



# Choosing a Professional School

*Where to Apply and Where to Matriculate*

There are two different stages in the process of picking out medical schools. First, where to apply? For many students the answer is everywhere. This is a struggle however because you should only be applying to schools that you would be willing to attend and the application process is very expensive and time consuming. You need to be efficient and thoughtful about the choices you make. The second stage comes once you have notification of acceptance from several schools. Which one to pick? This is the time to dig a little bit deeper and determine which schools truly fits your goals best!

Here are some resources that will help you in your exploration:

- I. Allopathic Medicine:
  - a. Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR)
    - i. Available for purchase at [www.aamc.org](http://www.aamc.org)
- II. Osteopathic Medicine:
  - a. Osteopathic Medical College Information Book
    - i. Available for purchase or free download at [www.aacom.org](http://www.aacom.org)
- III. Dental
  - a. ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools
    - i. Available for purchase at [www.adea.org](http://www.adea.org)
- IV. Optometry
  - a. Schools & Colleges of Optometry Admissions Requirements
    - i. Available for free download at [www.opted.org](http://www.opted.org)
- V. Pharmacy
  - a. Pharmacy School Admission Requirements
    - i. Available for purchase or free download at [www.aacp.org](http://www.aacp.org)

## Where to Apply: Items to Consider when Choosing Schools

### *State Residency*

Your best chance of acceptance lies within the state in which you hold residency. For the purposes of schooling, you can only be a resident of one state. In looking at out-of-state schools, be sure to pay close attention to the number of students accepted from within the state. By and large, private schools do not favor students from within a particular state, but there are exceptions to this rule.

### *Location*

Not only is residency an issue, you should also be looking at schools for their geographic location and their location within a community or institution. For example you may have family or friends that you want to stay within easy travel distance from. Also some programs are housed in very urban or rural areas, and possibly not even on the campus of their home school.

### *Mission/Focus*

A school's mission and focus can provide a good insight into the motivation behind the program. Some schools emphasize on primary care; if you are interested in research this may not be the setting you are looking for.

### *Financial Support*

While you want to find a school that has the right fit, you may also need to be considering the financial ramifications behind these decisions. How much is tuition for in state vs. out of state, public vs. private?

### *Grading System*

There are two systems for grading at the professional school level: graded or pass/no pass. The pass/no pass system allows for students to work together in a very collegial manner, sharing information and studying. Many of the professional schools work within this model, while some are still using a graded system, one that often breeds a more competitive environment. Everyone works in different ways and diverse environments allow you to find the system where you will be able to thrive.

### **Where to Matriculate: Items to Consider when Choosing the School**

Now that you have applied, interviewed and received acceptance offers, the big decision has arrived: where will you go? This is the second phase in process of choosing, during which the following elements are useful in finding the best fit for you. A lot this information can be found and observed during the interview, but if you have questions, do not be afraid to contact the schools again.

### *Curriculum*

Most programs have a thematic purpose to their goals. Each one focuses on different elements in the fields of health. You will want make sure that the theme fits with your goals whether they be general, specific or research oriented. You should also be investigating the layout of the program: how many credits per semester, format of the classes, patient contact, etc.

### *Facilities*

Most likely, at an interview you will have a chance to tour the facilities. This will give you the chance to look at the facilities. How up to date is the technology and what will you be able to use and learn on? Find out the student to cadaver ratio to assess the availability of individualized study. It is also important to know where your rotations will be taking place and how this may affect you in terms of transportation and housing.

### *Student Body*

While every cohort of students is different, you will want to see if you have similar passions, interests and goals to the students attending a particular medical school. Not only will you be taking courses with these students, they will also be your colleagues and professional connections in the field of medicine.

### *Interdisciplinary/Extracurricular Activities*

If you are the type of student who is very involved, you may be interested in continuing to be so, even in medical school. Some medical schools offer curriculums that have time for extracurricular activities built, others will not.

### *Financial Aid*

Not only does the cost of tuition come in to play at the beginning, it becomes often more important when deciding which school is right for you. Weigh your options in financial aid, including are you being offered scholarships or grants and how much would you be taking out in loans. While financing your education should not be the ultimate decision, it is a very important factor.

### *Support and Administrative Services*

Building a support system is always essential and often priceless. It is important to know how accessible the faculty and administration are. Some medical schools even have mentoring programs set up to make sure you get the support you need.

*NOTE: While this handout was created to demystify the application process for preprofessional students, it does not alleviate the need to meet with advisors.*

This list is based upon a presentation given by Ms. Sylvia Robertson, Dean of Admissions, University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, in 1997.