

Eight Essential Steps in preparing for admission a Professional Health School

Although there are scores of different health fields, the basic steps in preparing to enter the fields' professional schools are often very similar. How well students manage these steps, with the assistance of their advisors, can significantly impact how competitive they will be when they apply.

1. **Prerequisite courses** must be completed in a timely manner in order for students to be eligible to graduate and/or apply to professional programs. These courses vary from school to school and program to program. Relevant issues include the acceptability of online, community college, and advanced placement courses; the need to take full-loads of the "science-major" courses with labs while earning above average grades; and whether requirements can be waived. To advise students well, advisors must be able to identify helpful resources, such as professional schools' Websites, teach their students to use available resources, and determine which courses at their institutions are equivalent to the schools' prerequisites.
2. **Health-related experiences** are essential in helping students confirm their desire to pursue a particular health profession. Most schools expect students to document their experiences in a variety of fields and in multiple settings. Advisors can establish shadowing programs but should expect students to make their own contacts and schedule their own shadowing visits.
3. **Personal growth and development** are integral to the educational process for those pursuing careers in the health professions. Professional programs assess the personal attributes of applicants as well as their academic skills. Advisors should encourage their students to engage in volunteer and leadership activities that will help them learn about themselves and others. Pre-health students must learn to assess honestly their strengths, weaknesses, and suitability for a career of service.
4. **Researching schools** should begin as early as possible. Advisors will need to have current and accurate resources available so students can learn about a variety of schools/programs. Students usually need assistance with narrowing their choices, making reasonable decisions, and choosing an appropriate program.
5. **Entrance exams** are often a significant challenge for many students. Required exams vary from school to school and program to program, and students may need a variety of learning strategies to perform well. Advisors can create a chart for the major health professions that identifies the required exams, when they should be taken, and effective preparation techniques.
6. **The application process** can sometimes be lengthy and complicated. To assist their students, advisors can create a Website with dates and deadlines, a "to do" checklist, links to relevant sources of information, and links to the various professional schools.

7. **Preparing for interviews** improves students' chances of being accepted into professional schools but also prepares students for life. Advisors can inform students about Websites that provide interviewing tips and feedback about the interview process at particular schools, set up mock interviews with representatives from the local professional schools, and enlist their institution's career development office to videotape and critique applicants.
8. **Financial aid planning** to pay the high costs of matriculating at a professional school is essential, but frequently overlooked by both applicants and advisors. Perhaps the application process itself is so stressful that applicants are just relieved when accepted and do not worry about this final step. However, the predominance of loans as opposed to grants or scholarships that do not have to be repaid makes this step important. Advisors can offer resources on financial assistance (Websites and print materials, for example) that students can review for guidance. Financial aid directors can also provide help for students who are completing the myriad financial aid forms.

An excerpt and modified from:

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/Pre-Health.htm>

Authors:

[Ruth O. Bingham](#)
University of Hawaii-
Manoa

[Beverley Childress](#)
Auburn University
Chair, Health
Professions Advising
Interest Group