve learned along the way.

IT IS OKAY FOR THINGS NOT TO GO ACCORDING TO PLAN. I promise. I find that pre-meds, we have a tendency to set a goal and a life plan, and expect things to work out in that exact way. Spoiler alert, it rarely happens that way. Life has a funny way of throwing you curveballs that cause you to have to reevaluate your “master plan” and learning to go with the flow will help you in the long run. If someone had told me freshman year that I would be taking a gap year to complete a Master’s in Medical Sciences, instead of going directly into medical school, I would have told them they were wrong. Yet here I am, ready to move and begin a new chapter in my life before I get to the really big one. It took some time, but I’m okay with it. Not everyone’s journey is the same, so don’t compare them.

Additionally, it is so easy to get caught up in having to do a certain number of things, to be “the perfect medical school applicant.” While these are important, you can find your passion outside of medicine and continue to pursue that as well. You may actually gain valuable experience from it, if you play team sports, you learn teamwork and maybe even some leadership skills, both of which are valuable as a physician. A big example I use is research. Many of us feel as though research is required to get into medical school, while it can help boost your application, it isn’t necessary. I recommend that you at least try it for a semester, if you don’t feel passionate about it, then it’s okay to not do it. Chances are, what you have listed on your resume, will be discussed in an interview and it will be obvious if you did not enjoy it. Otherwise, life is short, so do things that make you happy as well! Find creative ways to integrate what you care about into aspects that are more rigidily required for applications, so if you love to read, try reading to children in an after school program, you’re giving back and inspiring others with your passion!

Lastly, this is a major cliche, but be yourself!! It is so easy to get caught up in being the carbon copy of someone else, especially as a pre-med, since we’re all trying to do the same things to get to the same place. Stay genuine, like Jackie said, med schools want a person!

TL;DR, go with the flow, things likely won’t go exactly as planned, keep up with your passions, be uniquely you!

Best of luck, this journey is long and hard, but so rewarding!! I believe in all of you.

**Juzar:**

First few years:

When you first come to college, it can be difficult to adjust to a new environment, but you have to be able to adapt and focus on your coursework in order to get the best grades possible. For me, when I came to A&M, I lacked a proper study habit and discipline, but once I was able to figure out what strategies worked for me, I was better prepared for my classes going forward. One of the best advice I can give you is to develop a good study habit during your first semester of college so that you have a good foundation for the future.  Once you got this down, focus on getting good grades because GPA and MCAT scores are the most important factors.

Once you learn how to manage your time, be sure to start shadowing different doctors so you know that medicine is truly your career choice. I found it handy to keep a notebook in which I wrote down something interesting that I learned or saw each day I shadowed. This later allowed me to create a detailed and a vivid personal statement for medical school instead of relying on my memory.

Aside from gaining relevant medical experiences, try to join or start a non-clinical organization. Use this as a chance to pursue some of your hobbies in your free time. Whether playing competitive intramurals or rock climbing, this definitely shows medical schools that you do something with your free time.

MCAT**:**

I took the MCAT twice before I got a satisfying score so it is okay if you don’t do well the first time around. The first time I took the MCAT, I took a prep course to help me aide for the test. However, I ended up not performing well on the test due to my own setbacks when studying. The second time I took the test, I used a 10-week home study schedule from examkrackers to guide my studies. This worked a lot better in my opinion because I was able to really focus on my weaknesses.

Applying**:**

Once you are ready to apply to medical school, make sure you keep in touch with OPSA because they are professionals at this. Be familiar with the TMDSAS application if you would like to apply to Texas schools, AMCAS for out of state MD schools and AACOMAS for out of state DO schools. Fill out the application as thoroughly as you can because this gives the school the first impression of who you are. If you apply out of state, be sure to research the schools before you apply because different schools have slightly different requirements for admission. When writing your essays, be sure to really bring out your passion for medicine and what experiences that you have had makes you a unique applicant. The essays in conjunction with your GPA and MCAT scores will help get you an interview. When you start interviewing at schools, be sure to be up to date on what that school has been doing in terms of research, residency placement, and if the curriculum fits your learning style. You will always get asked the question about why you want to be a doctor so make sure you prepare sufficiently enough for these questions. OPSA interview workshops provides a great collection of the most commonly used interview questions and I mainly used those to prepare. Also, be aware of the current laws regarding medicine as you may be asked about that as well. Above all, remember to be yourself as the admissions committee just want to know if you are a good fit for the school.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [Juzar94@tamu.edu](mailto:Juzar94@tamu.edu)

**Will:**

Pre-application years:

Push yourself to be the best studying, researching, shadowing, volunteering pre-med you can be, but, like others have said, do something with a passion you have. I love these examples: did you play basketball in high school? Volunteer coach a local youth basketball team. Do you love poetry? Find a way to share your passion with people (reading to children in hospitals, the elderly who may enjoy the socialization). Fill up your application checklist but do it in your own way. Make your application not just a good application, but a great representation of who you are. Your passions and humanity will make you a better interviewee and a better caregiver.

MCAT/Application time**:**

Give the MCAT everything you have and remember that people do well on this test all the time - you can too. Find a way to take a prep class and stick to it religiously. If you are a BIMS major I highly recommend finishing Biochemistry II and taking Histology (VTPB 443) with Dr. Larry Johnson. Histology takes some work but you will be very well prepared for the Biology and Biochemistry section.

Make your application essays genuine. Use the essays to show off your achievements, but put your personality into the text.

Interview time:

When you visit schools, you will have your own personal list of priorities for evaluating them. I noticed that many people on the interview trail were extremely focused on the pre-clinical classwork years. Yes, these are important years and yes, Step I will be hugely important, but make sure to pay attention to the hospitals. Can you see yourself in this building for 12 hours a day on surgery rotation? Don’t get carried away with the beautiful private hospital - the public hospital is likely where you will spend your time and be most involved.

As for the interview itself, confidence is everything. Nobody expects you to know everything, but know why you want to be a doctor, why you belong in that school, and be able to say exactly what your plans and goals are. Have goals and plans to share, and not just what field and what specialty (I made this mistake in one interview). Always remember why you want to do medicine, which is people. Our fellow men and women are the most important things in life and in the medical profession. Talk about how you will care for people, and what impact you plan to leave on your community (locally, regionally, globally). Most importantly, try to make a connection with your interviewer.

Decision time:

If you are choosing between multiple schools and know what specialty you want to go for, use that as a deciding factor. Which school has the best surgery/pediatric/OB/GYN residency? On your rotations you will likely be learning from and working with those residents and attendings, not to mention asking the faculty for LORs for your own residency application later.

**Mackenzie:**

General advice**:**

*Protect your GPA as best you can.* If I had to pick one single piece of advice to give any pre-med it would be to understand the importance of a competitive GPA.

* If you didn’t have a great freshman/sophomore year, or had a random bad semester, it most definitely does not mean you are not meant to be a doctor. If anything, use it as an opportunity to show how you handle setbacks and come back stronger, a quality that will serve you well as a physician. Know that your grades are telling the story of your development as a student, and work as hard as you can each semester to gradually write that story so it communicates your dedication to becoming a doctor.

*Remember that everyone’s journey to med school is different. Everyone* has places and times in their pre-med years that are messy and far from perfect, and that’s okay. You are going to be a great doctor not in spite of those experiences but because of them.

* Know that there is a seat in a medical school class that is waiting for you. Only you can fill it, and while it may not be at the exact school or in the application year that you planned, it is out there. I always told myself that I would end up in medical school when/where I was supposed to so that one day I’ll end up in the right place at the right time to treat the patients that need me.

*Ask lots of questions.* Ask doctors/professors/advisors/medical students/people further along in the application process/etc whenever you have a question or need advice. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Make sure you are seeking out mentors who have been where you are and learn from their mistakes.

Essays**:**

When you are writing your personal statement/application essays, keep the perspective of a future patient in mind as you write. If a patient were reading your essay would they think “I want this person to be my doctor”? Use your experiences to show how you have the qualities that patients look for in a doctor.

My MCAT Study Schedule**:**

I took a Kaplan prep class (live online) that lasted from May to August the summer between my sophomore and junior year. Then I repeated the class for free (all you have to do is call and ask to repeat your class and they will reset it for you) during the fall semester of junior year, but really focused on my weak areas instead of completing every single module in the course. Then I studied a lot during the winter break and took the MCAT in January. I really liked this study schedule, and if you have any questions about MCAT prep feel free to ask me anytime.

* Take as many practice tests as possible- I took the MCAT twice and really focusing on practice tests is a big reason I was able to raise my score the second time.
* Keep a “Lessons Learned” notebook. When you are reviewing practice tests, concisely write down every concept that you got wrong in the notebook. Read through the notebook once a day to refresh those topics.
* The MCAT is hard but not by any means impossible. It all comes down to time spent practicing and testing yourself on the topics. Concept review is great, but you will really see improvement by testing yourself through practice tests or study groups.

Interviewing**:**

* Brainstorm a list of questions beforehand- have questions for your interviewers, admissions officers, and current students.
* Know *why*- why medicine, why that school, why that location, etc and be prepared to answer those questions.
* Be completely yourself and be grateful for the opportunity. Interviewers will be able to see your authenticity and gratitude.

If you ever need someone to talk to or discuss essay prompts/ideas with, or if you have any questions at all (about applying, the MCAT, classes, or just being pre-med in general) please don’t hesitate to call or email me anytime! ([mackenhart@gmail.com](mailto:mackenhart@gmail.com))

**Kris:**

My strongest piece of advice to everyone, and it seems obvious, is to put your GPA first and foremost. It is important to have all the other attributes that will help you become a well rounded applicant. But your grades and MCAT score are most valuable. Freshmen, it is important to have a strong first year and get your GPA high. It is tough to change it once you get to your junior/senior year. Even though you may struggle the first semester or the first year in college, it’s good to keep persevering because it looks good to have an upward trend.

Join other organizations that you share interests with or you would love to be apart of. Yes, the Pre-Med society looks good on applications and provides you with a lot of opportunities but it also looks good to have unique extracurricular activities.