



MEDSCHOOLCOACH
helping you achieve your medical school dreams



SOPHOMORE YEAR

COLLEGE PLANNING GUIDE FOR PRE-MEDS



medschoolcoach.com

CONGRATULATIONS ON ENTERING YOUR SECOND YEAR OF COLLEGE!

Say goodbye to being the new face on campus. As a sophomore, you've completed your first year, transitioned to college, and are now making significant strides in becoming a physician. You are one year closer to reaching your ultimate goal. You should be proud of every accomplishment.

Sophomore year is important time to prepare yourself to become a doctor. This is the year that you should hone your study skills, search for leadership opportunities, and develop meaningful relationships both professionally and socially.

With less than half of applicants getting admitted to medical school, being an average premed student won't cut it. Yet, more than 90% of students working with MedSchoolCoach get accepted. The need to plan and put together an exceptional application must continue now.

Your MedSchoolCoach Physician Advisor and you will work together to plan a fun and fulfilling sophomore year of college. Let us help guide you as you progress along your path.



Sahil Mehta MD

Founder, MedSchoolCoach

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Did you know?

For the entering medical school class of 2020-2021, there were 53,030 medical school applicants with 22,239 applicants matriculated – this converts to a 42% acceptance rate.

And of those accepted into medical school, about 83% graduate. You're one step closer!

Creating Your Personal Brand

One of the most important things you must do to best position yourself for medical school is to brand yourself. You must define and present yourself as uniquely qualified as a future medical school applicant and physician.

Strategically Pick Your Experiences

Figuring out your brand early on enables you to strategically determine extracurriculars and even academics you wish to participate in. For instance, if your brand is a passion for children, you may want to explore the possibility of shadowing or scribing with a pediatrician, tutoring underprivileged elementary school students and doing research in ADHD. Alternatively, if you decide you are passionate about caring for communities, you may want to consider majoring in public health and participating in extracurriculars that are community focused.

Later, when you are applying to medical school, your brand will directly impact your personal statement, secondary essays, and interviews.

Most pre-meds don't realize they need to brand themselves. Yet, branding is the first and most fundamental step in setting yourself apart from the competition. Therefore, it must begin as soon as possible during college. By the time you're already applying to medical school, it may be too late.

To determine your personal brand, first think granularly about why you're passionate about becoming a physician. And if possible, envision yourself practicing as one.

- Q. Are you passionate about cardiovascular research?**
- Q. Do you want to care for a geriatric population?**
- Q. Will you utilize a public health approach with your future patients?**



Personal branding comes in four primary forms:

1. **Area of Interest** – The most common form of branding is based on your area of interest, such as neurology or surgery. But you don't have to know your specialty to have a brand. Identify what else are you interested passionately about.
2. **Approach to Medicine** – Identify an approach to medicine you're interested in, such as preventive care or public health.
3. **Demographics** – Identify a demographic you're interested in, such as underserved communities, or those with physical disabilities.
4. **Specific Medical Issues** – Identify a medical issue you're interested in, such as medical innovation or cancer treatment.

Ideally, your personal brand will consist of a unique combination of these variables that ties back to your passions, experiences, and interests.

Did you know?

There are many ways to differentiate yourself, but gender may not be one of them. Beginning in 2019, females (50.5%) and males (49.5%) accounted for almost the exact same percentage of medical school students.



Conquoring Your Prerequisite Courses

One important area to continue focusing on during your sophomore year is your medical school prerequisite courses. These courses should ideally be completed before you apply to medical school, and before you take your MCAT – which is usually during the spring of your junior year.

Hopefully you started completing these courses during your freshman year. If not, you still have ample time with proper preparation.

Use the chart below to mark course requirements that you have completed.

Course Requirement Checklist

Course	1st Semester	2nd Semester
General Biology, with lab		
General Chemistry, with lab		
Organic Chemistry, with lab		
Physics, with lab		
English		
Math, including calculus		
Biochemistry – usually only need 1 semester		
Statistics – usually only need 1 semester		
Sociology – usually only need 1 semester		
Psychology – usually only need 1 semester		

Once you know what prerequisites remain, plan your sophomore year schedule. With freshman year behind you, consider taking more courses and a higher credit load this year.

Remember: Prioritize doing well in all your courses. Your Total GPA and Science GPA are both significant factors in the evaluation of your application to medical school.

Many students make the mistake of not taking all their courses seriously or overloading their course schedule. Then their grades suffer. Instead, consider your time commitments and maintain an appropriate balance so that your academic record is exceptional. Average pre-med grades will not get you accepted into medical school. Focus.

After reviewing your school's course catalog, fill in the courses you plan to take sophomore year. Include medical school prerequisite courses, those needed to fulfill your degree, and any required classes.

FALL SEMESTER

Course Title	Number of Units	Class Schedule

SPRING SEMESTER

Course Title	Number of Units	Class Schedule

**SUMMER SEMESTER OR
QUARTER (IF APPLICABLE)**

Course Title	Number of Units	Class Schedule

Enhancing Your Extracurricular Activities

There are core extracurricular activities that you need to be a competitive medical school applicant. These experiences provide learning, and also set you apart when applying to medical school:

- **Clinical Experience**
- **Research**
- **Physician Shadowing**
- **Community Service**
- **Leadership**

Since you are already a quarter of the way through college, hopefully you have had a chance to start some of these activities, or at least heavily researched which suit you best. The best experiences are the ones that you are passionate about.

If you started an activity during your freshman year, and you enjoy it, continue it throughout your sophomore year and beyond. For these ongoing activities, identify ways to enhance or increase your position. For instance, if you have been volunteering at a clinic for several months, perhaps you can enhance your position by being a volunteer coordinator or working on various projects within the organization. Or if you have been a member of a specific club, consider running for an elected position such as treasurer, secretary, vice-president or even president.

Remember to achieve results. Many students forget about this importance of this. Medical schools want to see evidence that you can achieve meaningful results. For instance, if you have overseen fundraising for a club, keep track of how much you were able to raise, what the increase was versus prior year, and what you did to raise that additional amount. If you were involved with initiative that distributed winter clothing to those in need, keep track of how many individuals your initiative helped.

Showing that you have dedication, initiative, and can achieve results not only impresses medical schools, but also helps you develop important skills needed to become an effective physician.

Now let's go through each of the extracurricular activities and record the progress you have made since starting college!

Clinical Experience

Clinical experiences allow you to interact directly with patients. They can include, but are not limited to scribing, EMT, clinical research, or hospital volunteering. Track what clinical experiences you've had so far.

Experiences to Date:

Activities Completed	Number of Hours

Think about which activities have been the most valuable to you and describe them. This way, when it is time for you to discuss these experiences in your application essays and during interviews, you can refer back to your notes.

Extracurricular Experiences:

Describe extracurriculars you would like to focus on the future.

Extracurricular Focus:

Research

The best research activities include designing and executing your own project, presenting a poster, and getting published. While many students do not have research experience this in-depth, most pre-meds will do basic science research, usually exploring some biological or chemical process.

Sometimes research opportunities don't surface until later in your second year, or even third year, of college. If you haven't found a position yet, use some of the tips below to help gain experiences:

- **Engage** – Talk to various science professors during their office hours. Ask them about their ongoing projects and see if they need any volunteers.
- **Network** – Seek out your pre-med friends and inquire if they have research positions. See if you can speak to the professors about these.
- **Investigate** – Check out your pre-health club. Often these clubs can link you to professors that welcome students in their lab.
- **Inquire** – Reach out to local hospitals to inquire about positions. Teaching hospitals which are university-affiliated can be a great place to start. Research a particular department online and then email the department chair or secretary. For example, contact the chair of the internal medicine department to see if they have any volunteer research positions available.

Below, record research leads you have contacted, what the opportunity is, and your last interaction. Contact many leads. Play the percentages, as not everybody will get back to you or have an available opportunity. Be persistent with following up.

Research Opportunities:

Name & Contact Info	Opportunity Details	Status of Last Follow-Up

Physician Shadowing

Shadowing involves a student visiting a physician's practice and observing their day-to-day activities. This can be done in an outpatient clinic, such as an office, or an inpatient setting, such as a hospital. Shadowing can be done quickly within a tight timeline or accumulated gradually over time.

During times like these, finding in-person opportunities can be challenging. In those instances, digital shadowing opportunities can be beneficial. While not a replacement for an in-person experience, the [MedSchoolCoach Virtual Clinical Education](#) provides students an opportunity to shadow dozens of real physicians online.

Students should utilize every resource available to find shadowing opportunities, from family and friends to professors and colleagues. These experiences provide insight into what can be expected across various medical specialties, and provides on-site, first-hand learning.

Track what shadowing experiences you've had so far.

Shadowing Experiences:

Physician Name	Specialty	Number of Hours



Community Service

Physicians sacrifice many aspects of their personal life to serve and care for patients. Community service involves working with those less privileged or investing time or skills to help others in a meaningful way. There are many community service activities that you can participate in, and they don't necessarily have to be related to medicine. Here are some possible community service opportunities to consider:

- **Volunteering at a homeless shelter or food bank**
- **Volunteer tutoring**
- **Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentor**
- **Free medical clinic volunteer**
- **Building for Habitat for Humanity**
- **Nursing home companion**

Use the chart below to track your community service experiences you've participated in.

Community Service Opportunities

Organization	Number of Hours

INSIDER TIP:

"Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world."

- Howard Zinn

Leadership

A physician is often regarded as the leader of the medical team. They frequently lead groups of other professionals to care for a patient or coordinate their care. There are several qualities required to be a successful leader, including having integrity, being hard-working, and having the ability to communicate effectively and delegate tasks. The best way to show medical schools that you have these characteristics is to demonstrate them through experiences.

Now that you have your feet wet in some activities, think about leadership positions you are most interested in then demonstrate your leadership potential.

- Q. Are there leadership positions in your current extracurricular activities?**
- Q. Can you become a leader in a particular club where you are a member?**
- Q. Can you start an initiative in an area you're passionate about where your college doesn't provide sufficient opportunities?**

Leadership can be demonstrated by any activity where you work to coordinate the efforts of multiple people to achieve a certain goal. Consider being entrepreneurial. Don't be afraid to show your drive.

Summer Activities

As you head into the spring term of sophomore year, and each subsequent year, start thinking about how you are going to utilize your summer. While you should definitely take time off to enjoy a well-deserved break, you should also be productive. Spend your summer by continuing to participate in activities that will enable you to be a competitive medical school candidate.

Continue participating in areas like those you've been participating in throughout the school year. This demonstrates continuity and commitment, which medical schools like to see. For instance, if you've been involved with activities that focus on providing support for the homeless, consider looking for similar kinds of activities when you are at home for the summer.

Another way to use your summer is to begin participating in extracurriculars you have not had a chance to experience yet, but which medical schools consider important. For instance, if you have not had a chance to shadow a doctor, find an opportunity in your hometown (or wherever you are going to be for the summer) during the academic year.

Developing Meaningful Relationships

Being a competitive medical school candidate isn't only about having great grades and meaningful activities. It's also about having developed meaningful relationships – both professionally and socially. While you may already be adept at making friends, forging professional relationships requires more strategic planning.

Professional Relationships

From a medical school application perspective, developing professional relationships with professors and medical attendings is critical. These are the people who are going to write your letters of recommendation, become your mentors, and provide you with other opportunities and connections.

From a self-development perspective, cultivating professional relationships teaches you important skills such as communicating, networking and critical thinking.

Remember:

It is up to you to reach out to these professionals and develop these relationships. They're not going to reach out to you. When you do, don't just set up a meeting, show up and wing it. Prepare! More specifically:

- **Determine your goal** – Identify what you want to accomplish by the time the meeting ends. Do you want more information about a specific initiative? Do you want more contacts? Do you need advice on something specific?
- **Research the individual** – Take the time to research whomever you're meeting with. The more you know about the person, the better questions you can ask. Some version of the person's resume can usually be found on the university website or LinkedIn. Or just Google the person's name and see what comes up.
- **Create an agenda** – Once you know the goal of the meeting and you've done your research, create an agenda. Identify the issues you want to discuss, as well as the questions you want to ask. This way, your meeting has structure and appears organized.
- **Identify the stakeholders** – End every meeting with a Thank You. Also, ask who else you should talk to. Referrals are the best way to develop connections. Follow up with every person you meet with or speak to. Each initial meeting should serve as a starting point for developing a long-term relationship.

Social Relationships

Being pre-med is a long and challenging path. Therefore, it's critical to have support systems. While you have your family and your college advisors, one of the best support systems is pre-med friends. These are the individuals who are going through the exact same things as you. They can relate to all the ups and downs of the journey. Non-pre-med friends are also nice to have, as they can make for a great escape!

That said, having a few close pre-med friends that you can trust will make your pre-med journey more successful in three ways:

- 1. Academics** – Pre-med courses are quite challenging. When you have fellow pre-med friends to study with, you are significantly more likely to be able to overcome challenge. Whether it's understanding concepts, solving problems, or following lab instructions, everyone has different strengths and weaknesses when it comes to pre-med subjects. You may be great at general chemistry but struggle at physics. Perhaps a pre-med friend can help. Plus, for material such as biology that requires more rote memorization, a test buddy can help once you've studied the material.
- 2. Social Life** – It's critical that you carve out time for yourself to have fun. Otherwise, you will get burned out. While it's great to have friends who are not pre-med, having pre-med friends can make having a social life less stressful since they're dealing with same challenge of trying to find a healthy academic/social life balance. They're more likely to understand why you may not have as much time to hang out or why you complain so much about organic chemistry.
- 3. Med School Application Support** – By junior year, while you're going to fill out your own applications, get your own letters of recommendations, and do your own interviews, having pre-med friends can make a strong and positive difference:
 - **Constructive Feedback** – Solicit feedback on content and organization, and have them proofread your application, particularly essays. Proofreading is a must, because no matter how many times you read your own applications, you can still overlook mistakes.
 - **Mock Interviews** – By mock interviewing each another, the person in the role of interviewer gives the interviewee feedback in terms of content, organization and behavior. For instance, did you say, "ummm" too many times? Did you have good eye contact? Was your handshake (or elbow bump) strong enough? Do these mock interviews repeatedly with the same person to track progress.
 - **Share Tips** – Sharing experiences as you interview at different medical schools may provide insights and ideas that you otherwise may not have thought of.



Pre-Med Resources

[Association of American Medical Colleges](#) – Familiarize yourself with the AAMC site because it has amazing resources for pre-meds, whether you're still pondering medicine as a career or a junior applying to medical school.

AAMC sections most valuable to freshmen:

- [Deciding on a Career in Medicine](#) – Get a basic overview of what it takes to become a doctor.
- [Aspiring Docs Fact Sheets](#) – Learn how to get medically related experience, how to navigate the application process, and what it's like to be a medical student.
- [Anatomy of an Applicant](#) – These are the 15 core competencies that demonstrate your preparedness for medical school.
- [Paying for Medical School](#) – Learn about financial aid options for financing medical school and making it affordable.
- [Aspiring Docs Diaries](#) – This is an AAMC program where bloggers who are pre-meds, medical students and residents share their personal experiences. You can even apply to be a blogger yourself.

[American Medical College Application Service](#) – Most U.S. medical schools use AMCAS as their primary application method for their first-year entering classes. Even though you may not be using AMCAS until your junior year, you should familiarize yourself with it.

[American Medical Student Association](#) – AMSA is a student-governed, national organization committed to representing the concerns of physicians-in-training. AMSA members are medical students, premedical students, interns, residents and practicing physicians. Most colleges have an AMSA chapter. See if your college does, and if so, strongly consider joining. Such chapters provide great pre-med resources and networking.

[Future Health Professionals](#) – Formerly called Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), this is the largest student organization in preparing students to enter the healthcare field.

[Alpha Epsilon Delta](#) – AED is the U.S. health pre-professional honor society and service organization. It must be joined through a local chapter at your school.

[Prospective Doctor](#) – Powered by MedSchoolCoach, this site provides free resources for students considering or pursuing careers as physician. As a freshman, start by exploring [pre-med academics](#) and [extracurriculars](#).

[MedSchoolCoach](#) – When it's time to begin applying to medical school or studying for the MCAT, MedSchoolCoach has top 99th percentile tutors and advisors who have served on admission committees ready to give you personalized coaching.

[#PreMeds](#) – This is the private Facebook group of MedSchoolCoach and Prospective Doctor. In this community, share your stories, ask questions, and give and get advice from other premeds.

[The Student Doctor Network](#) – SDN offers free resources for students interested in medicine. It's a dense website and many of the resources are better suited for juniors. Still, its message board forum is quite popular, and the site is a great way to get questions answered from other students with similar interests.

[Medical School Directory](#) – To get a sense of what medical schools are looking for in their applicants, or if you already have an interest in some medical schools, explore their websites. This interactive map lets you explore every accredited MD and DO medical school in the United States. You may also wish to explore [Caribbean medical schools](#), too.

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Don't stop believing in yourself.
You are on the path to greatness.
You will be a physician.
**MedSchoolCoach will be there to
help you every step of the way.**

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