

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE TEXAS HEALTH EDUCATION SERVICE

2020-2021

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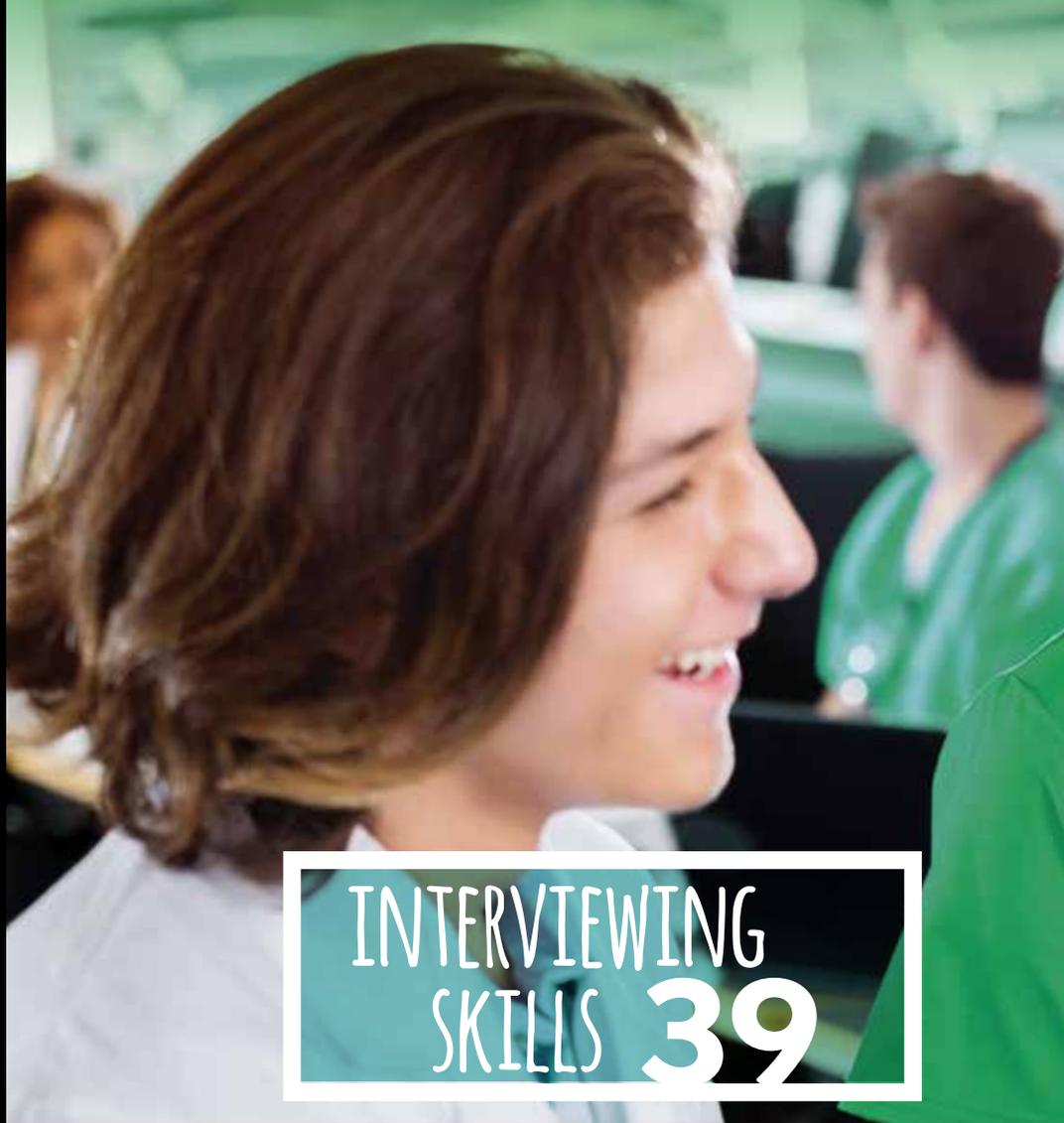
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## INTERVIEWING SKILLS 39

2 Working with Health Professions Advisors

6 Clinical Contact in Preparation for Medical School

8 Getting Letters of Evaluation

10 Primary Care:  
The Foundation of Healthcare

15 The Relevance of Extracurricular Activities

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Make the Most of Your Experiences **28** **ABROAD!**

# Profiles in Student Success

# 24

**18** The Photo and Your Application

---

**20** Continuing Adventures of Zander & Taylor

---

**36** Enhance Problem-solving Skills by Keeping Anxiety in Check

---

**42** TMDSAS Spotlight: Nichole Castillo

---

## EXTRAS

**Admission Stats . . . . .5**

**By the Numbers:  
Re-Applicants and  
Non-Traditional . . . . .23**

**Book Review: *One Flew  
Over the Cuckoo's Nest* . . . .35**

# Working *with* Health Professions Advisors

KRISTIN R.  
McJUNKINS,  
M.ED.

*During Your  
Undergraduate Years  
(and Beyond)*



Many students think they don't need to meet with health professions advisors until they're getting ready to apply to their program of choice. On the contrary, it is wise to have regular meetings – I like to call them 10,000-mile maintenance checks – throughout the undergraduate years (and post-graduate years if you're taking some time after graduation before applying).

Depending on where health professions advising is located on your campus, you may access to advisors beginning your first year of college. For example, at Yale we have a session during orientation to provide a basic overview of resources available. The first semester of college is a transition for everyone and the main goal as a student is developing effective academic strategies to not become overwhelmed with your workload. Health professions advisors, in conjunction with academic advisors, can help devise

an appropriate course schedule and provide tips for when to take specific courses based on your background so you challenge yourself without overextending your capabilities. In addition, it's important to seek out help from tutoring or find academic strategies early on to strengthen your study habits and time management skills so you don't get behind.

During your first year it's also important to not participate in too many extracurricular activities. Find two, possibly three, groups you want to join. These groups could be a continuation of something you did in high school or something new you'd like to try. First and foremost, think about the opportunities available to you and how you want to shape your college experience over the course of the next four years. Some of these activities may be pre-determined for you if you're a member of a sports team or musical group, for example.

These more intense commitments often require upwards of 20 hours per week, so it's vital to establish your study habits before adding other activities outside of classes.

At the start of your sophomore year you'll, hopefully, feel academically established. Meeting with your health professions advisor is a good way to talk about your "narrative" as a future applicant:

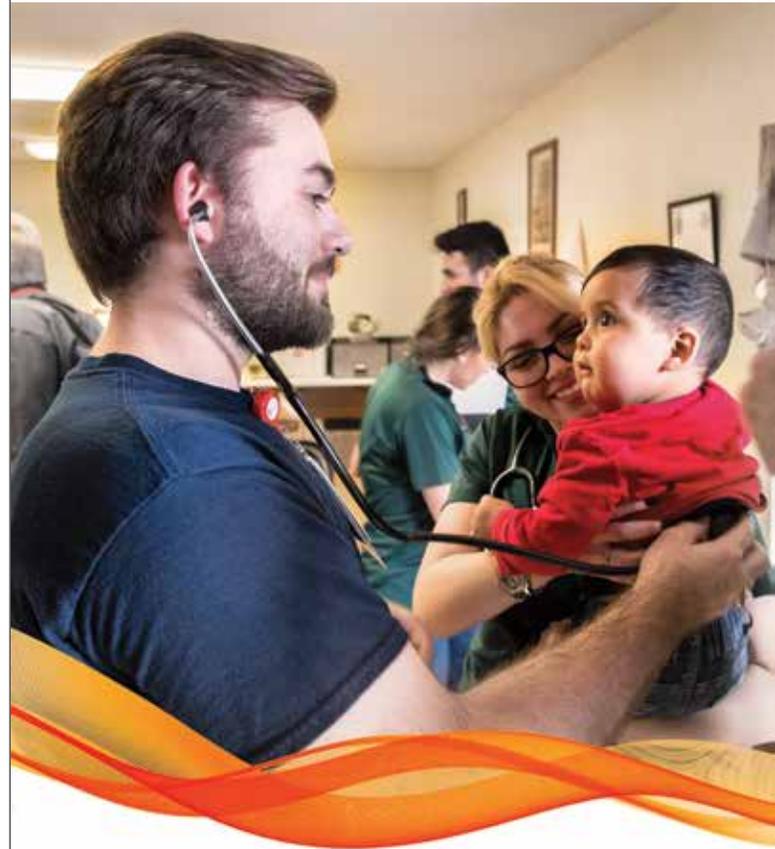
- What motivates you?
- Why are you interested in your health professions program of choice?
- How are you learning about the profession?
- What competencies are you developing from your extracurricular activities?
- Do you want to accomplish something specific, such as studying abroad, that takes a certain amount of planning?

Your health professions advisor can provide suggestions of activities based on your interests and share what other students on your campus have done in the past. Each applicant is unique and there is no cookie-cutter approach to developing a successful application. As you meet with your advisor regularly, they get to know you holistically. These conversations are valuable from a mentoring perspective.

As you move into your later years of college or post-graduation, many of your conversations with your health professions advisor will revolve around preparing for the application. The application process is a marathon, not a sprint. Thoughtful reflection is critical in preparing an application that represents YOUR NARRATIVE (there's that word again). Having an established relationship with your health professions advisor helps you feel comfortable talking about the myriad aspects of the application and allows the advisor to provide relevant suggestions for you because they've seen your trajectory over the years. Though applications to health professions programs don't open until May or June, it's helpful to start having meetings the previous fall to discuss topics such as whom to ask for letters of recommendation, personal statement ideas, and entrance exam preparation (MCAT, DAT, GRE).

We live in a digital age, and most questions about prerequisites and other requirements for health professions programs can be answered on school or association websites. What is lost from only researching through technology is the skill of conversation. One of the best traits of health professionals – in my opinion – is the connection they make with their patients and the community in which they practice. Establishing relationships with mentors in college is a wonderful way to develop active listening skills. Your health professions advisor should be at the top of your “go to” list of mentors throughout college (and beyond) as you plan for your professional career.

**Kristin McJunkins is Director of Health Professions Advising & STEM Connect at Yale University.**



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# BY THE NUMBERS

# for the entering class of **2019**

## TMDSAS Medical Schools

**6053**  
Applicants

**23**  
Average Age

**3.60**  
Average GPA

**506**  
Average MCAT  
Score

**1620**  
Enrolled Students

**22**  
Average Age

**3.79**  
Average GPA

**511**  
Average MCAT  
Score

## TMDSAS Dental Schools

**984**  
Applicants

**24**  
Average Age

**3.49**  
Average GPA

**20/20**  
Average DAT  
AA/PA

**296**  
Enrolled Students

**24**  
Average Age

**3.76**  
Average GPA

**21/21**  
Average DAT  
AA/PA

## TMDSAS Veterinary School

**676**  
Applicants

**23**  
Average Age

**3.47**  
Average GPA

**152.12/  
152.29/3.86**  
Average GRE  
V/Q/A

**162**  
Enrolled Students

**22**  
Average Age

**3.72**  
Average GPA

**155.07/  
155.05/4.06**  
Average GRE  
V/Q/A

# The Importance of Gaining Clinical Experience

FELIX G. MORALES, M.D.



**GAINING CLINICAL EXPERIENCES** is very important in preparing yourself for a health professions school. Many admissions officers will look at your health care experiences as an important part of their holistic review. As I travel to visit with students across the state of Texas regarding the application process, the most common questions about clinical experiences that I receive are: What type of clinical experiences should I have? How much clinical experience do I need? Why does it matter if I have clinical experience before I apply?

## WHAT TYPES OF CLINICAL EXPERIENCE SHOULD I HAVE BEFORE I APPLY?

Clinical experiences can often be divided into shadowing/volunteering or paid positions.<sup>[1]</sup> During shadowing experiences, students are often exposed to patient care through volunteering their time by either following a physician in their clinical practice or in a hospital-based setting. The exposure that the student receives during this time can offer a glimpse into the day-to-day demands that a physician sees.

As a family medicine physician, I often have students shadow me in my clinical practice. Initially, many of the students didn't use the opportunity to engage with me in a conversation about my medical practice or the steps of becoming a physician. After a few shadowing encounters, I have started to ask that students take notes on the patient care experiences that they witness. This often opens up the dialogue about my practice and about careers in medicine. I then provide guidance for them and ultimately can provide a letter of recommendation for their application. Therefore, I would highly recommend that you engage your shadowing physician and build a mentoring relationship with them. In preparation for applying to medical school, having a letter of recommendation from a mentor-physician will go a long way in making you a competitive applicant.

However, admissions officers realize that shadowing/volunteering might not be possible for some students. Therefore, I would encourage future applicants to look into paid positions such as working as a certified medical assistant (CMA), emergency room scribes, emergency room techs, phlebotomist or even becoming an EMT.<sup>[1]</sup> These experiences can also provide valuable opportunities to see what the clinical work really looks like.

If you have difficulty finding shadowing opportunities or a paid position, there are creative ways in which you can gain clinical experiences. A recent survey performed by the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) stated that 87% of medical school admissions officers would accept an alternative activity to clinical shadowing.<sup>[2]</sup> I would encourage such students to either volunteer time through a home health/hospice company, volunteer time in a nursing home, become a volunteer EMT, or even work with children with special needs in an occupational/physical therapy practice.

Students are often enticed to go overseas for their clinical experiences. Although these

opportunities do provide patient care exposure, you must remember that being exposed to medical care in the United States should be a priority because one day you will be licensed to take care of patients in our country.<sup>[3]</sup> The ultimate goal on your clinical experiences should not be a bullet point in your application, but to be exposed to patient care, and more importantly, becoming passionate about taking care of patients.

### HOW MUCH CLINICAL EXPERIENCE DO I REALLY NEED?

When it comes to clinical experiences, quality is more important than quantity. I would encourage you to seek out various clinical experiences in preparation for applying to medical school. One hundred hours with various specialties or patient care experiences will look better than many more hours spent in one specialty. To most admissions officers, having a variety of clinical patient care experiences is often used as an important criterion during the holistic review process and can separate you as a competitive applicant for medical school.

As you enter your undergraduate institution, I would recommend that you seek out patient care

experiences through pre-medical societies, clubs and organizations. Take the initiative and discover experiences in your local undergraduate communities, or even in your hometown. The goal is to seek experiences that demonstrate some form of passion towards caring for patients. Admissions officers realize that not all students take the traditional track of entering medical school straight from an undergraduate institution. Therefore, if you are a non-traditional applicant try to incorporate some varied clinical experiences even if you do not have a large number of hours. Patient exposure experiences will help you when your application is reviewed.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER IF I HAVE CLINICAL EXPERIENCES BEFORE I APPLY?

You must remember that you are applying to enter medical school where much of your training will be in clinical settings. Admissions officers are looking for candidates who demonstrate a sense of compassion, empathy, and a desire to help those in need and have experienced such in some sort of first-hand way. One of the best means for demonstrating these attributes is by enhancing your clinical patient care experiences, which can provide great material

*continued on p43*

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# The **W**s of Letters

MARILYN R.  
BANTA, PH.D.

## Letters of evaluation

are an extremely important component of any medical, dental, or veterinary school application. As a play on the word “letters” and a nod to a childhood favorite, Sesame Street, we will use “W” as the letter of the day to help explore some important points about letters.

### What is a letter of evaluation?

Letters of evaluation are personal narratives that individuals who know you well provide to the members of admissions committees in order to help them better understand you, the applicant. Obtaining letters from people who know you in a variety of capacities will enhance an admissions committee’s understanding of who you are, your interests, your motivations and talents, and will allow them to make a more informed decision about whether you are a good fit for their professional school.

### Why do admissions committees want letters of evaluation?

The “evaluation” part of the name indicates that the admissions committees want letter writers to go beyond just simply recommending you for admission. They want letter writers to evaluate your likelihood of success in a professional program AND to evaluate your potential to become an outstanding healthcare provider. If you have chosen your letter writers well, these letters will of course recommend you for

admission, but the objective is that your letter writers will generate an informative, honest and objective evaluation of your potential.

### Who should you ask for letters of evaluation?

Who you should ask to provide letters for you is not entirely straightforward. The letters you ask for will depend on your personal journey. Many professional schools strongly encourage letters from faculty members, particularly faculty in the sciences. Insight into your performance and success in your science courses is useful information for admissions committees. Consider including some variety in your choice of letter writers. Three letters from three different veterinarians may not provide much new information from letter to letter. For example, if you are doing research, then a letter from your research advisor is appropriate. If you are employed, then a letter from your employer is appropriate. Other appropriate letters might be from volunteer coordinators,

laboratory coordinators (if you teach science labs), military commanders, a pre-health advisor, and of course healthcare providers that you have shadowed, volunteered or worked with.

If you attend a large university with large classes, it is important that you make the effort to get to know your science faculty starting early on. If you have been out of school for a while, it is important that you maintain or re-establish regular contact with faculty members who may not have seen you for a while. The key point is that you need to go the extra mile to develop solid, meaningful relationships with some of the people who have influenced you during your journey towards professional school. People who barely know you will produce brief, vague and uninformative letters for you, which is not in your best interest. People who know you well will provide informative, meaningful evaluations.

### When should you ask for your letters?

In a general sense, you should ask for letters close to the time that you will be applying, so that your letters are clearly up-to-date, fresh, and relevant. A letter that was written a year or more in the past does not send a positive message to the admissions committees. It suggests that the person writing the letter has not seen or heard from you in a year



**Dr. Banta is Pre-Health Advisor and Senior Lecturer  
in the Department of Biology at Texas State University**

(or more) and has no idea what you have done or accomplished recently. If you are re-applying, it is appropriate to ask letter writers from a previous application cycle to write letters for you again, but they should generate new, updated letters that show that you have maintained contact with the letter writer since the last application cycle.

More specifically, demonstrate professionalism and give your letter writers plenty of advanced notice when asking them for letters. Asking at least one month ahead is courteous and respectful. This means you need to think about when you want your application file to be complete, and then work backwards in time to calculate when to request letters.

### **How** should you request a letter?

OK, so “How” does not start with the letter W. But this is important information, and “how” contains the letter w, so let’s just roll with it!

This is another good opportunity for you to demonstrate professionalism. Bear in mind that your letter writers are likely to spend hours researching, composing, editing, and then uploading a letter for you. That type of effort deserves more than just a quickly composed email from you asking if they will write a letter. Making the request in person is the most professional way to request a letter. Rather than just asking someone if they will write a letter of recommendation for you, ask whether they feel they can produce a strong, positive, personal evaluation of you. There is a big difference, and the latter is what you should be aiming for. If you ask about an evaluation, and your letter writer tells you that they do not think they can, then you should thank them graciously for their honesty and select someone different.

If someone agrees to write a letter for you, be prepared to offer them supporting materials to help them generate a strong, personal letter for you. This might involve a meeting or interview to help your letter writer better understand your motivation and preparation for professional school. You should be prepared to provide them with your transcript, a copy of your personal statement, your resume, or anything else that they might want.

*continued on p43*

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## the foundation of a strong healthcare system

SUE S. BORNSTEIN, M.D., FACP

Primary care professionals serve on the front lines of healthcare. For many, they are the first point of contact with the healthcare system. That means they are often the first to see depression, early signs of cancer or chronic disease, and other health concerns. They ensure patients get the right care, in the right setting, by the most appropriate practitioner, and in a manner consistent with the patient's desires and values. Primary care professionals are, essentially, the quarterbacks of healthcare (The Case for Primary Care: blogpost @ primarycareprogress.org).

Primary care is also the foundation of an effective healthcare system. Robust systems of primary care are positively correlated with improved health outcomes, including all-cause, cancer, heart disease, stroke and infant mortality, low birth weight, life expectancy and self-rated health (Pettersen S, McNellis R, Klink K, Meyers D, Bazemore A. *The State of Primary Care in the US: A Chartbook of Facts and Statistics*. January 2018). Patient care delivered

with a primary care orientation is associated with more effective, equitable and efficient health services.

### The Growing Need

In the United States, the primary care physician workforce comprises about 1/3 of the total physician population. This contrasts with most other countries to which the US is compared in which about 2/3 of the physician workforce specialize in primary care.

It has been widely reported that the US is experiencing a shortage of primary care physicians, which is predicted to worsen soon. It is estimated that by 2032, there will be a shortage of between 21,100 and 55,200 primary care physicians in this country. In Texas, it's estimated that we will have a shortage of up to 3,375 primary care physicians by 2030 (*2019 Update: The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections for 2017-2032*. American Association of Medical Colleges). There are several reasons for the shortage but the major force driving

demand continues to be a growing, aging population with an increasing number of chronic conditions.

In addition to shortages of primary care physicians, there is significant maldistribution as well. Primary care physicians and other physicians tend to practice in urban areas; in fact, physicians in Texas are concentrated in the state's largest urban counties. There are at least 35 Texas counties that don't have a practicing doctor. With an ever-increasing population Texas needs more primary care physicians. The need is especially critical in rural parts of Texas.

### The Power of Relationships

There are many appealing aspects to a career in primary care. Since each of the primary care disciplines covers a very broad range of conditions, the intellectual stimulation and the deep understanding of the pathophysiology of human health and illness is one aspect of the allure of primary care. Another compelling element is the longitudinal relationships that we are privileged to share with our

**Dr. Bornstein is Executive Director of the Texas Medical Home Initiative, Regent of the American College of Physicians and Trustee of the Texas Medical Association.**

patients and their families. In family medicine and internal medicine, it is not uncommon to care for three generations of a family. In pediatrics, clinicians care for children from birth until late teens so long-term relationships are frequent.

There are benefits to both clinicians as well as the patients for whom they care. We learn not only about our patients' medical issues but also about their families, their careers, their successes and the challenges they face in their lives. In turn, our patients see us as trusted and knowledgeable partners in their health and healthcare. When our patients face a serious or life-threatening illness, having a personal physician who understands and respects their preferences and priorities in life is critically important. We can and do advocate for our patients as the member of the healthcare team that knows them best. We can be their voice in discussions with specialists when evaluating treatment options.

### The Power of Teamwork

In order to meet the growing demands of primary care, a shift in the way care is organized is occurring. Team-based care

is becoming a more common model in primary care practices. A driving force behind health care practitioners' transition from being "soloists" to members of an orchestra is the complexity of modern healthcare. Teamwork is the foundation for resilience to errors. In addition, high functioning teams have tremendous potential to promote clinician well-being, which is foundational to effective and efficient team-based care.

The composition of primary care teams can take many forms depending on the needs of the practice's patients. The team is led by a physician who works closely with one or more nurses or medical assistants. They form the backbone of the clinical care team. With proper training and experience, the non-physician members of the team take on greater responsibility for patient care.

The keys to success are mutual respect; defined roles and responsibilities and frequent communication among the team members. They may "huddle" in the

morning before the day begins and review the schedule of patients to be seen that day. Notes are made of patients who are due to follow-up lab work, preventive care such as immunizations, a mammogram or colonoscopy. These items can be ordered by the non-physician team members as part of standing delegated orders. The nursing staff can document the visit and other information in the electronic health record which frees the physician to focus his/her attention on the patient.

Other team members may include health coaches, social workers, diabetes educators, pharmacists, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, behavioral health specialists and others, depending on the needs of the patient population. Clinical care teams are dynamic and must have the flexibility to determine roles and responsibilities expected of them based on shared goals and the needs of the patient.



### The Role of Technology

The practice of medicine has been impacted by technology in several ways. The electronic health record

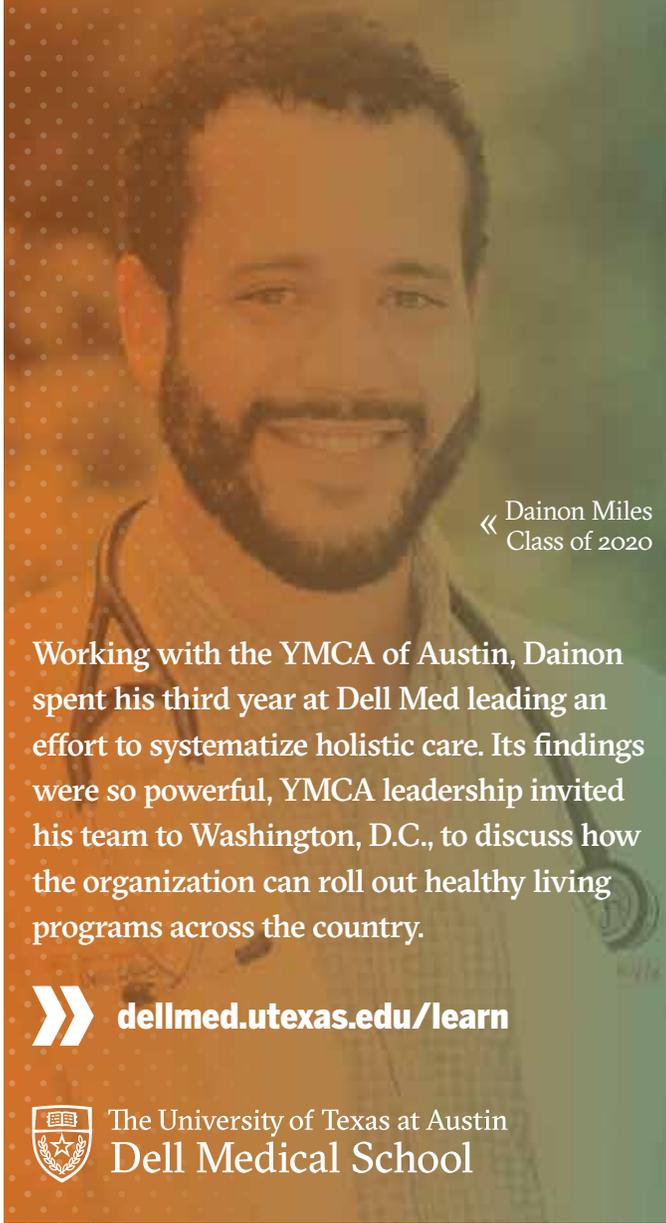
**Primary care is defined** as the provision of integrated, accessible healthcare services by clinicians who are accountable for addressing a large majority of personal healthcare needs, developing a sustained partnership with patients and practicing in the context of family and community (Donaldson M et al. *Defining Primary Care: An Interim Report*. National Academies Press 1994).

## PRIMARY CARE MEDICAL SPECIALTIES

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Obstetrics & Gynecology  
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(EHR) has seen widespread adoption. Although the concept is an appealing one, the EHR has not lived up to its potential as a clinical tool. Still, there are a number of benefits to the EHR including alerting the clinician to the need to schedule preventive health screening exams, vaccinations and laboratory testing. Electronic health records also can alert clinicians about drug allergies and potential drug interactions. Ideally, EHRs can serve as clinical communication tools between clinicians in various locations and in other practices.

Another technology that many patients and clinicians find useful is the patient portal. Within guidelines, patients can message the practice and their personal physician. Clinicians can send messages and laboratory results as well.

Telemedicine is a promising tool for a number of clinical settings. In Texas, if a patient has an established relationship with a physician, telemedicine can be used for some types of subsequent visits. Telemedicine has been particularly beneficial for augmenting physician presence in more remote areas of our state. We will see increased use of telemedicine as patients find it an increasingly convenient way to access their clinical team.

The use of wearable devices is also increasing. Continuous glucose monitors, various types of heart monitors, pulse oximeters and other devices can feed patient data directly into the EHR in many situations. These data can serve as a useful adjunct to other clinical data and help guide the patient's treatment plan.

## Summing It Up



A career in primary care can be very satisfying. There is a pressing need for additional primary care physicians in Texas. With new models of care and new technology, primary care specialties will continue to serve as the foundation of an effective and efficient healthcare system. During your journey into medicine, you might want to strongly consider the benefits of practicing primary care medicine. You and your patients will be very happy you did! •



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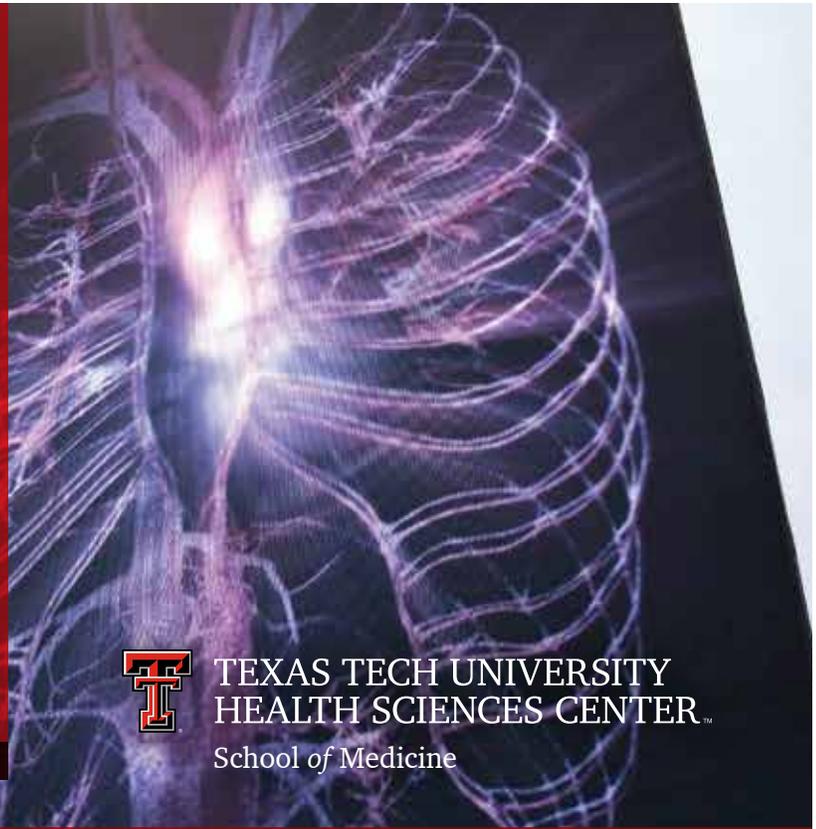
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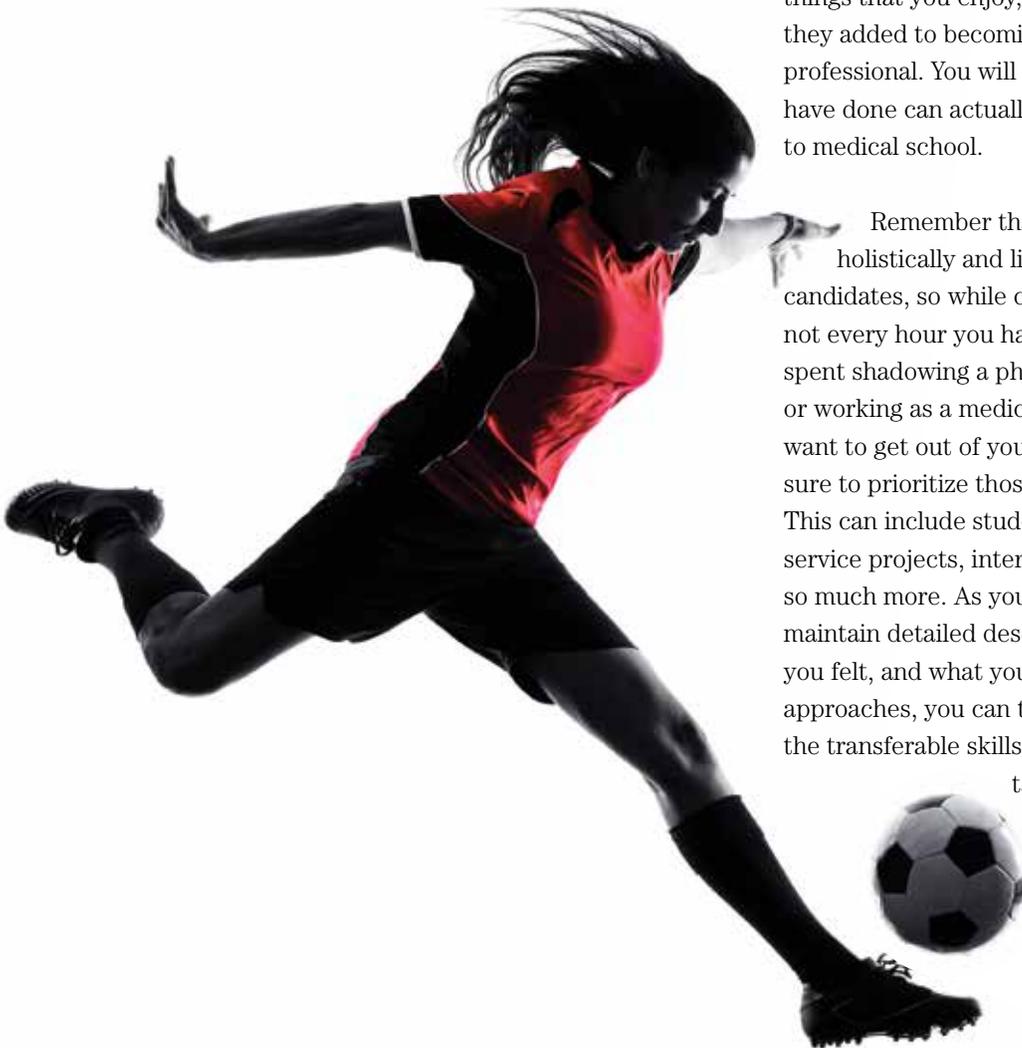
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# “But that has nothing to do with being a doctor!”

JOHN FIERST

(Yes, it does!)



As you go along your pre-professional journey, you might have spoken these very words to yourself as you thought about which extracurricular activities you wanted to commit your time to. As a pre-health advisor, I have worked with many students who have mentioned this sentiment to me before, but my advice to all of them has been steadfast: pursue the things that you enjoy, and then reflect on the value they added to becoming a doctor or other healthcare professional. You will often find that the activities you have done can actually be very beneficial on your path to medical school.

Remember that medical schools evaluate you holistically and like to see well-rounded candidates, so while clinical experience is important, not every hour you have outside of studying must be spent shadowing a physician, volunteering in a clinic, or working as a medical scribe. Think about what you want to get out of your undergraduate years, and be sure to prioritize those activities and commitments too. This can include student organizations, community service projects, internships or employment, and so much more. As you keep track of your activities, maintain detailed descriptions of what you did, what you felt, and what you learned. As application season approaches, you can then think more critically about the transferable skills you gained in each activity. Let's

take a look at some examples to help get you thinking:





## You as a Student

### Member of intramural basketball league

Developed teamwork skills

### Tutor in an after-school organization

Developed communication skills by explaining concepts to children in a variety of ways

Developed empathy by working with students who may come from different backgrounds than you

### Store associate at a clothing store

Developed people skills by approaching customers in a respectful and helpful way

### Vice president of college government

Developed leadership skills by communicating with fellow officers and membership

Developed conflict resolution skills when leadership team needed to come to agreement



## You as a Doctor

### Member of healthcare team

Must be able to share responsibility with pharmacists, nurses, administrators, etc.

### Counselor to patients about their conditions

Must be able to explain complex medical issues in a way that patients of diverse backgrounds understand

### Ambassador of medical community

Must be able to meet patients with respect, listen to their concerns, and develop a trusting relationship with them

### Leader in a healthcare setting

Communicate with members of the healthcare team to ensure quality patient care

Handle disagreements among staff that does not affect patient experience

As you can see from the examples above, there is always a way to relate what you are doing back to your journey to becoming a physician. For many students, it is easier to reflect on shadowing, health care volunteering, and community service experiences, as those things are more directly related to the life of a physician. Yet often, it just takes a bit of reflection to make those connections for all of your other pursuits as well. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you look back on your own activities:

1. What was most memorable from this activity?
2. What did I learn while I was a part of this organization?
3. What skills or strengths do I have now that I did not before?
4. Who worked with me on this activity or in this organization that I can talk with about my experience?
5. How was participating in this activity or organization similar to being a doctor?
6. How will this experience make me a better doctor in the future?

Answering these questions can help you reflect more deeply and write complete activity descriptions that fully encompass everything you experienced and learned. You will also likely be better equipped to share your experiences more clearly on secondary applications and in interviews. Finally, don't forget to consult with your pre-health advisor regularly, as your advisor can also help you think more about how to bring out the best of your extracurricular experiences when it comes time for you to apply to medical school. So for now, continue making the most of your undergraduate journey and pursuing the things you enjoy, because they DO have something to do with being a doctor!



**Mr. Fierst is Assistant Director of Academic Advising at Rice University**



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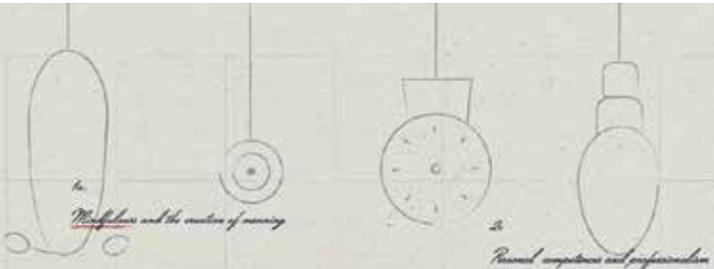
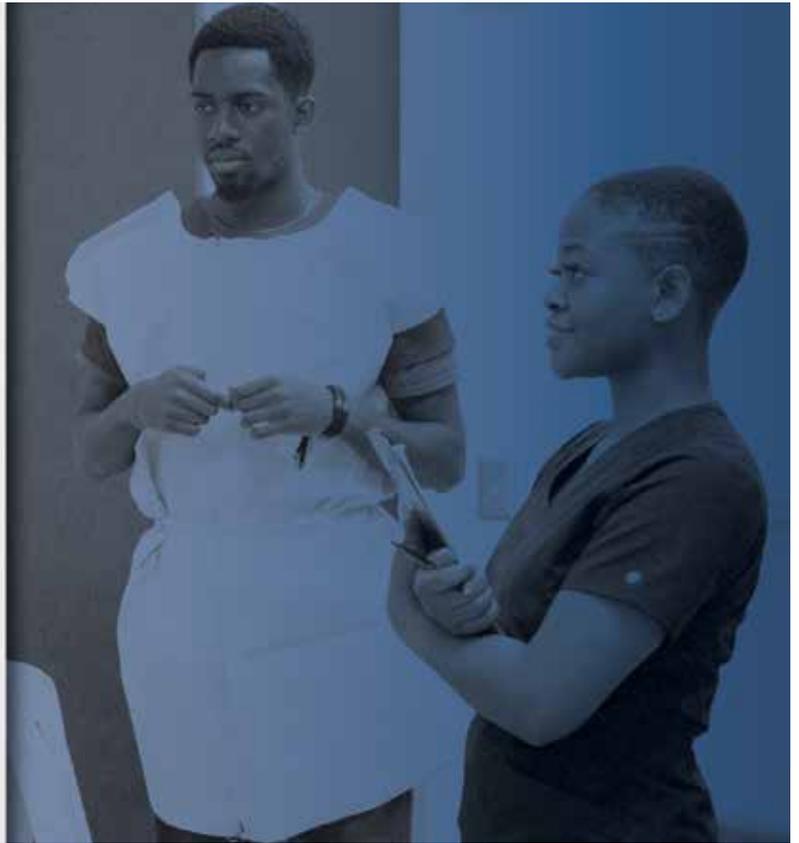
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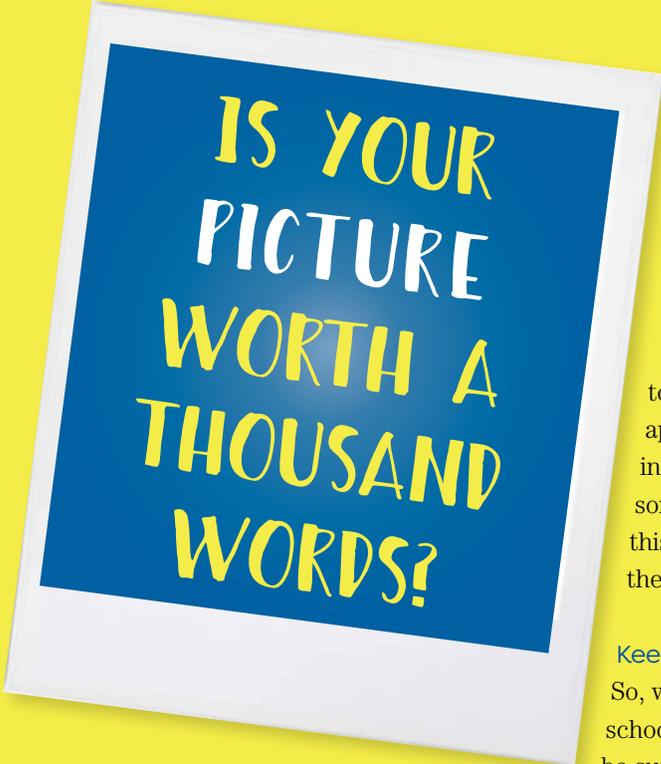
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# IS YOUR PICTURE WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS?

**WHETHER YOU'VE BEEN PLANNING FOR A CAREER IN HEALTHCARE SINCE YOU WERE A CHILD**, or it's a decision you made recently, you've probably known for some time that certain criteria must be met in order to apply to professional school. In fact, in addition to completing the prescribed coursework, the required supporting documents to your TMDSAS application include standardized test scores, transcripts, and letters of evaluation - all things you'd expect from an application to professional school. But did you also know that another required component of your application is a photo of yourself? Let's talk about why that is and how you can make sure that your photo is the best representation of you.

We reached out to some of the professional schools and asked for their input on a few questions we've received from applicants regarding the purpose of the photo in the application. We asked the schools

## What your application photo says about you!

NICHOLE A. CASTILLO, M. ED

to help us understand how the application photo is used, what insight the photo provides, and for some tips to help applicants use this feature of the application to their greatest advantage!

### Keeping Things Secure

So, what's the number one reason the schools require a photo? You might be surprised to learn that the number one reason is simply security. Over and over, representatives from the schools responded saying that the photo helps to identify applicants, especially during the interview process. You probably would agree that it makes sense to use pictures to help identify applicants given that, collectively, the TMDSAS participating schools receive more than 7,500 applications during a typical admission cycle!

### What About Bias?

It is paramount to know that the photo is decidedly NOT for screening purposes. In fact, some schools report that the photo is not even seen until the interview phase, while others indicate that members of the admissions committees never see photos during application review in order to prevent bias. Some applicants may have been hesitant to provide a photo, fearing that their picture might unduly impact their ability to progress through the admissions process. Thankfully, the schools have systems

in place to prevent any prejudice, ensuring that all applicants are afforded the same, fair, consideration.

### The Story a Picture Tells

That said, is it reasonable to assume that although the photo is not used in the screening process, it may provide the schools with some insight about you? Absolutely! In fact, the choice of photo does indicate the way an applicant chooses to represent themselves. More specifically, Theresa Silva, Director of Admissions at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, indicates that the photo provides "insight into [the applicant's] professionalism." What's the takeaway here? The schools do expect to see a degree of professionalism reflected in the photo that you submit.

### Pro Tips for Your Application Photo

So, what should you not do? Don't appear too casual. Beach attire, activewear, and clothing that is too revealing is highly discouraged. What to wear instead? Think professional! Choose an outfit you'd be proud to wear to a job interview or to an event that requires just a little bit of dressing up, like a graduation. A nice button-up or a blouse should do the trick! Remember, you are applying to professional school, and in the professional world there are expectations when it comes to dress code.

What else should you not do? Don't get lost in the crowd! Sometimes, applicants submit photos that are poorly cropped (floating arms, anyone?), or that include other people, making it difficult to identify who is the applicant. In addition to this, avoid submitting a photo that is too small, too far away, or otherwise makes you too difficult to recognize. Keep in mind: this process is all about you! So, make sure your photo reflects that.

Right about now, you might be thinking that you need to book a session with a studio photographer. You don't! If your friends or fellow classmates are also applying, you might want to schedule a time when you can take each other's picture – no fancy equipment required; the camera on any smart phone will do just fine. Simply remember to be the only person in the photo and avoid selfies, if possible. What else? While a studio backdrop is not required, do pay attention to the background of your photo. Stick to the basics and avoid anything distracting.

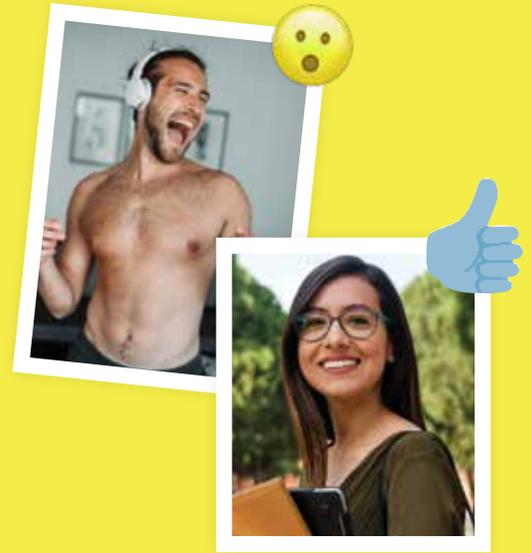
While these suggestions are meant to assist you in the photo selection process, there are some technical considerations to keep in mind to ensure that your photo is compatible with the TMDSAS online application. This information is also available in the TMDSAS Application Handbook and on the photo submission page of the application.

If these technical aspects aren't met, you might be prevented from submitting your application at the moment you'd like. Or once submitted, TMDSAS staff may have to reach out to you for a different photo, possibly delaying the processing of your application. It is important to note that once your application is submitted, your photo can only be changed by TMDSAS staff, and that is only if it does not meet the technical requirements. Therefore, it is important to put in the proper time and consideration when choosing which photo to upload to your application.

We hope these insights help you feel more informed and comfortable with the photo requirement of the application, and we think that following these suggestions will truly help you to put your best face forward!

**Ms. Castillo is the Senior Academic Evaluator with TMDSAS and the editor-in-chief of the TMDSAS Application Handbook.**

## Be sure to put your best face forward!



 **Make Sure it's Compatible!**

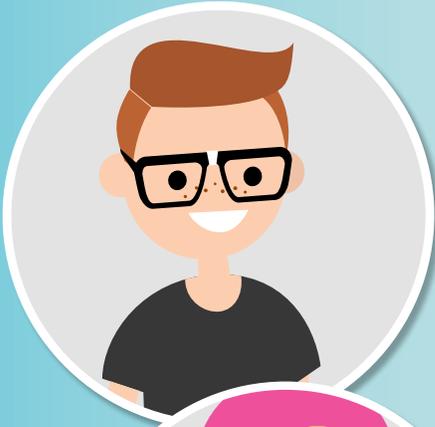
**TMDSAS photo requirements:**

- ✓ **TYPE:** a digital photo – you will not be able to mail in a print photo.
- ✓ **SIZE:** the photo must be smaller than 100KB.
- ✓ **FILE FORMATS:** only jpg, gif, png, or bmp file formats are compatible.

# THE SHADOW SEEKERS

DEB BECK, PH.D. &  
KAREN DE OLIVARES, PH.D.

## Further Adventures of Zander & Friends



**TAYLOR** (*texting*)  
Hey Oli! R U ready?

**OLI** (*texting*) Sorry, Taylor, I'm shadowing.

**TAYLOR** You're ALWAYS shadowing!

**OLI** It's with Dr. Bullock this afternoon, the large animal veterinarian! I have plenty of small animal experience, but besides giraffes, he works with sloths! I NEED large animal experience! Plus, these animals are also in the "exotics" category.

**TAYLOR** Well, if playing with sloths is more important than our upcoming tournament ... It's a benefit for children.

**OLI** The sloth just moved a paw. Gotta go.

**TAYLOR** (*text to Zander*)  
You headed to the field yet?

**ZANDER** No. I'm shadowing.

**TAYLOR** **What! No way.**

**ZANDER** It's ALL important! You're doing the same thing for your physician assistant application. Aren't you?!!!

**TAYLOR** I thought all those hours shadowing were just required for pre-vets... that's why I changed from vet

med to pre-PA. Is there ANYTHING that doesn't require a bunch of shadowing hours

**ZANDER** Hmm... I don't know, maybe, but that's probably a question for Dr. Jack, our health professions advisor. Didn't you talk with him last year?

*Later in the evening Zander, Oli, Taylor and Wren meet to go over their microbiology notes from before a quiz.*

**TAYLOR** So, Oli aren't you supposed to be observing the sloths?

**OLI** The two-toed are nocturnal, although they don't do much either in the day or night. That's the beauty of watching sloth behavior... everything is in sloooooowww-motion! Of course they don't have the whole forest at the zoo, but if they did they'd only go from about here to the Student Union, maybe a total of 41 yards in a day. I may be able to use this experience with the sloths for my Honors research thesis. Wouldn't it be cool if I got my name on a paper in a published scientific journal? I think that's important if I want to continue doing research in vet med. I'm going back tonight to watch.

**TAYLOR** It may be good that you have two more years to get it all done if sloths are that slow!



**Dr. Beck** is the Director of Health Professions Advising at The University of North Texas and **Dr. de Olivares** is the Director of the Health Professions Advising Center at The University of Texas at Dallas.



**WREN** Actually...

**TAYLOR** What now?!!! Don't tell me we don't have two more years to get everything ready for our applications!

**WREN** Well, you have two years only if you want to take a gap year. Since we're juniors, we'll be applying at the end of this year if we want to go into dental school, vet school or medical school – and PA for you, right after we graduate. You will be graduating in two more years, right?

**TAYLOR** Maybe. Maybe not. I've changed my major several times and that always messes up my degree plan. Sooooo, Oli? All those grades I made in my engineering classes won't actually count against me for getting into PA school, right?

**OLI** Sure they count! The health professions schools want only the best students – at least I want the smartest, most intelligent doctors and PAs treating me! This is important stuff, Taylor! You'll be holding people's lives in your hands – just like I'll be dealing with life and death matters with animals. What do you think a PA does, for goodness sake?

**TAYLOR** I thought they just handed shots and stuff to the doctor... you know, like it says, physician's assistant.

**ZANDER** *That could be why you need to shadow a PA!!!!* How else will you ever know what a PA does? And by the way, it's NOT "physician's assistant", it's "physician assistant". There's no possessive case here!

**TAYLOR** Huh?

**ZANDER** My aunt is a PA and doesn't "belong" to any doctor! Yes, it's true a PA practices medicine under the supervision of a doctor, but my aunt actually sees patients on her own. She doesn't only just "assist"; she treats patients.

**TAYLOR** I guess it's easier to get into PA school than medical school... Why are sloths so slow, anyway?

**OLI** They have a low metabolic rate and ...

**WREN** Hey, look we're studying microbiology tonight not biochemistry.

**ZANDER** Right, but Taylor needs to find a PA to shadow. It's important to know first-hand what a PA does and that it is super competitive to get into PA school.

**TAYLOR** About how many hours are required for shadowing?

**WREN**

It depends on the school. You'll need to do some research on the schools you want to apply to. For pre-vets, a good number is around 700-800 hours with different vets and animal-related activities.

Pre-dental students should have at least 100 hours, but I plan to have more. I like being at the dental practice.

**TAYLOR** You like listening to the drill whining away?

**WREN** It's not about the drill. It's about helping people feel better about themselves and be able to lead a healthier life.

**OLI** And, it isn't all about sloths. Pre-vets should have a variety of experiences like being a vet tech or kennel caretaker, working on a horse ranch or even if you were in 4H or FFA and raised show-animals... almost anything to do with animals (for pre-vets, that is). One person even did an internship one summer at an elephant sanctuary in Africa! She wants to work with exotic animals, though. Everyone doesn't have to do that. I have an



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emergency vet clinic lined up to shadow an ER doc. My friend took her dog, Minerva, to the ER when she swallowed a sock (Minerva, I mean. Not my friend.)

**ZANDER** I was scribing in the ER when they brought in a kid who had swallowed a sock. You see all kinds of things in the ER. That's why you need experience. So you'll know more about what you are getting into.

**OLI** Ya, there's a lot to learn. I'm trying to shadow a doggy ophthalmologist over winter break – I took Twinky to him when she started going blind, but there wasn't anything he could do – it's a genetic disorder in blue heelers... so now I'm her seeing eye dog, or rather person.



**TAYLOR** Wow! You already know a lot about animals and vet med, Oli! So how do you find someone to shadow?

**WREN** I went to Dr. Jack and told him I wanted to be a dentist. He suggested I start with my own dentist and talk with other pre-dental students. They've been really helpful about passing along contacts. Plus, he told me about volunteer events like Texas Mission of Mercy (TMOM) where I can help out AND meet dentists and dental students.

**ZANDER** I talked to Dr. Jack too. He suggested volunteering so that I could show I was dependable, able to get along with people and really interested. It's not just about hours to put down on an application and it isn't only about shadowing. It's about what we think we really want to do, and finding out if that is what we want to do.

**TAYLOR** (*looking at his class notes*): I wonder how many microbes were on that sock? **Hey, Zander, do you think I could shadow your aunt?** •

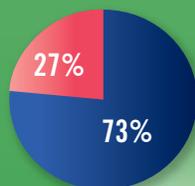
# BY THE NUMBERS

EY2020

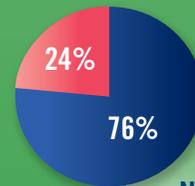
## Non-traditional Applicants & Re-applicants



### Medical



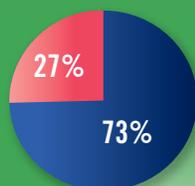
	Traditional	Non-Traditional
Total	4367	1625
Avg MCAT	507.6	504.7
BCPM GPA	3.6	3.3
Overall GPA	3.7	3.45



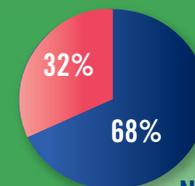
	New applicants	Re-applicants
Total	4582	1414
Avg MCAT	507.4	505.2
BCPM GPA	3.66	3.36
Overall GPA	3.67	3.52



### Dental



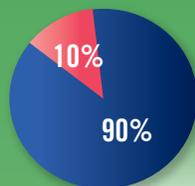
	Traditional	Non-Traditional
Total	667	255
DAT A	20.2	19.5
DAT B	19.8	19.5
BCPM GPA	3.39	3.2
Overall GPA	3.54	3.34



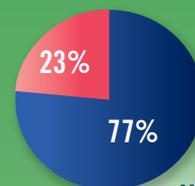
	New applicants	Re-applicants
Total	638	294
DAT A	20.2	19.6
DAT B	19.9	19.4
BCPM GPA	3.41	3.18
Overall GPA	3.54	3.36



### Veterinary



	Traditional	Non-Traditional
Total	661	76
BCPM GPA	3.43	3.29
Overall GPA	3.53	3.4



	New applicants	Re-applicants
Total	566	171
BCPM GPA	3.43	3.36
Overall GPA	3.53	3.46



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## AKWASI F. OPOKU

4TH YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT

TEXAS TECH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, LUBBOCK



Akwasi Opoku grew up in Kumasi, Ghana in a large family. One of the things that is most notable about his life in West Africa was the limited availability of medical care. “I visited the doctor thrice in the first 12 years of my life, not because I had an impeccable immune system, but because of the limited availability of healthcare in my native country.” However, rather than allowing this fact to embitter him, he focused it in a positive way. “Growing up in an environment with overbearing health needs ignited a strong passion within me that ultimately led me to pursue a career in medicine.”

At the age of 12, Akwasi and his family immigrated to the U.S., moving to the small city of Amarillo, Texas. He learned early the value of education. “I firmly believe that learning is students’ greatest opportunity to not only improve themselves but their communities as well.” He enrolled at Vanderbilt University as a chemistry major where he encountered a large and diverse student population. “Through honest and critical dialogue between students of various racial and religious backgrounds, we [can come] to a better understanding of the attitudes and forces that foster and sustain alarming social issues...” Akwasi prepared well for his medical school application. He utilized the opportunities available to him to gain extensive leadership experiences through campus student

organizations, his church as music leader and pianist, and as a tutor and peer mentor. Additionally, he let his passion for community service direct him to various activities through church, campus outreach, and two Alternate Spring Breaks in Ohio and North Carolina. He also was active in research at Vanderbilt, during summers at the University of Notre Dame and during a gap year he worked full time teaching math and science at a Houston elementary and middle school.

Now a fourth-year medical student at Texas Tech School of Medicine in Lubbock, Akwasi has experienced much of what he had hoped to see... the provision of medical care to people in need. He also has relished the chance to extend his learning opportunities and to help others to grow and achieve through student outreach at Tech. After graduation, he plans to enter a residency program in radiology and hopes to stay in academic medicine where he can teach and mentor students.

**CONGRATULATIONS, AKWASI!**

## DANIEL T. ANTHONY

3RD YEAR STUDENT

PRESIDENT, CLASS OF 2022

TEXAS A&M COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Daniel Anthony has always been an “animal person.” During high school, he states, he was responsible for taking care of two tortoises, two birds, three dogs, a chameleon, a hedgehog, and many fish. You could say he has a real passion for animals. He grew up in San Antonio and had great opportunities to connect with

veterinarians and others caring for small and large animals. But he recognized early on that veterinary medicine is also about building relationships with people. “I believe that I can have a positive effect on people’s lives through their pets.” There is a special bond between a caregiver and the patient. One that Daniel relishes.

His journey from pet owner to veterinary student has been a methodical one for Daniel. He took advantage of many opportunities to volunteer and work in vet clinics as a kennel technician, a vet tech, and through research efforts with reptiles and dogs in Texas and Colorado.

Daniel’s education, both in terms of academics and life experience, has taught him how to be resilient. “I [have] learned a tremendous amount about humility, perseverance, and myself, while finding my sense of community.” And indeed, serving the community around him is a foundational part of what drives him to succeed. His family, from parents to grandparents, taught him the value of contributing to society and the reward that comes “from treating those around you with dignity and respect.”

After graduation, Daniel aims to open a small animal practice with a focus on orthopedic surgery. “I want to challenge the status quo of veterinary care by leading the industry in high quality service, experience, and community outreach.”

**WELL DONE, DANIEL!**



## HEATHER D. DEVILLE

2ND YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT

TEXAS COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER

Heather DeVille's pathway into medical school has been circuitous. Though introduced to the idea of pursuing a healthcare career during high school, life sent her on a variety of different paths. Each of which provided her with learning experiences and valuable lessons. The most important lesson she has learned in life thus far, she says, is that "while knowledge is important, dedication is critical."



Growing up in southeast Louisiana, Heather learned from her mother the value of hard work and how to overcome obstacles. Two big obstacles affected Heather's life while in college, the devastation of her living environment by Hurricane Rita and a severe car accident less than a year later. Nevertheless, she persevered in her education and ultimately received a degree in biology. Her love of the sciences and education led her to teach high school science for two years while pursuing a master's degree in biology.

However, Heather's love for medicine and caring for people never diminished. Her goal: keep moving forward! In fact, she states, "moving forward has allowed me to reach many destinations." One of which was the delight of her son. A single mother, Heather sees her son as a source of love and support in her efforts to become a physician. Being a mother produces in a woman the qualities of "patience, selflessness, and determination..." all characteristics of a great caregiver.

Though the road to medical school for Heather was unlike the traditional path, she stuck to her dream bolstered by both good and difficult experiences. She worked hard, stayed focused, was energized by the support of family and friends and ultimately has succeeded in her goal! Heather is the president of her medical school class and plans a career in pediatrics although she is keeping her options open until she has completed all of the medical school clinical rotations.

**CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR SUCCESS, HEATHER!**

## GUSTAVO GARZA

4TH YEAR STUDENT

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SAN ANTONIO

DENTAL SCHOOL



Gustavo Garza didn't initially enroll at UT Austin as a pre-dental student. His thoughts leaned toward medicine as a result of volunteering during high school at a local hospital in his hometown of Mission, Texas. He definitely liked the idea of "helping people as a satisfying career option." But he was unsure about that choice. Something just didn't connect. He knew that one of the aspects he wanted was "the ability to work hands-on with the patients."

Shortly thereafter he began shadowing a dentist and started seeing that dentists do, in fact, work directly with every patient, whether it is just a check-up or a prosthetic tooth insertion. He loved the amount of face-to-face time spent with patients. The other aspect of dentistry that appealed to Gustavo was the team atmosphere of the profession. As he puts it, "the dentist must work with a variety of people to run their practice and perform their work appropriately." As he discovered, dentistry just "felt right for me." Another part of what encouraged Gustavo to enter dentistry, and what drives him to continue, is the role that dentists play in society. "Being a positive addition to my community is something that money alone can't provide. It comes from always striving to provide patients with the best possible outcome from their visit to the dental office." This is particularly important in communities (such as Gustavo's) with a large percentage of families which are financially disadvantaged. "I can relate to people who cannot afford to go to the dentist and the challenges they face."

Gustavo's journey from an uncertain freshman in college to understanding better his personal and professional goals has been exciting for him. After graduation from dental school, he plans to serve his patients and his community in the Rio Grande Valley with excellence and compassion.

**BEST WISHES, GUSTAVO!**

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MATTHEW CHUMCHAL, PH.D.  
& LAURA LUQUE, PH.D.

## How Pre-Health Students Can Make the Most Of Their International Experience

So, you have decided to go abroad? Congratulations! A global learning experience offers incredible opportunities for personal and professional growth, and memories that will last a lifetime. In this article, we provide advice specifically geared toward pre-health students that will help you to make the most of your experience.

### Are international experiences feasible for Pre-Health students?

As a pre-health student, you are one of the busiest people on campus. You take a full load of courses, including tough science classes, study for entrance exams and participate in an array of extracurricular activities. It can be hard to imagine how you might fit an international experience into your schedule, but with some reflection on your goals and advance planning, it is possible.

#### TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

First, recognize that there are many types of international experiences available to college students. Your university likely offers semester-long as well as shorter summer or winter intersession programs for course credit. If not, it may be possible to enroll in international programs offered by other universities for credit that will transfer

to your home institution. A great benefit of participating in a university-sponsored study abroad program is that you can have confidence that faculty and administrators have vetted the program and found it to be academically appropriate, ethically sound and safe.

Alternatively, there are a variety of third-party study abroad providers that offer overseas programs to undergraduates. The experiences offered by these groups vary widely; some focus



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on academics while others emphasize service-learning or even recreation. Some providers may have academic agreements with your university, while others have no formal affiliation. Often, providers that officially collaborate with your university must provide reasonable assurance that they have planned for your health and safety and offer an appropriate learning environment. However, providers that offer study abroad experiences outside of the structure of your university may operate with very little oversight. In these cases, you are solely responsible for determining if the provider can deliver the experience they promised in a safe and ethical manner.

Finally, many students find opportunities to participate in international service or mission trips with family, healthcare practitioners in their community or even religious organizations. These experiences can be meaningful, but they usually are not professionally evaluated.

### **Considerations for clinical & service opportunities while abroad**

If you are like most pre-health students, you cannot wait for the day when you have the opportunity to care for your own patients. In addition, an important component of any application to

professional school is participation in health-related activities. As a result, international programs that promise opportunities to gain hands on, clinical experience may seem like perfect opportunities for pre-health students. However, be warned, participating in health-related activities while abroad can be fraught and any international experience with a clinical component must be approached with a great deal of caution.

To put it bluntly, providing healthcare without proper training and licensing is illegal and unethical. A simple way to determine whether an experience is legal or ethical is to ask yourself “would I be able to do this in the U.S.?” If the answer is no, then you should never do it while abroad. For the typical undergraduate student, extracting teeth, closing an incision with sutures, assisting in a birth and dispensing medications are all out of bounds. If, as an untrained student, you participate in these types of activities, you place patients at risk, make yourself liable for prosecution at home or abroad and violate basic ethical principles of clinical practice, which could lead admission committees to question with you are fit for a career in healthcare. Therefore, you should do your homework and avoid programs that are likely to put you in an

## **RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS CONSIDERING AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Core Competencies**

The Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/core-competencies/>

### **Choosing an ethical health-related experience abroad**

Guidelines for responsible short-term global health activities: developing common principles <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-018-0330-4>

University of Minnesota, Global Ambassadors for Patient Safety module <https://www.healthcareers.umn.edu/courses-and-events/online-workshops/global-ambassadors-patient-safety>

Seager, Greg. *When healthcare hurts: An evidence based guide for best practices in global health initiatives*. AuthorHouse, 2012.

### **Policies related to prerequisite courses completed during a study abroad or other international experience**

Texas medical school coursework policies <https://www.tmdsas.com>



unethical situation. Even if you are not directly practicing healthcare you must avoid situations that could lead members of the local community to assume you are a professional. For example, some programs allow undergraduates to wear white coats, which could lead patients to assume that these students are licensed practitioners. Generally, international experiences that include participation in existing health education campaigns or service activities that indirectly result in positive health outcomes (e.g. developing strategies to inform families about the benefits

of breast milk) are appropriate for undergraduate students while those that involve direct participation in healthcare are not. We have provided some resources at the end of this article with more information about ethical issues associated with participating in health-related activities while abroad.

### **Aligning your study abroad experience with AAMC's Core Competencies**

You may be wondering: "if undergraduate students should avoid situations where they may be asked to practice healthcare, then what is the value of an international experience for a pre-health student?" Although participation in health-related experiences is an important part of your development as an applicant, it is just one part. For many students, it may not even be the most important part. For example, the American Association of Medical Colleges has developed 15 core competencies, or desirable traits, for entering medical students (and we would argue that these competencies are relevant to students interested in any area of healthcare, not just medicine). We note that "clinical skills" appears nowhere on the list of core competencies and we are confident that most admissions committees would agree that an accredited professional school is the only appropriate place to learn these skills.

So, what are the traits found on the list of core competencies? They include inter- and intrapersonal competencies such as social skills,

cultural competence, ethical responsibility to self and others and resilience and adaptability. A study abroad program or other international experience provides an excellent opportunity for you to grow in these areas and others. Here are a few examples:

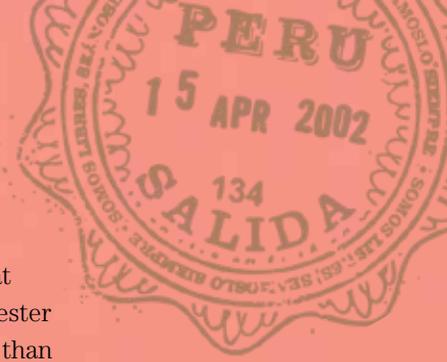
#### **SOCIAL SKILLS**

Successfully navigating your international experience will require strong social skills. For example, while abroad, students often realize that the fast-paced nature of life in the U.S. and direct communication style used by Americans is not typical throughout much of the world. Spending time internationally can help you learn to pay attention to social and behavioral cues of others and make appropriate adjustments to your own behavior. As a healthcare provider, learning to recognize your patients' subtle, non-verbal cues that they are afraid, they do not understand your instructions, or that they do not have the capacity to comply with your directives, is critical to providing appropriate care.

#### **CULTURAL COMPETENCE**

Unique socio-cultural factors in countries around the world lead to patterns of behavior that are different from those common in the U.S. Obvious examples (that are also of practical importance to any world traveler) are norms related to everyday activities like dress or tipping for good service. An international experience provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate that you are mature enough to research cultural norms





in the places you will visit, learn to recognize these differences while you are abroad and make respectful adjustments to your expectations and conduct. As a healthcare provider, the majority of your patients will be different from you (i.e. different age, race, gender, physical ability, socioeconomic status, etc.). Learning to respect cultural norms or practices that are different from your own now will make you a more effective provider in the future.

### **ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **TO SELF & OTHERS**

Although we have tried to make the case that pre-health students can learn a great deal from any study abroad experience, you may still choose an international experience with a healthcare component, which could put your ethical decision making to the test. Because healthcare providers carry out actions that can have a significant effect on their patient's health and livelihood, they have a responsibility to behave in ways that do not cause unjustified harm or suffering. An international experience can provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your limitations, and learn to say "no" when asked to participate in an activity beyond your level of training.

#### **RESILIENCE & ADAPTABILITY**

There is no experience like international travel to test your resilience and ability to adapt. Multi-leg flights, public transportation, lost luggage and communication in an unfamiliar language are all part of a typical international experience. Some

students find the challenges associated with breaking out of their routine to be exhilarating while others struggle to keep their composure. No matter what category you fall into, proving to yourself that you can successfully travel abroad, integrate into a new culture, make friends and learn something along the way is an intensely satisfying experience that can help you feel more confident when you experience the unexpected as a student or practitioner.

#### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

A global learning experience offers you a wealth of opportunities to prove to admissions committees that you possess the pre-professional competencies that they are seeking in students. The experience may even help you identify those areas where you could benefit from additional growth.

### **Planning your experience**

#### **FIRST IDENTIFY YOUR GOALS**

When you are deciding whether to go abroad, ask yourself the following questions: Why do I want to go abroad? What do I expect to get out of this experience? What skills do I bring? What are my limitations? Answering these questions is the first step toward identifying the best experience for you.

#### **TIMING AND COST**

Once you have decided that an international experience is for you, you should meet with your advisor, preferably early in your college career to discuss the ideal time to go abroad. Depending on your major and career

goals, you may learn that one semester is better than another to be away from campus or that going abroad is more achievable if you take courses in a different sequence than your peers. Whatever the case, the sooner you start the conversation with your advisor the easier it will be to fit an international experience into your academic plan.

If you are planning an international experience that will provide course credit, be sure to talk to your advisor about how this could affect your application to professional school. Professional schools have policies about what types of study abroad or international credits they will accept, and you should understand this prior to going overseas.

Meet with representatives from your study abroad office to learn which opportunities are available to you. In addition, your study abroad office can provide information about scholarships and may have insight into which programs have historically worked well for pre-health students or students with similar majors. Some students find it difficult to fit in a study abroad experience without taking a "gap" year between graduation and matriculation to professional school. The thought of a gap year is off-putting to some students, but do not dismiss the idea too quickly. For most students, delaying their application to professional school by a year

(or more) to study abroad could certainly be justified by all that can be learned from a quality international experience.

## Practical advice for getting the most out of your study abroad experience

### PRE-TRIP RESEARCH

Taking the time to prepare before your trip is the first step towards a successful experience. Even if travel is being arranged for you, you should understand the basic logistics of your trip. Where are you going? Where is the airport in relation to your final destination? What is the currency and exchange rate in the country you will be visiting? Are credit cards widely accepted and, if so, which ones? Is tipping expected? Do not be passive when it comes to logistics. By taking an active role in planning the “details” of your trip, you will have a richer, and safer experience.

Without a doubt, you should inform yourself about the history and politics of the country you are visiting. How long has the country existed in its current form? What are the major ethnic groups? What is the form of government? Since you are interested in healthcare, understanding a little bit about major public health issues and the health care system should also be of interest to you. Developing a basic understanding of these issues prior to departure will make the trip much more meaningful by providing you with important context.

### WHILE ABROAD

Plan to be fully engaged in your experience and take advantage of every opportunity to learn. Talk to your study abroad instructors, your host family and even your Uber drivers about what you observe around you and ask them to help you understand your experiences.

Keep a journal; list your observations and questions along with anything that surprises you, causes joy, wonder, stress or anxiety. Your journal entries will not only help you make sense of your experiences, but they may prove invaluable when writing application essays or preparing for professional school interviews.

During your free time, take a walk or ride public transportation and observe the daily life of those around you. If you are in an international city, spend time away from areas that cater to tourists. Although sightseeing at major “tourist destinations” is sometimes an important part of a travel experience, these areas will not necessarily give you a sense of the daily life of the people whose country you are visiting (remember those core competencies).

At a minimum, learn to say hello and thank you in the language of the people you are visiting. This is a great way to demonstrate respect and endear yourself to your hosts.

### BACK HOME

Share your experience with others but focus on what you learned,

how you were challenged and the personal growth that took place, not simply where you visited and what you did. When you return to the U.S., seek out faculty members or mentors with international experience who may be able to help you debrief. Doing so will help you process and frame your experience. Do not be surprised if at first you cannot find the words to describe your trip fully. It often takes time and reflection to process the meaning of your experiences.

### WHAT IF IT IS NOT FEASIBLE TO STUDY ABROAD?

Despite all the benefits associated with studying abroad, doing so may be too expensive, incompatible with your personal life or interrupt your academic trajectory. If you find yourself unable to study abroad, you can find many of the benefits associated with an international experience in the U.S. Look for opportunities in your local community to broaden your horizons and develop the core competencies desired by professional schools. Engaging with communities different from your own (e.g. refugees, people experiencing homelessness, etc) in your own backyard can be just as challenging and rewarding as doing so while abroad.

### Final Thought

At the end of the day, taking the time to meet someone who is different from you, either locally or abroad, will enhance your life, help you grow and prepare you for future interactions in your career.

Safe travels! •



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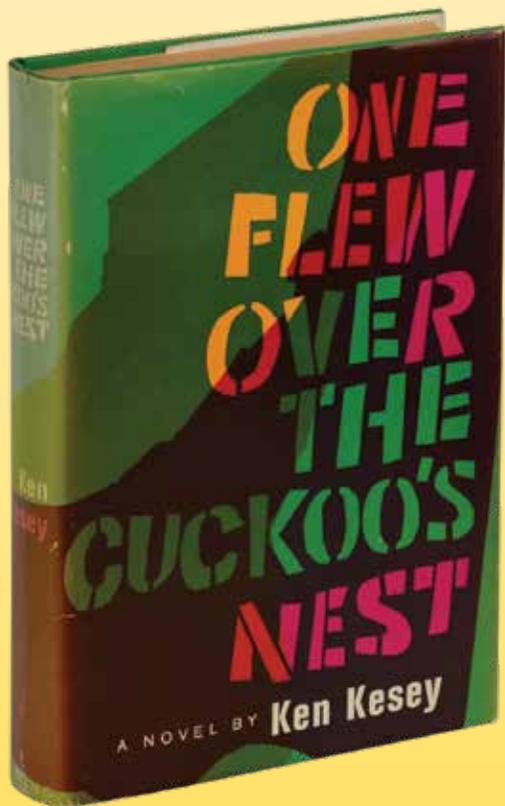
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# ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

## BOOK REVIEW

DOYEN RAINEY, M.A.T.

### TWENTY YEARS AFTER READING KEN KESEY'S

*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, I still gasp at remembering its climax. In addition to delivering a quick and memorable read, *Cuckoo's Nest* contains a beautifully important lesson for healthcare providers.

*Cuckoo's Nest* takes place in a mental hospital, and its characters are colorful, as you can imagine. Delightful prose and snappy dialogue are delivered through the eyes of one long-time patient, "Chief" Bromden, a quiet onlooker whose poetically hyper-vivid visuals suggest his deep empathy...and psychiatric distress. Much of his distress comes from the book's tyrant, Nurse Ratched, who embodies the institution more so than its white walls and brick exterior; the place is practically held together by her malignant gravitas.

Mildred Ratched's kindness rivals that of *The Grinch*; she is hateful, petty, shrewd, and manipulative. As a nurse—a caretaker—she is perfectly monstrous. Patients fear the Big Nurse, who belittles and emasculates her patients with cutting words and psychiatric therapies that banish their dreams and gentle their behaviors. Patients are sometimes released from Nurse Ratched's ward, but none emerge healed. On the American Film Institute's list of "100 Greatest Heroes and Villains," Nurse Ratched ranks formidably at #5, a breath below Darth Vader [#3] and well above Amon Goeth, the sadistic death camp commandant from *Schindler's List* [#15].

The lesson in *Nurse Ratched* is that she is so nearly a superb nurse. She has many enviable qualities: intelligence, work ethic, and precision. She follows professional guidelines exactly. Her records are tidy and her uniform spotless, bleached white and crisp as a carapace. She volunteers in her community and gives to charities. Under Nurse Ratched's watch, patients receive therapy, treatments are administered, and profits are never considered. Her ward functions more or less like a well-administered ward in 2020.

Nurse Ratched falls from superb nurse to monstrous tyrant because of a single attribute she lacks: compassion. Without it, her intelligence turns to conniving, her remarkable precision becomes a bureaucracy weaponized against patients and coworkers, and her "charity" serves only to belittle and shame. No healing comes from Nurse Ratched. No healing can come from Nurse Ratched because, without compassion, there simply is no healing in her.

As the story unfolds, readers discover how compassionless healthcare can be worse than no care at all.

If you only get to read one book this year, read *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Let its wordplay enchant you, its characters amuse you, and Nurse Ratched terrify you into never losing the compassionate heart that first drew you into a healing career.

*\*Louise Fletcher's chillingly-human portrayal of Nurse Ratched helped launch the 1975 film version to 9 Academy Award nominations and 5 wins: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Adapted Screenplay.*

Mr. Rainey is assistant director of the Health Professions Advising Center at the University of Texas at Dallas.

# BEING A HEALTHIER YOU IS ANXIETY IMPACTING YOUR ABILITY TO PROBLEM-SOLVE?

MATTHEW C. MEEKS, M.Ed.

**This article is going to be a bit different from some of the others you may read about applying to professional school.**

As a doctoral student of learning and behavior, I have studied how anxiety impacts learning, how it affects problem-solving abilities, and how it threatens our ability to be positive, active members of our communities. Let's be real, we all experience heightened levels of anxiety at times and most of us are aware of how it impacts our daily lives such as difficulty concentrating on important tasks, struggling to learn and synthesize new information, or uncertainty when navigating a complex admissions process (just to name a few). New research may provide an explanation for how and why anxiety sufferers could experience disruption of certain cognitive processes that are critical for everyday life, such as the ability to engage in problem-solving.

Think for just a moment about some of the decisions you will have to make in the process of obtaining admission to professional school: from constructing the best possible personal statement, to deciding

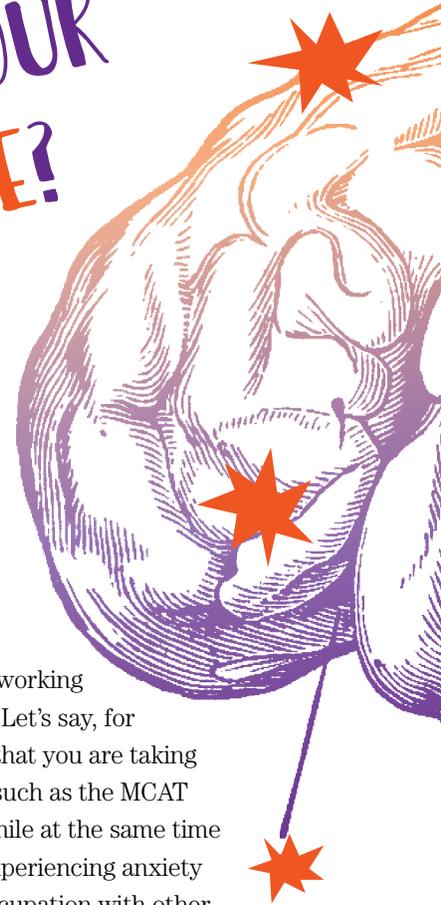
on your best possible responses to questions on the TMSAS application, to even thinking on your feet in those multiple mini interviews (MMI). You will make thousands of decisions throughout the application process (aka problem-solving), therefore it is critical to recognize signs of anxiety so that you can identify points of impact and take the necessary steps to monitor your well-being.

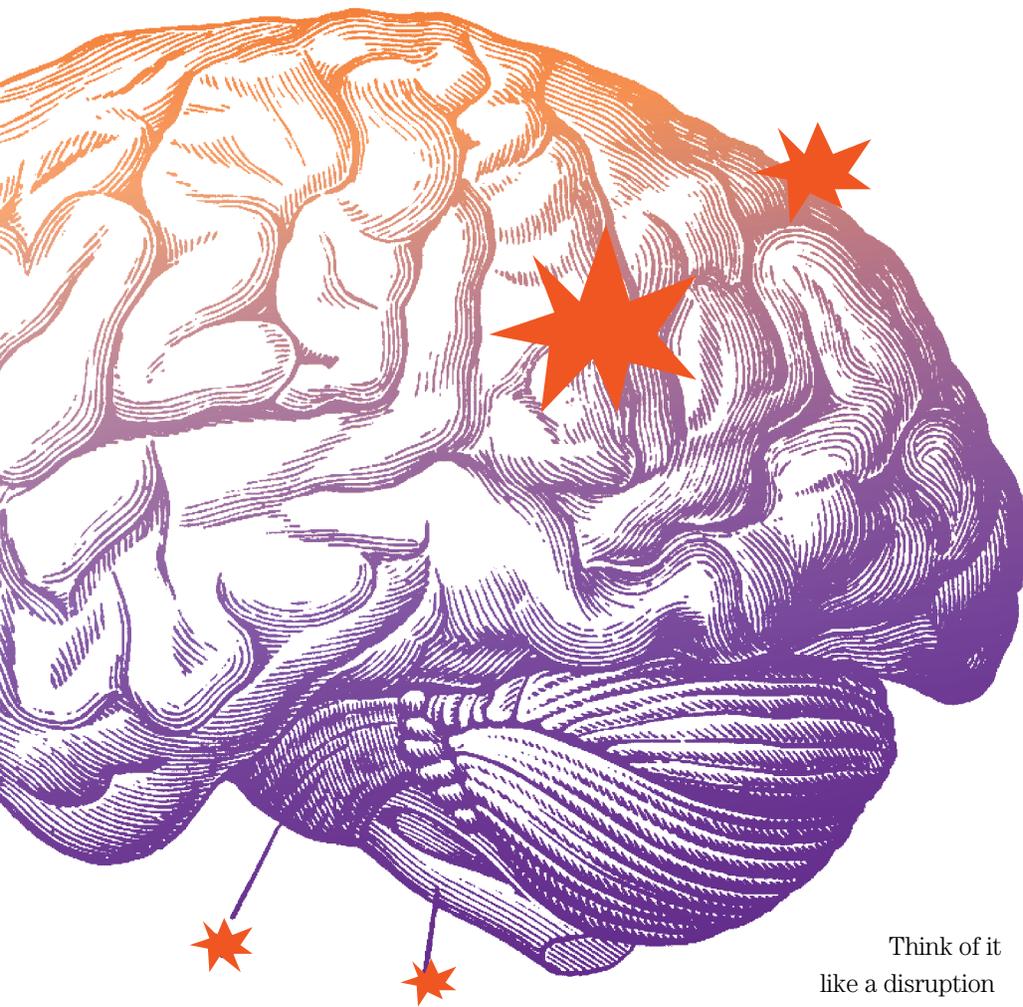
## The Connection between Cognition and Anxiety

Anxiety sufferers who find that problem-solving and decision-making have become more difficult may not be aware that the two could be connected. To better understand how anxiety impacts the cognitive processes involved in decision making, we need to understand both Attentional Control Theory and Autobiographical Memory Specificity. Attentional Control Theory explains how, when we experience anxiety, our attention is diverted to the things we believe to be causing our anxiety (aka environmental stimuli), thereby decreasing the level of cognitive processing available for other important processes (like problem-solving), and impacting the rate of

retrieval (working memory). Let's say, for example, that you are taking an exam, such as the MCAT or DAT, while at the same time you are experiencing anxiety or a preoccupation with other stressful variables, such as mounting relationship troubles or family issues. In this state, your rate of cognitive retrieval is diminished because your attention is diverted to this source of anxiety. Attentional control is critical in order to see our problems in their truest form, without the distraction of other environmental stimuli.

The next component in the problem-solving process involves the way our brains access the information necessary to assess our problems. Our brains are thought to store specific information about our pasts in an intricate structure which progresses from the facts we know about ourselves (like where we went to school growing up), to very specific events (such as what you wore on





your first day in that new job). The latter is called autobiographical memory specificity (AM), and it is a critical component in the problem-solving process because our brains use these episodic memories and our experiences from our past to precisely and efficiently frame problems.

**So, you may be asking, “why is anxiety impacting my ability to problem-solve?”**

Put simply, there is a correlation between our anxiety levels (particularly if this is a long-term, chronic state) and our ability to filter out the things we identify as a threat in order for our brains to more accurately concentrate on the retrieval of information necessary for solving problems.

Think of it like a disruption in the mental processes of your brain, slowing down your ability to access all the important details that are locked in there – details that could help you solve a problem instead of preventing you from the level of patience and understanding required to do so effectively. In other words, when your anxiety levels are high, your brain is working with incredible inefficiency.

**General Anxiety and Social Decision-Making**

General anxiety not only impacts your ability to devise solutions to problems that arise in your life as a student or a professional, but it can also impact problem-solving abilities within your social life as well. So, figuring out the best way to handle the conflict with that one friend becomes even more

difficult when experiencing anxiety and may explain your irrational response to the situation (i.e. losing your temper). The concern for sufferers of chronic anxiety is that their condition remains unchecked and that they may neglect to pursue help, thinking that their anxiety is temporary or perhaps even confusing it with other conditions or issues. So oftentimes, individuals self-medicate or wait until they experience a meltdown before getting help.

Let me be clear—I am not a doctor, psychologist, or licensed professional counselor. This article is not meant to help you diagnose any issues you are experiencing. My objective is to help you think about behaviors that you, or perhaps even a friend, may be experiencing and to encourage you to seriously consider reaching out for help, particularly if you recognize that problem-solving has become more difficult and you think it may be connected to anxiety.

**Key Takeaway #1: Recognize when and why it is time to get help.**

I recently conducted an interview with a school administrator who described how many of her high performing students struggle to admit when there is a problem and will allow their symptoms to significantly worsen before reaching out for help.

If you sense that anxiety is impacting you in any way, shape, or form, then it is best to reach out for professional help. You may think, “My anxiety

## RESEARCH ON ANXIETY & PROBLEM SOLVING

Psychologist David Hallford, from the University of Deakin in Melbourne Australia, published an experimental study in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* on how anxiety affects problem-solving through decreased AM specificity. Dr. Hallford conducted a series of experiments in the United States and Canada to assess two specific criteria involved in the autobiographical memory retrieval: (1) Frequency of rumination (thinking negative thoughts), (2) autobiographical memory retrieval (the level of detail that could be recalled from participants' pasts). He then administered the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale to assess their anxiety levels. Once all of the above data about the state of their mental health was taken, participants were then administered the Means-End Problem Solving Task to assess the level of detail participants were able to employ in solving these problems. Dr. Hallford hypothesized that participants with higher indicators on the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Test would demonstrate less detail in their problem-solving ability.

Following the experiment, Dr. Hallford confirmed his hypothesis that heightened anxiety is associated with a lower number of listed problem-solving steps and with less detail given; additionally, this anxiety involves increased rumination, which causes reduced AM specificity. He proved that there, indeed, existed a relationship between anxiety levels of participants and the number of problem-solving steps they were able to list. In addition, participants with elevated anxiety levels also struggled to retrieve specific event-level memories from their pasts. Put simply, this means that there is a connection between the level of detail participants with anxiety could remember about their pasts and their ability to list specific, detailed steps to solving problems they were presented.

Hallford, D. J., Noory, N., & Mellor, D. (2018). Reduced autobiographical memory specificity as a mediating factor between general anxiety symptoms and performance on problem-solving tasks. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 32(5), 641-647. doi: 10.1002/acp.3428.  
<https://mededits.com/medical-school-application/do-i-need-clinical-experience-get-into-medical-school/>

only impacts me, so what does it matter?" I think this is a false line of inquiry that we often ask ourselves in an attempt to avoid doing the right thing. But first, consider just how important you are to so many people in your life. Then think about your objective to become an independent health practitioner. It is important to consider how these long-lasting symptoms can impact your effectiveness and threaten your ability to achieve your goals.

### Key Takeaway #2:

#### There's Definitely Hope.

You may be thinking, "this all sounds a bit scary, what if it's too late?" It's never too late. The important thing to remember here is not to neglect your need to seek help. There are a whole host of helpful coping mechanisms and other options available for individuals who suffer from anxiety. Remember, the concern is that over time, and if left untreated, anxiety can begin to impact the cognitive processes important for problem-solving. It is important to recognize that you are not alone—and that seeking help is the responsible thing to do.

### Key Takeaway #3:

#### Getting Help to Be Most Effective in Your Community

This is something I had to learn as I got older. I try to run two miles every single day. Not just because it makes me healthier, but because when I am healthier (both mentally and physically) I am a more productive and active member of my community. As a professional school applicant, you have already made the decision that you want to live a life of service to others and make the world a better place. That requires that you are intentional about caring for yourself—including your mental and emotional well-being. That leaves me with my final thought: reaching out for help is not just about you, it's about doing it for your family, your friends, and your future patients.

So if you feel you may have anxiety, consider consulting a professional who can offer expert advice on how to manage that anxiety. The truth is, the world needs you—a healthy you.

**Mr. Meeks is Director of the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service and a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University.**



# INTERVIEWING FOR SUCCESS

RYAN GRAY, M.D.

If you have made it to the interview, you have navigated your pre-health journey successfully enough to have a school want to have a conversation with you. Whether you are applying to medical school, dental school, or veterinary school, you need to have a level of competence in your ability to have that conversation. If you want to be a vet, you are communicating with the owners of the pets and your colleagues. If you are going to be a dentist or physician, you will need to communicate with your colleagues, patients, and their families.

Unfortunately, when you apply to any of these professional schools, it is hard to show your ability to communicate in your application. Your letter writers may be able to speak to your level of ability to communicate, but many times that does not come through well enough.

Almost all medical, dental, and veterinary schools rely on a medical school interview. In this article, I hope to give you some insight into what these schools are looking for and how you can best prepare for them. After reading this article, you should be more at ease with your ability to perform well on interview day.

## JUST BE YOU

No matter which professional school you are interviewing for, at the end of the day, the interview process is trying to determine that you are a normal person who can communicate well.

Your job during the interview is not to prove your ability to do well in school. Your job on interview day is not to prove that you are passionate about science and want to help people/animals. Your job on interview day is also not to show how amazing you are. If you are lucky enough to get an interview at any of these schools, you have already proven yourself to that school to a certain level. They know you are qualified enough; now, they just want to say hello.

Hopefully, you read the previous paragraph and took a sigh of relief. When I talk to students about the interview, they are relieved that they do not have to prove anything. They are grateful that they only need to be themselves. *Your job on interview day is to be yourself and communicate with the interviewer in a way that shows who you are, not how you think you are amazing.*

## COFFEE SHOP CONVERSATION

I like to call an interview a *coffee shop conversation* because, at the end of the day, that is how you hope your interview will go. If you can imagine going and meeting a spouse, or significant other, at a coffee shop, think

Dr. Gray was a flight surgeon in the U.S. Air Force and is now podcast host and owner of [medicalschoollhq.net](http://medicalschoollhq.net).

about the process leading up to that encounter. Are you sitting in the car worried about how you are going to say hi, how you are going to talk about the week that you had, what you learned from it, and how it made you a better person? You did not. You walked in, sat down, and you communicated like a human being.

If you can do this on your interview day, then you have been successful. The best interviews are always the ones where the student walks out, thinking, "Wow, I didn't know we were going to talk about Star Wars for the last 30 minutes," or "I didn't think they would care so much about my prior career so much. They didn't even ask me what my greatest strengths or weaknesses are. How do they know I'm going to be a good doctor?" Most interviewers just want to have a good, engaging conversation. That is all.

On an episode of my podcast, *The Premed Years*, I did an interview with a director of admissions at a medical school, who had told me that the biggest feedback that she gets from interviewers is that, too often, when they leave an interview, they have no idea who the student is. All they know is that the student came in and recited what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. This is not the reaction you want to get from an interviewer. You can have stellar stats and not get into school because you didn't do well on your interview day.

### **COMMUNICATE THE BASICS**

There are some key things that you need to be aware of and that you need to understand about you for your interview day. First of all, *you need*

*to be able to answer the most basic opening statement, which is "tell me about yourself."* Most students take this opportunity to dive into why they want to be a doctor, vet, or dentist. They recite their resume and try to highlight what they think makes them unique, and a strong applicant. I recently had a student highlight the different countries she has lived in and the different schools she has gone to—"forcing" an agenda of being exposed to cultural diversity, which the interviewer doesn't need to hear. Knowing the student has lived in several countries should make it obvious that she was exposed to different cultures.

In reality, what you need to do with this opportunity is to talk about you as a person, outside of the things that you think will make you an amazing professional. You do not need to prove that this is what you are meant to be. You need to show them who you are. You do not need to "force" an agenda showing how competent of a physician you are going to be. You need to be you.

I like to think about this prompt differently. I want to have students think more along the lines of where are you from and what do you do for fun? Talk about your family and your upbringing. That shows the interviewer a little about what has shaped you. Again, don't come from an angle of how you were raised and how it will help you in the future. Don't talk about your parent's hard work and how they taught you that, or how a sense of service has been instilled in you by your grandparents. Talk about the activities outside of

what you have done to prove you want to serve people. Activities like enjoying travel or what is your favorite place that you have visited? Or do you enjoy cooking, movies or reading? These are the types of responses that will allow the interviewer to connect with you as a person and not have a barrier of an interviewee trying to force your agenda. Make it a coffee shop conversation, and you may find yourself talking about the last movie you saw for the next 30 minutes.

### **COMMUNICATE WHY YOU ARE DOING THIS**

You also need to understand why you're doing this. The interviewer will almost certainly ask you why you want to be a doctor, why you want to be a dentist, or why you want to be a vet. You need to understand your story and the journey you have been on to get to this point. Liking science, being good at science, or any other variation of that is cliché and should not be discussed. Wanting to help people/pets is cliché and should be avoided. Those things are usually foundational to this journey, not the reason for it.

Your answer needs to be around your journey to this point. It needs to be a condensed story of your journey since most of you have had long journeys that span many years and can fill up the whole 20-30-minute conversation. You should talk about what sparked your interest in this field, and potentially what your most memorable or most impactful experience has been since you have started exploring this field as a career. Let them know why you continue to want to be a doctor or dentist or vet.

I want to reiterate one last time that your aptitude in science classes is not a good reason for wanting to be a physician. Your service-oriented upbringing is not a good reason to want to be a dentist. Yes, wanting to help people or pets, and liking science are kind of core to this whole process. Those are prereqs before you even get to this point, so take that out of your vocabulary for your applications and the interview process.

You should understand your strengths and weaknesses. You should understand your failures, your obstacles, what you've learned from these experiences, how you've grown, how you've overcome, what you're doing to work on your weaknesses, what you've learned from your failures, and what you're doing so that they don't happen again. If you struggle with those, ask your friends and family members for their perspective.

### **COMMUNICATE WHY YOU APPLIED TO THAT SCHOOL**

You should also be prepared to talk about the school you are interviewing at and why you want to go there. You need to do thorough research into the school. Find out what specific programs they have and curriculum they have, and how they set up their school and other things that you may be exposed to while being part of that school. Check out their website and social media, like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook for information and news they release.

Having friends at the school is not a great thing to say. Having friends or family members who are alumni isn't a strong reason to go to a school. Location and support in that area can be important to discuss, but I always like to talk about that last.

### **THE MULTIPLE MINI INTERVIEW**

The multiple mini interview (MMI) is a newer interview format that started in Canada and is now spreading across the United States to help schools better evaluate students

during the interview process. These stations have students worried because they are different, but I hope that you can take a second to understand how they are actually helping you. Not having a great station won't necessarily keep you from being accepted. On the other hand not connecting in a one-on-one interview, when there are only two or three, can easily cause a rejection.

The multiple mini interview stations are small situational-judgment-like tests very similar to the CASPer, which was created by the same people who created the multiple mini interview. Every school operates the multiple mini interview differently, and what you see at one school may be different than another school. At its core, the typical structure of the MMI includes two minutes to read a scenario and 6-8 minutes in the station. There may be an actor in the station, an interviewer, or another student. The better the job that you can do at pretending that the acting-based scenario you are in is real-life, the better you will do. The better

*continued on p43*



# Nichole Castillo

**What is your favorite part of working with applicants?**

My favorite part of working with applicants is being able to convey to them that we get it – applying to professional school is a huge deal! We know that by the time applicants are ready to submit their application, they’ve already invested time, money, and energy into the process. We also know that the stakes can seem high, and this can result in some moments of anxiety. So, when we speak to an applicant over the phone, or encounter them at one of the fairs, it’s a nice feeling to be able to assuage some of those fears by answering their questions and helping them to better understand the process.

**How long have you worked at TMDSAS?**

I joined TMDSAS in the summer of 2017, and so the entering class cycle of 2021 will mark my third full application cycle. Prior to coming to TMDSAS I was a middle school Spanish teacher for nearly a decade, so it has been quite the change! But I enjoy being able to work with our applicants, many of whom are students that have now reached a new milestone in their educational career.

**Tell us about your role at TMDSAS.**

I started at TMDSAS as an Application Processor and moved into the role of Academic Evaluator in the Spring of 2018. Since then I have been able to grow my knowledge and skills with TMDSAS, and in addition to working on the team that reviews

and transmits applications (over 7700 in EY 2020), I am the Editor-in-Chief of the TMDSAS Application Handbook, which is our #1 resource for applicants as they work through the application. I also assist in coordinating other applicant outreach efforts, such as our annual Applicant Survey. The feedback from applicants really drives the improvements we make to our handbook and other resources, such as our website, course listings, podcast, APPLY Magazine articles, and more!

**Any advice to TMDSAS applicants?**

I would advise applicants to really avail themselves of the myriad resources they have. Of course, I’m referring to the resources that we publish on the TMDSAS website, but I’m also talking about the interpersonal resources that exist too! There are so many people in our lives with a depth of knowledge and abilities who can help us to identify and reach our goals. For many applicants, this might mean visiting their advisors for academic planning, forming a study group to prepare for admissions tests, or getting help from a friend to review and critique their essays. There are lots of ways that another person’s perspective can help in this process, so be sure to take advantage of that!

**Tell us more about yourself!**

I am a native of Austin, TX and earned my B.A. in Spanish Language Teaching at UT Austin (hook ’em). I subsequently earned my M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Policy from UT Arlington. As mentioned, I used to be a classroom teacher, and although I am no longer an educator, I appreciate being a resource to applicants as they continue their educational journey.

**What do you like to do when you’re not at work?**

I love spending time with family and friends, going to the movies, eating good food (preferably spicy!), and traveling with my partner, Adam, when we have the opportunity. I’m also a mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters, and I have a blast hanging with my Little.



*Thank you, Nichole,*  
**for your efforts at TMDSAS on behalf of the students!**

### Clinical experience *continued*

for your personal statement and are often great talking points in an interview.

Admissions committees are not assessing your clinical acumen, but we are trying to get a sense of your understanding of the medical profession. We are trying to assess your ability to handle the stress and time management constraints that physicians undergo. I would encourage you to develop personal relationships with shadowing physicians and anyone that takes care of patients, so that they can provide wisdom and insight to help you understand what is important in addressing the needs of patients.

Finally, as you start developing your pathway towards applying for medical school, remember to keep patient-centered clinical experiences in the forefront of your mind. Ultimately, admissions officers are looking for those attributes that we know will help develop empathetic and kind physicians. Gaining valuable clinical experiences will not only help you in the process of becoming a competitive applicant for medical school, but it will help you develop the attributes that we want in a physician. •

### The W's of Letters *continued*

Be prepared to suggest a deadline for uploading your letter to TMDSAS. Many people like and work well with deadlines. Do not be shy about providing a gentle, courteous reminder if the deadline you established is getting close and it does not appear that your letter has been uploaded yet. Letters are an important component of your application and you need to take ownership of making sure that they are submitted. When your letter writer has submitted their letter, do not forget to thank them. A handwritten thank you note is an excellent gesture.

Being thoughtful about the process of securing letters of evaluation will help your application to professional school. Hopefully, the next “**W**” word you will hear, after the admissions process is complete, is “Welcome” to the incoming professional school class! •

### Interviewing *continued*

that you can communicate your thoughts and your thought processes, the better you will do.

Many students are concerned about the MMI because they think they need to know very specific information like medical laws and medical ethics, politics, and policy. Medical schools understand that you don't have this information. They are not expecting you to know this information. They will want you to have a superficial understanding of healthcare and how it works in this country. From that knowledge, you should be able to communicate your thoughts on how to improve it, what you like and what you don't like.

*Whether in an MMI or traditional interview, the goal is not to have the right answer. The goal is to hear your thoughts.* Don't be afraid if your thoughts and beliefs are different from the interviewer's thoughts and beliefs. The interviewers should leave their own biases and personal thoughts to themselves. They are there to evaluate your ideas and the reasons behind your thoughts, which is why your thought process is very important to communicate.

If you go in with the right attitude, the MMI should be fun. I love hearing from students who email me and let me know that they took my advice, treated it like real-life, and had great conversations.

### IN SUMMARY

If there is only one thing that you take away from this article, it is that you need to be yourself on your interview day (and in your application in general). You don't need to sell yourself during your interview. Have a great conversation and show them that you are going to be a great member of the community and class. They know that you are hard-working—everyone at this stage is. They know that you are dedicated to being a doctor/dentist/vet—everyone at this stage is. Separate yourself by being you, and your interviewers will cherish the unique conversations from that. Good luck! •

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