

Preparing for a Health Care Profession: The Basics

1. Find out if this is what you want to do.

- Shadow or interview a health care professional in the area in which you are interested.
- Read all you can about the profession. Health Sciences has information available for all careers.
- Volunteer at a hospital or clinic, if possible.

2. Find out about the requirements of specific schools or clinical programs.

- Contact specific schools that you are interested in for their specific requirements and further information. The websites of individual programs are also great resources.

3. Make yourself a competitive applicant.

- Every health care field has its own level of competitiveness in terms of getting accepted to a professional school or clinical program. Find out the average GPAs of students getting accepted in your field to get a realistic idea of what you need to have to be competitive.
- Take your college coursework and schedule seriously beginning as a freshman. Most admissions committees will look carefully at your transcript. Try to avoid having too many withdrawals, retakes, and other red flags. Programs will also look at the number of credit hours you took each semester and they like to see students taking full and challenging credit hour loads.
- Some fields, such as medicine, physical therapy, physician assistant, optometry, and dentistry, require an entrance examination before application. These include such tests as the MCAT, DAT, OAT, GRE, and PCAT. Find out if your field requires such a test and what type of scores are expected to be competitive. Also, inquire as to when you will be expected to take the test and what kinds of study and review options are available to you. These scores are critical so plan on some preparation time!
- Work on written and oral communication skills – these will be important during the application process and the interview.
- Shadowing/observation under a health care professional in the field you are interested in is a MUST. A few schools even require a specific number of hours.
- Volunteer work, community service, involvement on campus, and so on are all good activities that get you around people and/or show leadership.
- Get to know your professors, particularly in the sciences. You will be asking some of them to write letters of recommendation for you.

4. Apply to the schools or clinical programs early.

- Many professions have a centralized application service. For example, pre-med students apply through the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS). Some other fields that have such a service include: dentistry, osteopathic medicine, podiatric medicine, pharmacy, nursing, physician assistant, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.
- If your field does not have a centralized application service, you will have to fill out an online application for each specific school or program.
- Find out the application deadlines and apply early.
- When asking for letters of recommendation, provide the person with a short “resume” of your goals, activities, and achievements. Make sure you give them plenty of notice and always provide detailed instructions on how the letter must be submitted.
- Provide services, schools and programs with updates about completed coursework, awards, change of address, etc.

- If you are invited for an interview, think about possible questions you could ask as well as questions they might ask you. Take advantage of mock interview services on campus and resources from Health Sciences.
- In all your interactions with application services and schools, conduct yourself professionally.

5. Be realistic and always have alternative plans.

- If your grades and/or test scores are below acceptable levels, you must make a decision – either pursue a course of action that will lead to improvement or think about alternative careers.
- There are hundreds of opportunities in health care. If you really want to be in health care, there are likely other fields that would be suitable for you. Research some alternative careers and have “back-up” plans.
- Any student in a pre-professional program will be expected to choose a college major so that they can be working towards a baccalaureate degree concurrently with his or her pre-professional program. This requires a major/minor combination or a comprehensive major, as well as completion of the UNK general studies requirements and any other degree requirements as set forth in the college catalog. Pursuing a degree also provides a “back-up” plan.