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The Amherst College **Careers in Health Professions program** provides pre-health advising and mentoring throughout a student’s Amherst College years and beyond. The advising philosophy is interdisciplinary and holistic in nature, with the goal of promoting a collaborative culture that builds community among pre-health students and helping students understand that there are multiple paths to a health professions career, including paths other than medicine. We emphasize the development of qualities of empathy, kindness, respect, active listening, and humanism. The program is primarily educational in nature rather than just pre-professional. We not only advise but also mentor. And we’re dedicated to the overall College mission of supporting underrepresented groups and driving educational equity.

Many students choose to pursue a variety of jobs after graduation. A sampling of where Amherst College graduates pursue careers in health include positions at community health centers, clinical health care practices, public health, mental health, teaching, and healthcare in underserved communities. In addition to traditional allopathic medical school programs (MD degree), Amherst college graduates attend graduate and professional schools to pursue degrees in osteopathic medicine, nursing, physician assistant studies, veterinary medicine, public health, psychology, narrative medicine, medical anthropology, occupational and physical therapy, audiology and speech therapy, research science, and more.

Whether you have always known you wanted to be a health professional or if you are just interested in discussing your interest in health, health care, and healing or exploring in any way the possibility of a career in any of the health professions, you’ll find a home at the Amherst College Health Professions Community and Program.

**People**

**Dean Richard Aronson, MD, MPH** ([raaronson69@amherst.edu](mailto:raaronson69@amherst.edu)) is the Health Professions Advisor and leads the Careers in Health Program at the Loeb Center. The Health Professions Advisor is the person to consult about overall pre-health advising throughout your Amherst College years, which includes how to plan for your pre-health coursework, how to approach making a career decision, such as deciding to enter the medical profession or other health professions (including public and mental health), and how to find internships, clinical experience, shadowing, community service, research, and other opportunities to prepare you for a health career and to help you along in your decision making. Dean Aronson also works closely with students and recent graduates when they begin the process of applying to health professions schools.

* It is very important that you get to know Dean Aronson during your time at Amherst! In the 2023-2024 academic year, first-years are invited to participate in an introductory small group advising session held throughout September with Dean Aronson and Becca Tishler. Attendance at one of these small group sessions is mandatory for scheduling a future one-on-one appointment.

**Professor of Physics William Loinaz** ([waloinaz@amherst.edu](mailto:waloinaz@amherst.edu)) is chair of Amherst’s Health Professions Committee. He works with the Health Professions Advisor and Health Professions Specialist to prepare materials to support applications to health professions schools. Professor Loinaz is also available to help you, especially with your academic planning; feel free to email him for questions and to make an appointment.

**Rebecca (Becca) Tishler** is the Assistant Director for Health Professions Advising. She works closely with Dean Aronson and Professor Loinaz to support students and young alumni in all aspects of their journeys towards various health-related career paths. This includes, among other things, working with them on the application process for medical and other health professions schools. Contact Becca ([rtishler@amherst.edu](mailto:rtishler@amherst.edu)) to add your name to the pre-health email newsletter, which is a great resource for events, internships, jobs, and other information or with any questions you might have.

**Your First Appointment with the Health Professions Office**

All first-years with an interest in pre-health/pre-med are invited to participate in a **small group advising session** held throughout September and led by Dean Aronson and Becca. Attendance at one of these small group sessions is mandatory for scheduling a future one-on-one appointment. Students who indicated a pre-med/pre-health interest upon entering Amherst will be contacted directly to sign up for a group advising session. These group advising sessions will provide you with an orientation to the pre-health program and resources, and will answer any preliminary questions you might have.

**Coursework**

***Which courses should I take this semester?***

There is no single answer to this question! Different academic paths are right for different students*.*First and foremost, **it is vitally important that pre-med students do not rush through the pre-medical science requirements**, and that they take a breadth of courses across the curriculum.

**There is no one “correct” academic schedule nor is there a major that is expected or “looks better” for medical schools**. It’s also key to understand that you don’t have to major in STEM to be pre-med. Moreover, if someone feels unsure about their future career (as one would hope many do in their first year of college!), front-loading or rushing to complete the pre-medical course requirements achieves little and is not in their best interest.

However, if you feel reasonably well prepared in science, and especially if you may want to major in science, consider taking:

(1) Chemistry 151 or 155, as placed by the Chemistry Department.

(2) If the Math Department says you should start with Math 111 or Math 105, take it this semester if you feel able to do so. Everyone goes at their own pace, so do what feels right for you. Consult with Dean Aronson or Prof. Loinaz if you have questions.

If you have “placed out” of Math 111 according to the Math Department, you’ve met the calculus requirement for medical school, and for the vast majority of schools, the math requirement as well. At this time, we recommend that you take a statistics course at some point during your college years.

We generally recommend that new students start out with one lab course in their first semester. That said, however, students who have placed out of Math 111 and into Math 121 or higher may choose to take Biology 181 and Chemistry 151/155. Others who intend to major in physics may also choose to take two labs in the first semester.

However, **doubling up right away isn’t required for the pre-med track**. If you have questions, please discuss with your academic advisor and/or Dean Aronson or Professor Loinaz. While there are some students who may feel well-prepared for two laboratory science courses in their first semester**, for many students,** **doubling up right away is an unnecessary risk.**

We encourage you to give yourself room for the full breadth of your academic interests, and to feel confident going at your own pace.

***Which courses must I eventually take?***

Medical and dental schools require:

* MATH 111, or MATH 105 & 106 – this will satisfy the math requirement for almost all medical schools. These courses are prerequisites for Amherst chemistry and physics courses. Statistics is now strongly recommended, though not required by all schools.
* 4 semesters of Chemistry with lab (CHEM 151 or 155 and 161 or 165; then CHEM 221 and 231).
* 2 semesters of Physics with lab (PHYS 116 or 123, and 117 or 124);
* 2 semesters of Biology with lab (usually BIOL 181 and 191. BIO 191 is required for all pre-medical students; in some cases, students may take an upper level biology course in place of Biology 181, but space in advanced biology courses is very limited and preference is given to some majors – consult with Prof. Loinaz or Dean Aronson on that, and see the *Guide*);
* 1 semester of Biochemistry (with or without lab);
* 2 semesters of English, or certain other courses that may be substituted. The English requirement is determined by the individual medical schools, not us – therefore, the safest path is to take 2 English courses or one English course plus one literature in translation course. For most medical schools, 1 English Department course plus one literature in translation course is fine. However, to re-emphasize: **It’s very important to take a wide range of courses to prepare for the health professions across the curriculum, not just the English requirement.**

In addition, note that while an introductory course in psychology is not currently required by most medical schools, the MCAT exam now has a section that covers topics in introductory psychology (and some sociology).

There are many different sequences by which students fulfill these requirements. Many medical schools either require a course in statistics or view such a course favorably. We expect requirements for statistics to also become more common. Veterinary school requirements are more varied, and some veterinary schools require courses not offered at Amherst College. Students interested in veterinary school should contact Dean Aronson or Prof. Loinaz to discuss.

We emphasize that it is medical and dental schools that set the requirements for admission, not us. Not all schools have exactly the same requirements, but if applicants complete the above courses, they will have satisfied the requirements for almost all medical and dental schools. However, it is the ultimately responsibility of the applicant to make sure they have satisfied the requirements for the schools and programs to which they apply.

**The Guide**

An important source of information, especially for pre-medical students, is the *Amherst College Guide for Pre-medical Students Part I* & *II*, documents updated yearly, which you should refer to and study thoroughly. Both versions are available on our website and if you search for “Amherst pre-health guide” online.

The *Guide* answers many questions you will have about scheduling courses, getting clinical experience, and applying to health professions schools when the time comes.

Read it soon!

**Important Points**

It’s healthy and okay to go through periods when you’re not sure that you want to pursue medicine or another health profession. Exploration is an important part of your education here, and we encourage it. Students decide for sure that they want to pursue medicine at different times – from before college all the way to several years after college. The most important thing is that they have really taken the time, and done the exploration, to be sure. Go at your own pace.

Don’t rush through the pre-medical course requirements. Again, everyone goes at their own pace. If you feel that taking two laboratory science courses in your first semester is too much, we applaud your self-knowledge and support you in this! This is very important! Adjusting to college life and to the academics of Amherst is very important and it takes time. Many students will have a more enjoyable, successful, and positive academic experience if they slow down their pace of taking the pre-med courses and resist the temptation to overextend themselves. Again, **everyone comes to the decision to pursue medicine or another health profession on their own and at their own pace: there is no rush.**

Study abroad is strongly encouraged for pre-health students at Amherst. Meet with Dean Aronson on how you can arrange your schedule to do study abroad.

In general (there are exceptions), double majoring and doing the pre-med coursework is not recommended. It, in essence, means that you end up with three majors (the pre-med coursework itself in effect “counts” as the equivalent of a major), leaving little room for the thorough exploration of the curriculum that provides such great opportunities for your Amherst education.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

***May I use Advanced Placement to satisfy medical school requirements?***

Again, the *Guide* has all the details, but the bottom line is that you need to have at least four semesters of Chemistry, two of Physics, and two of Biology, all with lab, and Biochemistry (with or without lab). Even if you have advanced standing in one or more of these subjects, most medical schools will not accept you unless your college record includes the number of courses listed above in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and English. You may take advanced courses if you are exempted from introductory ones by the departments concerned, but you can’t simply omit the required number of courses based on your advanced placement. In Math, however, official placement is usually acceptable; see the *Guide* for more information about math placement.

***What should I major in if I want to enter medicine or one of the other health professions?***

Major in a subject that interests you: we cannot emphasize this enough! There is no one major or course of study that “looks better” for medical schools. Humanities or social science majors are not at all at a disadvantage when applying to medical school, if they have done well in the required pre-medical science courses. **Indeed, we are finding that medical schools are very interested in students who demonstrate curiosity and trying new things in their coursework rather than “studying what they think will get them accepted to medical school.”** Of course, if you like studying a particular science subject, choose it as your major. If you major in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Biochemistry/Biophysics, or Neuroscience, some courses you take as major requirements will count as pre-med requirements. And you would almost certainly major in science if you’re interested in medical research/pursuing a science-based MD/PhD.

**Some Advice for the Long Term…**

Now that the most pressing questions are out of the way, here is some advice that we think will be helpful beyond your first weeks at Amherst, in the form of five things we’ve noticed that many successful pre-medical students do. Consider following in their footsteps!

Many successful pre-medical students…

1. ***Engage enthusiastically in their whole undergraduate education*.** They choose a major—science or non-science—that interests them, and pick challenging courses outside the major that also interest them. Because they're interested in learning, they do well in their courses. Their professors get to know them and can provide them with strong recommendations.

1. ***Do well in the required pre-medical science courses.*** Whether their major is in

science or non-science, they have ability and genuine interest in scientific understanding that shows in their work in the required pre-med courses. Also, they go at their own pace. For some students, this means not piling up the pre-med science courses early on, but first learning to pace yourself.

1. ***Show accomplishment and leadership outside the classroom*.** They get involved in

a sustained way doing something worthwhile and interesting that they love doing and are good at doing—volunteering, mastering a musical instrument and performing, doing research, or many other things. There are excellent opportunities on campus that are pre-health related: Public Health Collaborative, Health for Humanity, the Minority Association of Premedical Students, Charles Drew Health Professions Society, the Kidney Disease Screening and Awareness Program, and Pre-Health Peer Mentoring are examples. Engaging in community service is an essential part of preparing for medical school or, for that matter, any health profession.  If you’re interested in being a mentee in the peer mentoring program, contact Dean Aronson.

1. ***Have contact with doctors, other health professionals, and hospitals.*** During the

two or three years prior to applying to medical school, they shadow, intern, work, or volunteer with doctors and/or in hospitals. They can point to experiences that have helped them understand what healthcare looks like. Additionally, direct experiences in settings where you are engaged in the health concerns of others – whether these are in a medical/clinical setting or not – are extremely important aspects of preparedness. Read the *Guides* for more information about this. 

1. ***Often apply to enter medical school later than the fall immediately after***

***graduation*.** Applying for admission a year or two or three after graduation enhances their qualifications, and they're not behind in their career—the average age of all first-year medical students in the U.S. is now 24-25. In the past five years, on average, **only 4 out of 45 applicants (only 8%) from Amherst to medical school are students applying for matriculation directly following their college graduation**. If they are prepared and motivated to plunge right into the pre-medical science courses when they arrive at Amherst, and have a clear and nuanced commitment to what lies ahead, that’s fine. But many who are later successful in being accepted don't feel so prepared or motivated or clear at first, and they take the courses and dive into clinical experiences when they *are* prepared and motivated.

**More questions…**

* *Is it all right to take pre-med courses over the summer?*
* *Will it improve my chances for acceptance if I double major?*
* *Can I study abroad for a semester or a year and still complete premed requirements?*
* *What is the MCAT exam and how should I prepare?*
* *What are my chances of getting into medical school if I have a “B” average at Amherst?”*

**These questions and many more are answered in the *Guide* - read it!**  We encourage you to take advantage of the liberal arts curriculum at Amherst and take a wide breadth of courses. Consider going out of your comfort zone in your course selection.

We look forward to working with you as you prepare to enter one of the health professions. Don’t hesitate to contact or visit us when you have questions!