

THE MAGAZINE OF THE TEXAS MEDICAL AND DENTAL SCHOOLS APPLICATION SERVICE

2019-2020

# APPLY

## REACH YOUR GOALS

4 Strategies for a  
GREAT APPLICATION

HOLISTIC APPLICATION REVIEW

BEYOND THE  
NUMBERS

DON'T FREAK OUT  
SOOTHE YOUR STRESS

*maximize*  
your **gap**  
**year**



# APPLY

is a publication of the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service. It is the mission of TMDAS to provide excellence in technical and customer services, accuracy and timeliness in application processing, and dedication to unbiased policies and procedures in the professional school admission process to student applicants and participating professional schools.

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# From the Editor



## DR. JAMES SCOTT WRIGHT

It seems daunting. The rise ahead of you, the slope which is at times gradual and at others steep. And then there are the rocks. Blocking the way ahead...how to traverse those? But, your greatest fear is the cliff. The drop off from which there is no recovery. That fatal edge that you seem to pass by frequently which instills fear in you, the fear of failure on your journey.

What drives you to continue? To endure the fear, the difficulties, the slips and tumbles? What is it that keeps your focus and determination? Of course, it's the summit. The goal of the journey. You've been dreaming of reaching that point for many years. Planning. Preparing. Charting the right path with the help of expert climbers and those who have succeeded before. Reaching that peak is all you think about; the very essence of who you are and want to be.

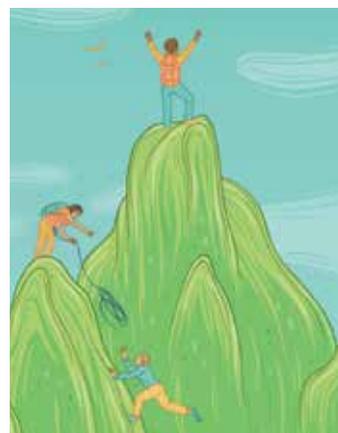
The trials, trips and falls. The exhilaration, energy, and the exhaustion. The journey. The summit.

Can you relate to this metaphor? It's all about you. Your pre-health journey toward the dream of a career in healthcare. We've all seen the difficulties of that path. Organic chemistry. Genetics. The MCAT or DAT. The application itself or the professional school interview. These are the cliffs and boulders in the way of achieving your goal, the summit. There are others as well. For each of you the journey is a little different; the difficulties and the fears are individual to your circumstances.

The cover illustration of this edition of **APPLY Magazine** tells the story. And it's our goal to give you, through the content of this publication, some tools to use on your journey. There are articles to encourage you, to challenge you, and to assist you. Additionally, TMDAS offers many tools on our website that can help in getting you to that summit. Podcasts and videos, articles and other resources. All are available for your journey.

So, lace up your boots. Get out the backpack. Meet up with your guide and climbing partners. Fully prepared and ready to succeed!

**LET'S SET OUT ON THE JOURNEY.**



# THE ADVENTURES OF ZANDER AND TAYLOR

## or How I Found Gold in the Pre-health Advising Office

BY DEBRAH BECK, PH.D. AND  
KAREN DE OLIVARES, PH.D.



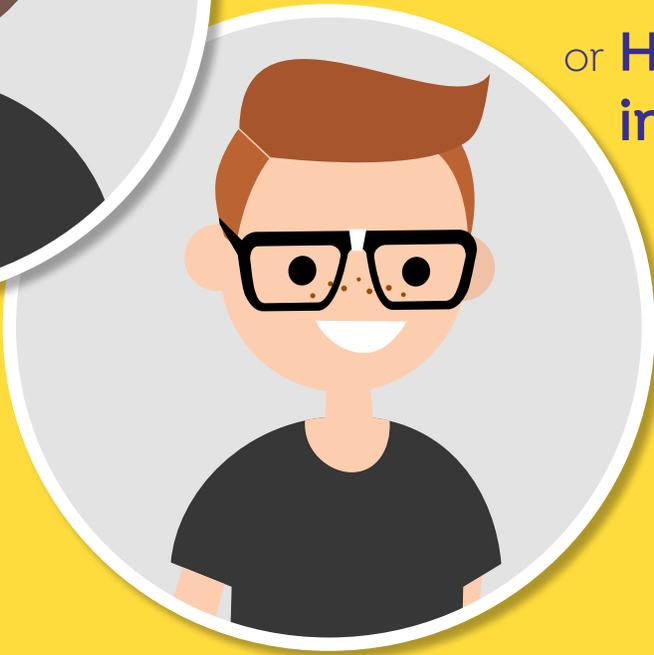
**ZANDER** I just talked to my pre-health advisor and I'm so glad I did!

**TAYLOR** I'm afraid I did too... He said he didn't want to talk to me.

**ZANDER** That doesn't sound like the Dr. Jack I know! Did he really say he didn't want to talk with you?

**TAYLOR** Well, he acted like that.

**ZANDER** Hmm... I know someone broke into his lab and stole his laptop yesterday so he had a lot on his mind. It had all that experimental data on rare South American fauna on it, so he's been pretty down. Did you have an appointment or go to his open hours?



**TAYLOR** Nah, I just dropped by his lab. He's always messing around there, but he doesn't have time to talk to me!

**ZANDER** He posts the times he's available on his office door and on his lab. He will set up an appointment with you. Did you email him to see when he's available?

**TAYLOR** I didn't know I could do that. Does he even know anything about how to get into vet school?

**ZANDER** Sure! I'm pre-med, but preparing to be a vet isn't all that different than getting ready to apply to medical school. You know we

both need shadowing, volunteering, great grades and good entrance test scores. We'll be applying next year, you know!

**TAYLOR** *Next year????!!!!*

Yikes! Here I am trying to finish up my sophomore year and I don't even know if I have all the classes I need.

**ZANDER** Yep! Dr. Jack has all that information and how to apply through the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service – or TMDAS for short.

**TAYLOR** But you didn't list the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical School in that mouthful of letters...

**ZANDER** Yeah, I know, but Dr. Jack said that he's helping someone apply to the vet school right now... using **TMDAS**. He told me to look on [www.TMDAS.com](http://www.TMDAS.com) for all kinds of information about getting ready

to apply. Plus, Enrique Jasso at TMDAS in Austin is amazing and knows a ton of stuff about medical, dental AND vet school applications. AND he will share it with all of us for FREE!

**TAYLOR** So then I don't even need to see Dr. Jack.

**ZANDER** Wrong. Believe it or not, Dr. Jack also knows about applying to health professions schools outside the state. He also knows the classes here. AND he's writing my committee letter.

**TAYLOR** What's that? Is that for JUMP?

**ZANDER** JUMP? Huh?

**TAYLOR** Yeah, that deal for medical school.

**ZANDER** Oh, you mean JAMP – Joint Admission Medical Program. It CAN give a bit of a jump, but you must work to stay eligible. Check [www.texasjump.org](http://www.texasjump.org) and Dr. Jack knows all about it. He writes recommendations for that program, but the committee letter is an evaluation sent to medical and dental schools. I don't think colleges of veterinary medicine ask for those, but you should check with Dr. Jack. He can talk with you about letters of recommendation. Not all universities have committee letters,

but pre-health advisors still help with recommendation letters.

**TAYLOR** Well, are you sure that application service handles all three kinds of health professions schools? Veterinary Medicine, Dental and Medical schools?

**ZANDER** Absolutely! I checked out [www.TMDAS.com](http://www.TMDAS.com) and it handles all the applications for all the public medical and dental schools and the vet school. Mr. Jasso has two Facebook pages – one for non-traditional applicants and the other is for ANY question you want to know about applying... and that information came directly from our pre-health advisor, Dr. Jack! He even knows about other professions if you decide you don't want to be a vet. I overheard him telling Oli that she would need more than 700 hours working and shadowing a vet! Or was it 100 hours? I forget. But we don't even have to have that many to get into med school! And that doesn't include all the experience you need with both large and small animals!

**TAYLOR** Really? LARGE animals? **Like LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS?** Oh, my! Would it count to maybe work in Dr. Jack's lab, helping take care of those rare South American fauna? Those things are GI-NORMOUS!

**ZANDER** Gosh, I'm not sure, Taylor, about the large animal experience. I think Dr. Jack meant cows and horses and maybe the occasional elephant, but you'd better make an appointment to see Dr. Jack – he's the expert on how to get into ANY health professions program! You better go see him soon, so you can get all the prerequisite courses you need – I also heard that you need an advanced statistics course to get into TAMU! And that class has a bunch of prereqs too!

**TAYLOR** *Good grief*, no, I didn't know I had to do all of that, too! Maybe I'll see what he says is required for something easier... I wonder what it takes to be a dentist? I heard that dentists make a lot of money! Or maybe a brain surgeon!

**ZANDER** I have absolutely no idea, Taylor. **WHY DON'T YOU MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH DR. JACK?**

**TAYLOR** I'm afraid he will just tell me my grades aren't good enough to get into any health profession. I had





that bad semester when I first came to Texas Uphill University. To tell the truth, I made a C in my biology class – I’m afraid to go talk to him.

**ZANDER** Understandable, but Dr. Jack has all sorts of resources that might help – the tutoring center, the resource center, summer internships... he even knows about professors who may need help with their animals in the lab – you might even get paid to do it. How do you think he can help you if you don’t tell him what’s going on????!!

**TAYLOR** Maybe you’re right, Zander. You learned about all this extra stuff you must do to get into medical school from Dr. Jack?

**ZANDER** I sure did and he even helped me find study materials for the MCAT!



**TAYLOR MCAT?!**

**ZANDER** That’s the entrance test for pre-meds. The pre-vet students don’t take the MCAT. I believe Dr. Jack has information on the Pre-Health website that tells you all about the entrance test required for pre-vets.

**WREN** Hey all! Where are you off to?

**ZANDER:** Oh, hi, Wren! Taylor and I are headed over to the Advising Office to see if Taylor can get an appointment with Dr. Jack.

**WREN** Oh, I just saw him yesterday. He is so cool. He really does care about us... maybe even more than he cares about those rare South American fauna! I am so terrified about the DAT since I’m taking it Saturday! He told me about some cool ways to calm down... and he said to take time to rest and relax the day before... just ways to stay cool! So, Taylor, when are you taking the GRE?

**TAYLOR GRE?**

**ZANDER** I guess that must be the entrance test for pre-vets?

**WREN** Yes. I used to be a pre-vet student, but after talking to cool ole Dr. Jack, he helped me see that being a dentist was a better fit for me. I still like animals and everything, but I could never euthanize a dog or cat.

**TAYLOR** EUTHANIZE????!!!!!! The Rainbow Bridge? That big Chicken Coop in the Sky?

**ZANDER & WREN** GO SEE DR. JACK!

**WREN** He can help you find something you’d like to do for the rest of your life.

**TAYLOR** Wow! Maybe I could be a biology professor! Dr. Jack sounds like a cool guy after all. So, if I should still want to be a vet, do I have to treat snakes? And spiders? And chickens? I am deathly afraid of chickens. And I don’t care too much for lizards... and salamanders... and toads... I don’t do slimy OR slithery...

**WREN & ZANDER:**  
**GO SEE DR. JACK!**

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

*In memory of one of the best pre-health advisors, Dr. Jack Pierce of Austin College.*

# APPLICATION TIMELINE

for the **Entering Class of 2020**

<p><b>MAY 1</b> Application Opens, 8am CT</p>		<p><b>MID-JULY</b> THROUGH <b>MID-JAN</b> <b>Medical &amp; Dental School Interviews</b></p>	
<p><b>OCT 1</b> Application Deadline, 5pm CST</p>	<p><b>OCT 15</b> Deadline for <b>Supporting Documents</b> (Letters of Evaluation and Transcripts)</p>	<p><b>Oct 1</b> Medical Schools <b>Non-Texas Residents &amp; Special Programs</b> Acceptance Begins</p>	
<p><b>Oct 15 through Dec 31</b> Medical Schools May Extend <b>Offers of Acceptance to Texas Residents Prior to the Match</b></p>	<p><b>Dec 1</b> <b>Dental Schools</b> Begin Extending Offers of <b>Acceptance</b></p>		
	<p><b>JAN 4-5</b> Veterinary School Interviews</p>	<p><b>JAN 17</b> Medical School <b>Match Preference Submission Deadline</b>, 5pm CST</p>	
<p><b>FEB 3</b> <b>Medical School Match</b> Results Announced, 8am CST; <b>Rolling Admission</b> Period Begins</p>	<p><b>March 15</b> <b>Veterinary School</b> Begins Extending Offers of Acceptance</p>		<p><b>APRIL 30</b> Date by which <b>Medical School Applicants Holding Multiple Acceptances Must Choose</b> One and Withdraw from All Other Schools (Nationally)</p>
<p><b>May 15</b> Texas <b>Medical Schools May Not Make an Offer of Acceptance to an Applicant who is Already Holding a Position</b> at Any Other Texas Medical School (including Baylor College of Medicine)</p>			



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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
College of Medicine

# holistic review

## IN THE MEDICAL SCHOOL ADMISSIONS PROCESS AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

FILOMENO G.  
MALDONADO,  
M.A.



By and large, applicants to professional school programs possess well-established values and diverse backgrounds along with some life broadening experiences that distinguish them in the admissions process. The stories they bring to the admissions process facilitate identifying a broadly diverse student body. This article presents another way of thinking about the process of selecting students without jeopardizing inclusiveness: Holistic Review. It highlights new perspectives in making admissions decisions. It emphasizes the importance of balancing traditional metrics with experiences and attributes in selecting applicants.

Medical education has an obligation to prepare physicians better to deal with the dilemma of disease and disability that many Americans suffer, especially among our burgeoning minority and immigrant groups. The fact that our society is continuously reshaping itself, becoming increasingly more diverse, multicultural, multiethnic, and globally

interconnected, compels us to close the diversity gap. Therefore, the obligation of any health professions school committed to effectively responding to the changing landscape includes assessing itself. Holistic review is such a process that allows a balance between competence and compassion so that one is not attained at the expense of the other.

### **WHAT IS HOLISTIC REVIEW?**

Holistic review is fundamentally a process that is aligned with the medical school's mission, core values, and priorities. It also emphasizes multiple factors in selecting applicants for interviews and admission. The common practice of allowing any single metric to drive the review and selection of applicants for interviews and admission are quickly disappearing. Schools are putting into place holistic review policies and procedures that provide the foundation to consider earnestly the varied ways each applicant may contribute to a diverse educational environment within the context of the

school's goals for classroom learning, clinical practice and medical research and/or innovation.

So, within a holistic admissions process what matters within the application that may determine how applicants are selected for interview and admission? Admissions committees across medical schools are incorporating the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students into their admissions processes. By doing so, committees broaden their scope of assessment to include:

1. Experiences that reveal the path applicants have taken to arrive where they are
2. The personal and professional characteristics that distinguish them
3. The interpersonal skills that reveal their ability to interact and communicate effectively
4. The demographic factors that shaped their experiences and attributes
5. The intellectual skills needed to adapt to the learning demands of medical education

## AAMC Core Competencies FOR Entering Medical School Students

### **PRE-PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES**

- Service Orientation
- Social Skills
- Cultural Competence
- Teamwork
- Oral Communication
- Reliability and Dependability
- Resilience and Adaptability
- Capacity for Improvement
- Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others

### **THINKING & REASONING COMPETENCIES**

- Critical Thinking
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Scientific Inquiry
- Written Communication

Thus, successful medical school applicants typically demonstrate the skills and knowledge in key areas to make transparent not only their motives for wanting to study medicine, but qualities essential in their professional, intellectual, and moral growth. Identifying Pre-Professional Competencies and Thinking and Reasoning Competencies (see previous page) are crucial for admissions committees in a holistic review approach and vital for understanding the nature of an applicant's path toward medicine.

### **HOW IS HOLISTIC REVIEW USED?**

In general, admissions committees get a sense of the extent to which applicants exercise these competencies in the personal statements, which should disclose the value of experiences in the context of their motivations for the study of medicine. They also examine activities in key areas, such as healthcare and service, to determine their breadth, depth, and/or continuity. If there is any place in the medical school application that is critical in the review process to assess an applicant's identity, level of commitment, maturity and motivation, it is in these segments of the application. A holistic review process not only has at its core a broad, balanced range of criteria to assess applicants, but it also identifies the "deal breakers", which often reveal underdeveloped motivation, a lack of maturity, integrity and responsibility, and high academic risk. These "deal breakers" will indeed vary from school to school,

but more often than not, they are not consistent with the competencies outlined above.

### **WHAT DOES HOLISTIC REVIEW MEAN FOR ME?**

The task confronting applicants is to develop the intellectual skills, attributes and experiences that reflect a balance between competence and compassion. Today we are seeing a remarkable emphasis on compassion and empathy. Medical school curricula are also focusing on bioethics, humanities in medicine, and professionalism, which has at its center respect, integrity and an understanding of the human condition. These additions have brought to the forefront the behavioral characteristics of compassionate care.

### **HOW ARE MEDICAL SCHOOLS MEASURING THESE OTHER CAPACITIES?**

Some schools are using new approaches to interviewing candidates such as multiple mini-interviews (MMI) which are situational in design requiring that applicants draw from their inter- and intrapersonal traits and experiences to make decisions or judgments. Others have structured into their traditional interviews thought provoking situations followed by critical guiding questions. To complement these approaches, some medical schools are now requiring online tests that assesses non-cognitive skills and interpersonal characteristics that medical schools believe are important for successful students.

Therefore, the goal of any student applying to medical school should be about making clear your identity, which is shaped and developed largely because of what you strive to be and achieve. Hence, what we as admissions committees hope to find in your identity is how you have looked inward to discover a sense of uniqueness and looked outward for a sense of community. This sense of uniqueness and community or identity is the acknowledgement that much of what you do in life is about developing character and manifesting that character in community.

### **SUMMARY**

**Part of the purpose in training medical students is to help them develop further their capacity to share in the pain and suffering of patients, understand what sickness means to them within the context of background and circumstances, and demonstrate a disposition to help. In other words, compassion must be center stage. Thus, students accepted and enrolling in medical school must have a strong foundation in the attributes and experiences that will facilitate the development of that capacity for compassion. The focus on experiences and attributes reveals not only the distance that they have traveled, but also the extent that they have been resilient and dealt with responsibility, accountability, authority, and vulnerability.**

**Mr. Maldonado is the associate dean of admissions and assistant professor of humanities in medicine at the Texas A&M University College of Medicine.**



### What Our Students Say:

*"I chose UTSD because the minute I got here, it felt like such a family."*

*"The practice we had in the simulation clinic throughout our first and second years really prepared us to start seeing patients."*

*"UTSD focuses on patient care and how we can provide the best care possible."*

*"We get the opportunity to be part of student organizations that teach us about organized dentistry that will benefit us when we graduate."*

# Your Future Is Here!





# Is Dentistry a Match for You?

KAY H. MALONE, D.D.S,  
BARBARA H. MILLER, D.D.S., M.S.,  
& RALPH A. COOLEY, D.D.S

The question is sometimes asked “Why would I want to consider dentistry for my profession?” The better question is “what is it about me that makes dentistry a viable career option?” There are many aspects of dentistry that might appeal to you, including the relationships dentists have with their patients and communities, the development of artistic and technical skills, the use of investigative problem-solving, and service to others. Let’s take a closer look at these elements of the profession and see if they might fit your interests. Maybe dentistry is a match for what you desire from a healthcare career.

## **What kind of healthcare appeals to you?**

Are you someone who desires interpersonal professional relationships, who wants to impact access to care, or wants to contribute to a culturally sensitive and diverse workforce? Like most medically-related fields, dentistry offers the

opportunity to positively impact patient care in areas of relative need, be it in rural areas or in disadvantaged communities where clinicians can make a significant difference. In these relatively more isolated areas you may become a community leader or civil servant to those around you, allowing you the opportunity to bring about real change.

Many applicants to dental programs are attracted to the profession because of their own personal or family experience with dentistry. Some of these experiences are positive ones (“The Day I Got My Braces Off! Wow!”) and these future dentists want to pay it forward. Other experiences may have been negative...maybe they felt marginalized, misunderstood, or ignored, or maybe their family did not have access to dental care at all.

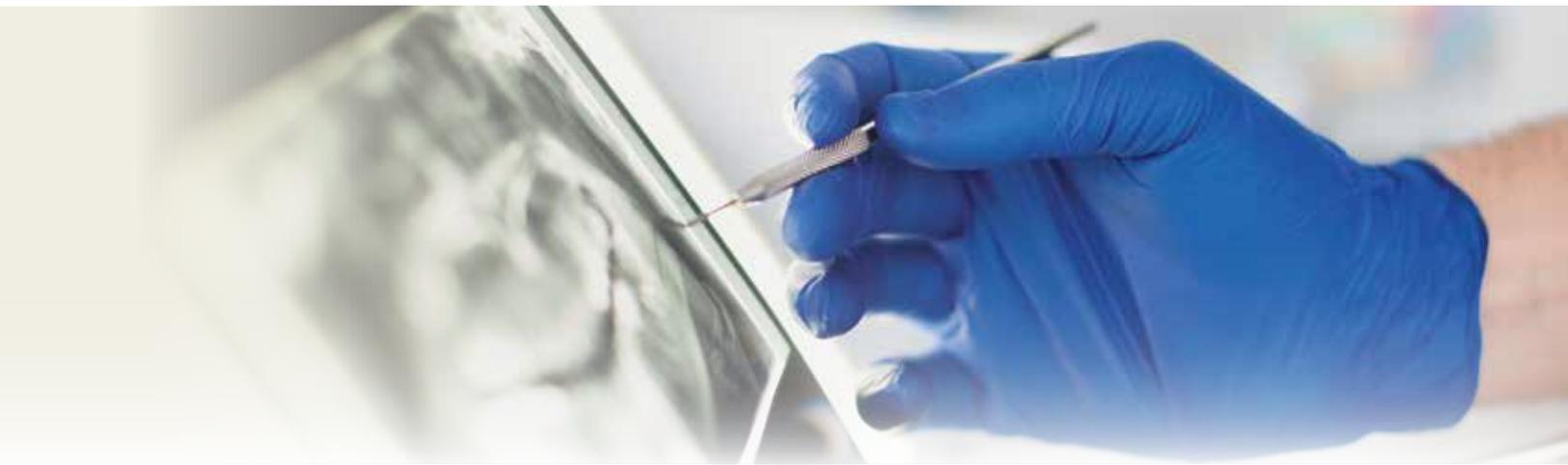
Future dentists often want to provide care to underserved areas by serving their communities in a culturally sensitive manner. Outside of the large urban areas of the state, there are places all around Texas that do not have enough dentists. Small towns and rural locations need

general dentists and specialists, but these are not the only places with limited access. Even right in the middle of big cities there are many patients who might feel their access to dental care is limited. Maybe this is due to the patient’s limited English proficiency or it might be a lack of cultural sensitivity from the healthcare providers that they have seen. Not having a dentist who can speak to the patient in their primary language can be very detrimental, so efforts to provide culturally and linguistically competent care can help patients feel more welcome. Dental colleges are very interested in students who are bilingual (or multilingual) and students who come from underserved areas themselves, to bring their perspective to the issue of access to dental care.

Some dental students, particularly those from minority and immigrant communities, have an interest in providing education about prevention of oral diseases, treatment options and public health issues for their future patients. Sometimes the immigrant families are from countries and cultures that have not placed an emphasis on dental healthcare and these future dentists want

to help local families and friends improve in these areas and realize the connection between oral health and overall health. Additionally, our dental students who never had an opportunity to meet a dentist that looked like themselves are motivated to be a mentor to young people in their communities, providing the relationship that they needed and wanted but never quite had.

For the last several years, accreditation standards have required dental colleges to provide their students with cultural competency training and experiences. Dental schools therefore must show efforts to increase the diversity of the profession. One of the educational benefits of being a part of a diverse class is learning how to interact with people in a culturally sensitive manner. Anyone can learn to be more culturally aware by, for example, practicing empathy. All dental practitioners can improve their cultural skills. Face-to-face interactions with people from different backgrounds are often the best way to improve these skills. Participating in volunteer and community service activities (locally or globally) can also help with these



skills. Generally, dental professionals must realize what an honor and privilege it is to serve others.

### ♥ Do you enjoy fine technical or artistic activities?

Dentistry requires developing specialized, perceptive abilities to perform precise procedures. This is often completed by visualizing tissues which are upside down, and for patients who are usually not sedated. The challenge of being technically proficient is developed through a transition from teaching aids and head & neck simulators, to real patients. One of the major differences between dental and medical school training is that by the third year of dental school these patients are your patients for whom you carry out a variety of treatment procedures over two years. You will develop a close professional and interpersonal relationship as you manage your patients' treatment over time; obviously, these people-skills will carry over after graduation into your life as an independent dentist. Instead of simply observing in dental school, you will develop treatment plans and perform actual procedures (surgical and restorative) to improve your patients' dental health. In the process, you will succeed in creating true doctor-patient relationships where you also become a coach and motivator.

### ♥ Do you like the challenge of solving a problem, and then physically fixing the problem?

In dentistry, you learn to be both a diagnostic investigator and a clinical technician where you develop hand skills to treat what was identified through systematic identification. Just as important, rapid growth in cutting-edge materials, techniques, and equipment has made dentistry an exciting field to be a part of as these advancements will no doubt continue. As a clinician, you will determine through the life-long learning process what is the most clinically acceptable mode of treatment given your patient's needs and desires. The ability to use your creative side with certain restorative procedures can also be extremely rewarding. You are truly making a clinical work of art in which many patients will want to show off your artistic creations to others. The challenge and self-motivation to improve on their technique and to extend their creative impulses drives many dentists to pursue long and rewarding careers.

### ♥ Does the thought of being a leader and continuously growing in your leadership abilities appeal to you?

If so, dentistry is a career that allows that to happen. As a dentist, you are considered a leader. In taking care of patients, you are the leader of the team that works with dental assistants, hygienists, and administrative support team members to deliver the best care possible every day. You make challenging leadership decisions that impact the lives of others in positive ways. However, leadership applies not only to the patients you are treating but also to the team members you work with daily, to make them feel more effective, productive, and fulfilled.

It is a common misconception that one person cannot make a difference in major events in life. In the world of dentistry, such is not the case. As a dentist, you can extend your leadership ability and influence how the profession will look and operate in the future. Working with dental organizations, you can influence how dentistry is practiced at both the state and national level, both now and in coming years. You do not have to be the president of an organization to impact change in dentistry...you just must be part of the profession, participate in the care of others, and get involved. It is exciting to be part of positive changes that will impact the profession for decades to come.



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**DENTISTRY**  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

# BY THE NUMBERS

# for the entering class of **2018**

## TMDSAS Medical Schools

**5807**  
Applicants

**23.6**  
Average Age

**3.60**  
Average GPA

**505.6**  
Average MCAT  
Score

**1652**  
Enrolled Students

**22.6**  
Average Age

**3.77**  
Average GPA

**509.9**  
Average MCAT  
Score

## TMDSAS Dental Schools

**978**  
Applicants

**24.0**  
Average Age

**3.46**  
Average GPA

**19.4/19.3**  
Average DAT Scores  
AA/PA

**308**  
Enrolled Students

**22.3**  
Average Age

**3.68**  
Average GPA

**20.9/20.2**  
Average DAT Scores  
AA/PA

## TMDSAS Veterinary School

**601**  
Applicants

**23.3**  
Average Age

**3.47**  
Average GPA

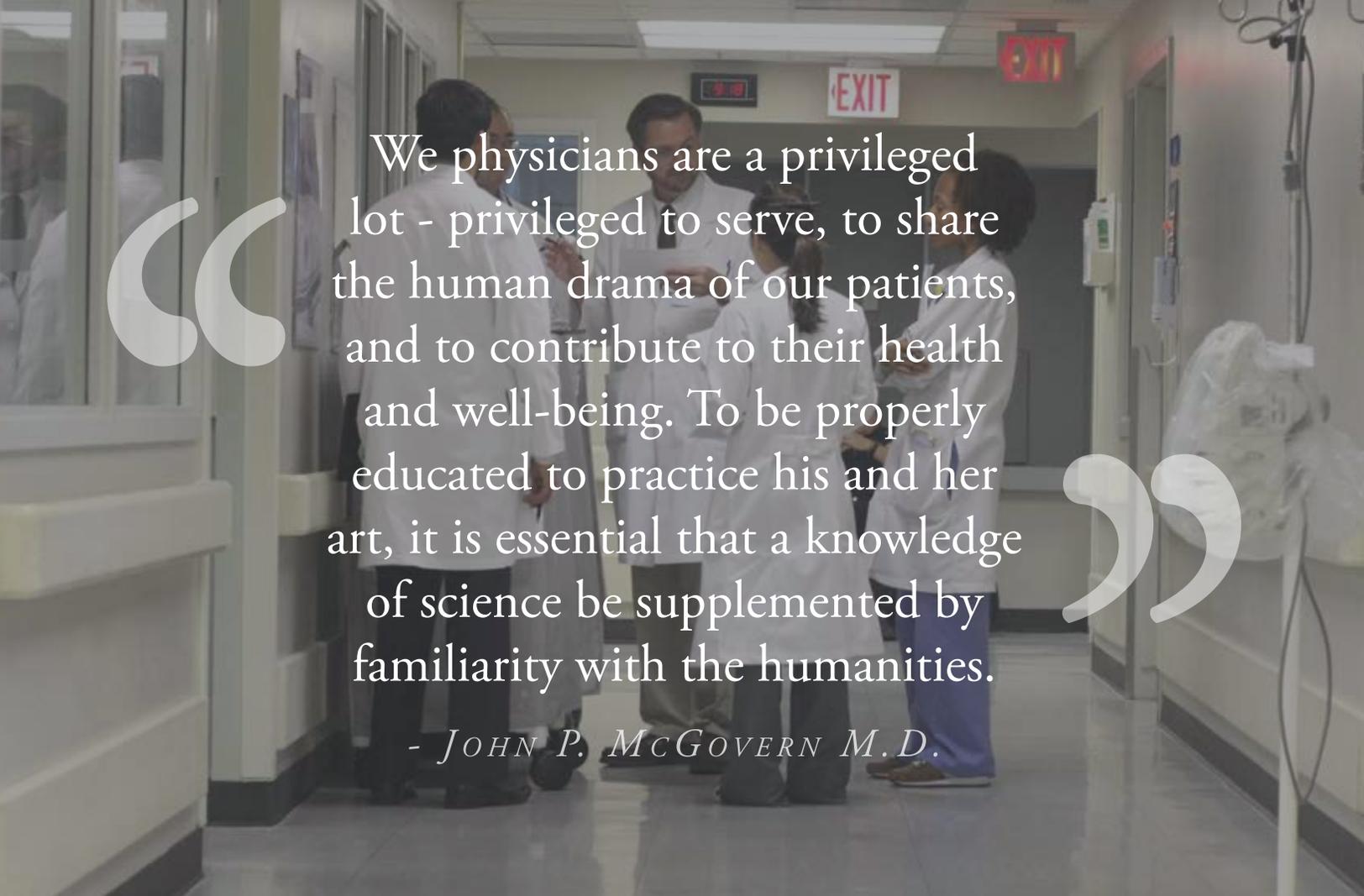
**152.8/3.89/  
152.9**  
Average GRE Scores  
V/Q/A

**152**  
Enrolled Students

**22.4**  
Average Age

**3.72**  
Average GPA

**155/4.12/  
154.8**  
Average GRE Scores  
V/Q/A



We physicians are a privileged lot - privileged to serve, to share the human drama of our patients, and to contribute to their health and well-being. To be properly educated to practice his and her art, it is essential that a knowledge of science be supplemented by familiarity with the humanities.

- JOHN P. MCGOVERN M.D.

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# ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE MANY a Career in Public Health

DAVID L. LAKEY, M.D.

I did not grow up in a medical family, and thus during medical school it was important for me to learn what it really meant to be a surgeon, internist, or pediatrician. One career path that I was not directly exposed to until after formal medical training, however, was public health. Although I was well trained in treating disease, my knowledge about how to systematically work within a community to decrease its overall disease burden was rudimentary.

There came a time for me, however, when it felt increasingly urgent to look for ways to address the problems I was seeing in my daily practice at a population level. Whether it was diabetes patients in the ICU with wound infections, or pregnant women who were HIV-positive, it felt important to think beyond their individual treatment to the programs and policies that might have prevented their health challenges from occurring in the first place. To do so I needed to learn

about public health systems, career options within them, and the tools to improve these systems and the communities they serve. Doing so has been the highlight of my career in medicine.

Public and population health need physicians to bring their medical expertise and experience to system-level issues, but the physicians interested in this work also need to equip themselves to work effectively in contexts that are very different from what they encounter in the hospital, the examination room, or the operating theater. It demands a set of skills that aren't necessarily taught in most medical schools or residency training disciplines.

**The capacity to work with big data is essential.** Not every job in the field requires advanced skills in analyzing and interpreting data, but it is necessary to have fluency beyond what the average physician possesses.

**It is important to be able to communicate concisely and effectively.** So much of the work in public and population health involves persuasion and communication. Some of this is verbal work, but a great deal is written—in emails, letters, op-eds, white papers, reports, and even text messages or tweets.

**Learn to work in and with communities as a true partner.** This means, above all, listening carefully to many points of view. That's what builds cooperation and consensus. It sustains morale within organizations. It establishes trust and provides reassurance in moments of crisis. Perhaps most importantly, it is the means through which public and population health professionals obtain the essential information they need to do their jobs well.

**Begin to think in terms of populations rather than strictly individuals.** The orientation that solves a specific medical challenge is different

than the orientation that thinks statistically and holistically about the types of interventions that can move the needle on broad health outcomes.

Learning to manage finances well is essential. There is money to manage in traditional medicine, but in public and population health the management of budgets and finances in a context of scarce resources is absolutely central.

**Learn the tools of quality improvement (QI).** Many of the systems we rely on are not as effective and efficient as they need to be, and great improvement in population health can be achieved by effectively defining the problems, identifying the variables, and bringing the tools of QI to bear on the issue.

**Managing people well is essential.**

This means both supervision of employees with whom you are tasked to give direction, and the art of persuading people over whom you may have no direct authority, building voluntary consensus, and sustaining collaboration.

There is no single avenue for acquiring these skills (and others) that will support a career in public or population health, but our field is getting substantially better at providing opportunities to students to supplement their medical curriculum with training from other disciplines.

A joint Master's in Public Health degree, if that's offered by your institution, is an enormous leg up for physicians looking to become involved in public or population health work. Many institutions are launching departments of, or programs in, population health; these departments and programs are offering higher level courses in subjects like biostatistics and epidemiology.

In addition, there are always opportunities for doctors and doctors-in-training to serve outside of the school walls, including in internships and volunteer service with community organizations, non-profits, public health agencies, and others. There are, increasingly, medical clerkship programs that embed students in communities and charge them with supporting those communities in ways beyond traditional medical care.

Being involved in public health has been the highlight of my medical career. I was able to serve on my local health department board and became very involved in state-wide disaster response. Eventually, I was privileged to serve as the Texas Commissioner of Health. It has been both exciting and rewarding to be part of systematic health improvement, and as you are thinking through your own career opportunities I encourage you to include public health as an option.

## WHERE DO PUBLIC HEALTH PHYSICIANS WORK?

Public health physicians serve in local, state, and federal agencies (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Food and Drug Administration, Health Resources and Services Administration) and health departments to prevent disease, promote healthy lifestyles and policies, and protect communities from harm during events like outbreaks and natural disasters. They work in large companies as occupational health physicians to prevent work-related injuries and illnesses and to improve the health of their employees. Large healthcare systems, due to the necessity of value based care, are increasingly developing high-level leaders and departments devoted to population health management. In academia the need for a skilled workforce in biostatistics, epidemiology, community health, health informatics, and health policy has never been greater. In fact, due to this need several medical schools are now starting new departments of population health.

**Dr. Lakey is the Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs and Chief Medical Officer for The University of Texas System and Professor of Medicine at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler. He served as Texas Commissioner of Health from 2007-2015. @DavidLakey\_MD on Twitter.**



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MEDICINE DENTISTRY VETERINARY GRADES APPLICATION MCAT DAT GRE BIOLOGY CHEMISTRY PHYSICS



STUDYING INTERPERSONAL SKILLS TEAMWORK RESEARCH CULTURAL COMPETENCY





GOALS DREAMS SUCCESS

CRITICAL THINKING SCIENCE

COMPASSION ETHICS RELIABILITY

LEADERSHIP APPLY RESILIENCE

CONFIDENCE PROFESSIONALISM

ADAPTABILITY GROWTH

ALTRUISM SERVICE VOLUNTEERING

LETTERS OF EVALUATION ADVISOR

PROFESSORS

# Don't Freak Out!

Planning your emotional health during test prep.

JAMES SCOTT WRIGHT,  
Ed.D.

## JADEN WAS FRAZZLED.

He had spent a lot of time studying for the MCAT over the past few months. Taking practice exams, reviewing past course materials, diagnosing the areas where he needed more preparation. But now it was the week of the exam. His stress level was going up as he realized that this test might dictate whether his dream of medical school would really happen. So, in the days and hours prior to his exam date, he felt more pressure to study.

On his 45-minute drive to the testing site, he had the review book open in the car seat next to him... reviewing the areas where he felt weakest. By the time Jaden walked into the testing center cubicle, he felt so anxious and exhausted that his confidence was shot. And then, in the most bizarre circumstance of his short life, it happened. After the lunch break, when he was taking the MCAT section on biochemistry, his physical and mental energy failed him. He fell asleep during the exam! Waking up in a panic, Jaden realized

that the time allotted for the test had expired. *This story is not fictitious...it really happened to one of my students in the past.*

## THE PROBLEM

It is not unusual for pre-health students to feel anxious about the process of applying to professional school. After all, many of you have been dreaming of a healthcare career for a long time. Taking and doing well in difficult courses, approaching faculty about writing letters, and

completing the online application can all produce a lot of stress. However, taking the entrance exam is arguably the most anxiety producing event in the entire process.

Known as high-stakes testing, these types of exams are designed to be difficult. For most applicants, taking the MCAT or similar exams represents a level of complexity in testing and potential consequences that they have never experienced before. Which is why many applicants feel a great deal of anxiety before taking the exams. There are, however, ways that you can avoid allowing this type of stress to overwhelm you.

### **PREPARE FOR THE EXAM**

Adequate preparation for the exam is essential to strong performance and to helping alleviate stress. You should begin studying 6 to 8 months in advance of your proposed testing date. For some students, this preparation means taking a commercial review course. Or maybe your campus offers a review structure that you can take advantage of. Some students can prepare on their own with study books; others need the structure of a course. Regardless, your emotional health will depend on your preparation regimen.

### **LIMIT EXAM FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS**

Too much talk with other pre-health students about the exam and what it means can be devastating to your emotional health. So, I

suggest that you limit these types of conversations. Make a pact with your pre-health peers that you will not allow your social interactions to be dominated by conversations about the MCAT or DAT. Avoid exam centered conversations unless they are for mutual support and encouragement.

### **PRIORITIZE LEISURE ACTIVITIES**

When the stress of exam preparation is the most intense, students often begin limiting the fun activities of their lives. Sometimes students get so nervous that they don't think time spent in relaxing activities is justifiable. In fact, just the opposite is true. You need these fun times in your life to decompress. Also, it allows you opportunities to be with people who are not completely focused on the exam experience. Leisure activities serve to create balance in your life and avoid burnout.

### **LIMIT STUDY TIME AS THE EXAM DAY APPROACHES**

I will admit that this one is counter intuitive. As zero-hour approaches, students tend to get more nervous and feel the need to study more. Unfortunately, that only seems to increase your anxiety. So, as the test date gets closer you should have a schedule of limiting the amount of study that you do. You need to replace the exam study hours with leisure activities and rest. In fact, focusing your energy on helping others might be very beneficial to your emotional health.

### **SPEND TIME IN MEDITATION AND POSITIVE THINKING**

What I mean by meditation is simply a technique of intentional relaxation, concentration and breathing that will settle you down emotionally and allow you to center yourself for the effort ahead. This will be of importance as the day of the exam approaches. For example, after you park your car at the testing center, you might want to spend five or ten minutes focusing yourself on positive thoughts. Try some deep breaths, in through the nose and slowly out through the mouth. This mental and physical exercise may help to calm you and center your thoughts on success.

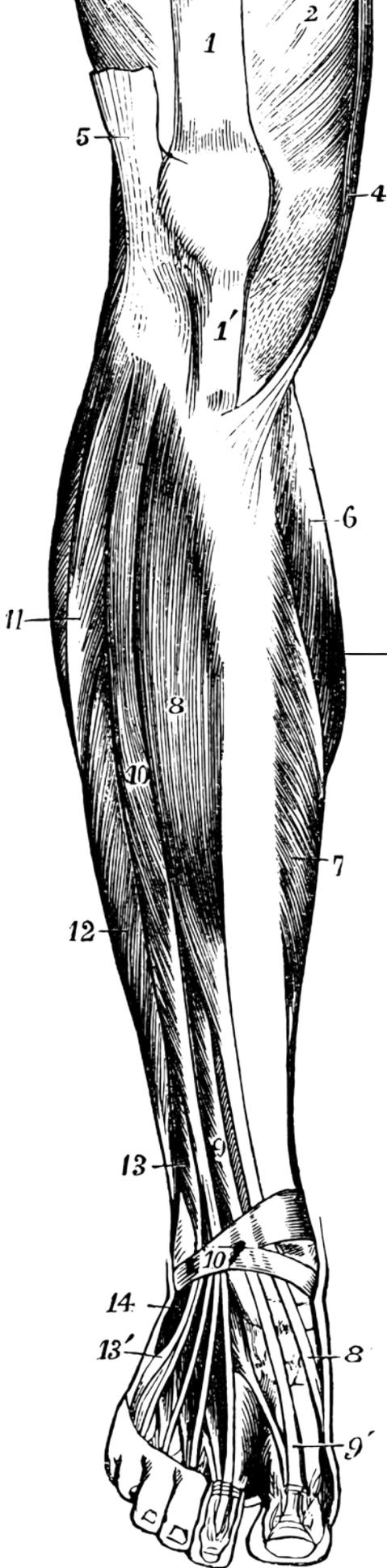
### **SEEK PSYCHOLOGICAL OR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN SEVERE CASES**

For a small number of students, the previous methods may not be enough to relieve severe anxiety. In such cases, students may want to seek professional help. Seeking the assistance of a trained counselor could be very helpful. Your college campus may have this kind of resource available to you at little or no cost. Additionally, some rare cases may need medical attention such as medications meant to address severe mental or emotional strain. Seeking advice from your family physician could help you determine if that is necessary.

As you can see, there are methods you can use to avoid allowing stress to detrimentally affect your test taking experience. Try some of these out and see if you can find a set that works for you.

---

**Dr. Wright is Executive Director of the Texas Health Education Service, Editor-in-Chief of APPLY Magazine, and Lead Author of The Maturity Project.**



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# BE THE BEST YOU

# 4 STRATEGIES

## FOR A BETTER APPLICATION



MATTHEW C. MEEKS, M.Ed.

STOP! Before submitting that application, there are a few things you ought to think about. We understand that this has been a marathon of a process for you and you're ready to be done, but before you click that button, there is one thing you should consider: once you submit, there are only a few minor changes that can be made to your application.

Imagine with me, you've been working on your application for several weeks. You are confident and focused on getting it submitted. You paste your essays into the corresponding fields, and carefully complete all other sections. You spend a day or two reviewing all the details and decide it is ready to submit. You're done. You experience that overwhelming sense of accomplishment.

Then, you log back into your application a day or two later. Simply to enjoy another look at your handiwork. And it happens—that moment of sheer horror. You see that your personal essay has an error in it—a misspelled word. No, there's actually two! The errors continue to mount and the panic sets in. You think, "What happens now? Am I doomed?"

Every year TMDAS receives an alarming number of calls from desperate applicants hoping to resolve serious errors they discovered post-submission. Applicants often realize these mistakes in their application essays or other sections; unfortunately, once submitted, it is too late to do anything about it. Applicants then spend the next several months worried that these problems may cost them an interview.

The whole scenario described above can be avoided by taking a few simple steps. So, for this article we will consider four strategies to consider before submitting your application.

### STRATEGY

## 1

### Value REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES

Truth is, you have probably reviewed your application a hundred times (or at least it may seem like it). You have logged dozens of hours staring at your screen making sure every detail is correct and feel confident that it is just perfect—that is until you realize (and likely too late) that it isn't. That's why it is critical to *review a printed copy of your application* prior to submission.

Reviewing a printed copy will cause you to see the words and sentences differently. Read it aloud and you may notice opportunities to change sentence structure and make it sound even better. It is also a good idea to allow others to read it. Have your pre-health advisor review it with you, or perhaps a member of your family or a close friend—anyone willing to offer a critical eye and a different perspective. Gaining admission into professional school takes a community. Learn to rely on your community now.

### STRATEGY

## 2

### Value THOUGHTFULNESS

What's the big hurry? Each year we receive hundreds of applications in the first week of the cycle. These applications contain a disproportionate number of errors compared to others submitted at any later point. Thinking they could gain an advantage by submitting super early, applicants will complete their applications in a matter of a few days or even less. This is never a good idea. Once you have completed the TMDAS application, we recommend reviewing your application repeatedly for at least a week before submitting. Reviewing every detail of your application prior to submission is vital and cannot be completed

without taking the necessary time to do so.

Hundreds of applicants unintentionally submit incomplete applications with missing or fragmented essays, serious typos, and a host of other issues, all hoping to make corrections. Once submitted, only a limited number of application sections can be revised. Don't rush through completion of the online application *Be intentional and thoughtful.*

**STRATEGY**  
**3**  
**Value ACCURACY**  
Applicants typically place most of their emphasis on the essays and short answer questions. But often it is the responses to other parts of the application that provide insight to review committees on who you are. *Be accurate in your answers to all questions in the application.* This may require some effort on your part to reconstruct your past activities such as volunteering and employment.

Applicants often tell us that one of the more tedious tasks is entering in all their coursework. But getting it right can prevent your application from being delayed in processing. Our academic evaluators take time to review every course entered in the application. Mistakes in course entry (whether intentional or accidental) keep the application in the processing queue longer, increasing the time it takes for your application to be transmitted to the schools.

Before entering your coursework, make certain you reference the guidelines found in the latest version of the TMDSAS Application Handbook. Also, download course listings from the TMDSAS website that are specific to your institution and will help in coding your courses properly. Finally, make certain that you enter your coursework and grades according to how they are indicated on your **official** transcripts.

**STRATEGY**  
**4**  
**Value HONESTY**  
Applicants often try to get into the minds of admissions officers and develop responses around what they feel is being looked for in a candidate. However, *professional school admissions officers are looking for the real you, not a false representation.* And the TMDSAS application is just one component of the entire admissions process; our representative institutions have developed complex procedures for evaluating candidates and are sure to identify falsifications, however small they may seem.

Some of these falsifications (or exaggerations) happen in embellishing employment and/or volunteer hours. Often, TMDSAS staff will ask for proof of employment when deliberating on, for example, a Texas

residency case. Be careful not to embellish activity hours. The interview committees have been at this for years—they'll discern any discrepancies!

## SUMMARY

These strategies are meant to give you a broader perspective and to help you through the application cycle. TMDSAS is not just an application clearinghouse—we are a group of individuals who believe in you and want to see you succeed. If you have questions or perhaps you would just like to share some concerns or anxieties you are experiencing regarding the application process, we are here to listen! Always feel free to contact us via email or telephone. From all of us at TMDSAS, we wish you the best and look forward to seeing your impact on the world as future dentists, physicians, and veterinarians.

**Mr. Meeks is Director of the Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service.**





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# BY THE NUMBERS

# REAPPLICANTS

## EY 2017

### MEDICAL

	Applicants	Matriculants
<i>n</i>	1326	334
Overall GPA	3.47	3.61
MCAT	501.7	507.4

### DENTAL

	Applicants	Matriculants
<i>n</i>	298	43
Overall GPA	3.32	3.49
DAT - AA	18.8	20.5
DAT - PA	19.4	20.5

## EY 2018

### MEDICAL

	Applicants	Matriculants
<i>n</i>	1232	284
Overall GPA	3.48	3.66
MCAT	503.1	508.1

### DENTAL

	Applicants	Matriculants
<i>n</i>	304	58
Overall GPA	3.34	3.47
DAT - AA	18.8	20.3
DAT - PA	19.1	20.1

## EY 2019

### MEDICAL

	Applicants
<i>n</i>	1283
Overall GPA	3.50
MCAT	504.1

### DENTAL

	Applicants
<i>n</i>	290
Overall GPA	3.37
DAT - AA	19.3
DAT - PA	19.1

## Adjust your path

No applicant ever wants to be in a position where they need to re-apply, but as the pool of applicants becomes more competitive, many otherwise good applicants find themselves in this group. The data points above only represent individual factors in an application, and should be used to help re-applicants focus their attention to enhance aspects of the application that may have been lacking. These may include:

- Retaking the MCAT/DAT
- Raising Your GPA
- Applying Earlier in the Cycle
- Gaining More Shadowing Experiences
- Re-focusing Your Personal Statement
- Working on Your Interview Skills
- Requesting Letters of Evaluation that Better Address Your Strengths

Reflect on your application and identify key areas that you can develop to make your application more competitive.

# animals, people, disease & health

*the* **FUTURE of VETERINARY MEDICINE**

**DR. KAREN CORNELL**

The future of veterinary medicine is unlimited! But, any predictions must carefully consider the profession's past performance, adaptability and resilience. The profession of veterinary medicine was born from the needs of people and the importance of animals to human society has been recognized since the Middle Ages. In fact, many have hypothesized that veterinary medicine may have preceded human medicine because food was a primitive requirement for human existence and early veterinary medicine supported healthy animals that created a food source, provided a power source to support agriculture or served as a means of transportation.

While human medicine preserves a human life, veterinary medicine sustains the life of humanity.

Veterinarians remain the guardians of animal health and welfare, and the role of the veterinary profession has expanded beyond its origins in keeping food producing animals healthy for human consumption and assuring horses could perform as beasts of burden. Veterinarians still support the needs of people, but in many ways. Perhaps the most well-known role of veterinarians is as primary care givers for pets and companion animals. More than 71 million households in the United States have a pet. And, the ability to provide preventative healthcare and advanced care for pets has grown exponentially over time.

Specialization in veterinary medicine has expanded to include most specialties available in human medicine. In veterinary medicine these range from A, anesthesiology, to Z, zoo medicine. Veterinary specialists now provide total hip replacement, endoscopy, dialysis, kidney transplants, and minimally invasive cardiac procedures. How does this benefit people? Research has shown that people who have a pet have improved heart health, stay home sick less often, make fewer visits to the doctor, get more exercise and are less depressed. Keeping companion animals healthy keeps people healthier.

Veterinarians play a role in human health in other ways as well. It is estimated that at least 75% of emerging and re-emerging diseases are either zoonotic or vector-borne. Zoonotic diseases, those spread between humans and animals, such as West Nile, avian flu, and rabies, catastrophically impact animals and people. Veterinarians play a crucial role in identifying these diseases and controlling their spread. For instance, the veterinarian's role in rabies, which is almost uniformly



fatal, is to vaccinate companion animals against rabies therefore decreasing exposure of people to the rabies virus.

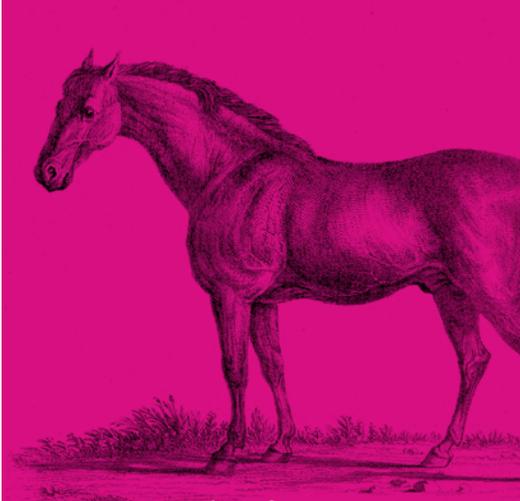
Veterinarians also play a crucial role in research that improves the lives of both animals and people. Dogs and other species are important models for human disease. As innovative diagnostic tests such as the Mars Wisdom Panel, a DNA test for dogs, and other at-home diagnostic and information platforms become increasingly utilized veterinarians will be at the leading edge of understanding the best indications and beneficial applications for these novel technologies. Because dogs' lives unfold over far fewer years than the lives of humans, investigation of diseases of dogs utilizing emerging technologies such as genetic sequencing, epigenetics and microbiome studies can realize benefits far more quickly than could be accomplished solely by research on human health. This means that not only does veterinary research with animals benefit animals, but findings can be extrapolated to similar human health problems and solutions.

Along the way, technologies can be refined and improved so that they are even more effective when used with human studies. One such study, a collaborative NIA-funded study between the University of Washington and Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, is the Dog Aging Project. The Dog Aging Project is a large-scale longitudinal

study of aging in pet dogs, in which individual pet dogs will be followed throughout life to understand the biological and environmental factors that determine why some dogs die early or succumb to diseases such as cancer, kidney failure, and dementia, while others live to a relatively old age free from these problems. Similar longitudinal studies of aging in humans have yielded a wealth of important data but require decades to perform. What takes decades in people will take just years in dogs. By using cutting-edge technologies, in less than a decade the Dog Aging Project could identify the critical factors that may help pets stay healthy longer, with the bonus that they will be able to compare these outcomes to those from the human studies.

The future of veterinary medicine is indeed unlimited! It is a profession that has seen its role expand over time and will continue to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing world. The relevance of veterinary medicine and its role in animal health and human health will continue to grow as new innovations in medicine occur. Maybe your interests coincide with those illustrated above. If so, check out the possibilities available in veterinary medicine. You may be glad you did!

**Dr. Cornell is Associate Dean for Professional Programs and Earline and A.P. Wiley Endowed Veterinary Chair at the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.**



*The first <sup>1800s - Horse</sup> veterinary school* was founded in Lyon, France in 1761 by Claude Bourgelat because of the devastating animal plagues of the time including rinderpest, anthrax, blackleg, scabies, strangles and tetanus. This first school focused primarily on the diseases of sheep, cattle and horses because of the human need for these animals and their products. As society changed throughout time, for instance when the automobile was invented, and horses were no longer needed as a mode of transportation, some anticipated that veterinary medicine would become obsolete. Just the opposite has been true, veterinarians have a bigger role in society now than ever before.

# The Legacy Continues

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*“ I chose UTMB because I wanted to go to a medical school that not only had a wonderful education program, but also valued collaboration and teamwork. ”*

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School of Medicine

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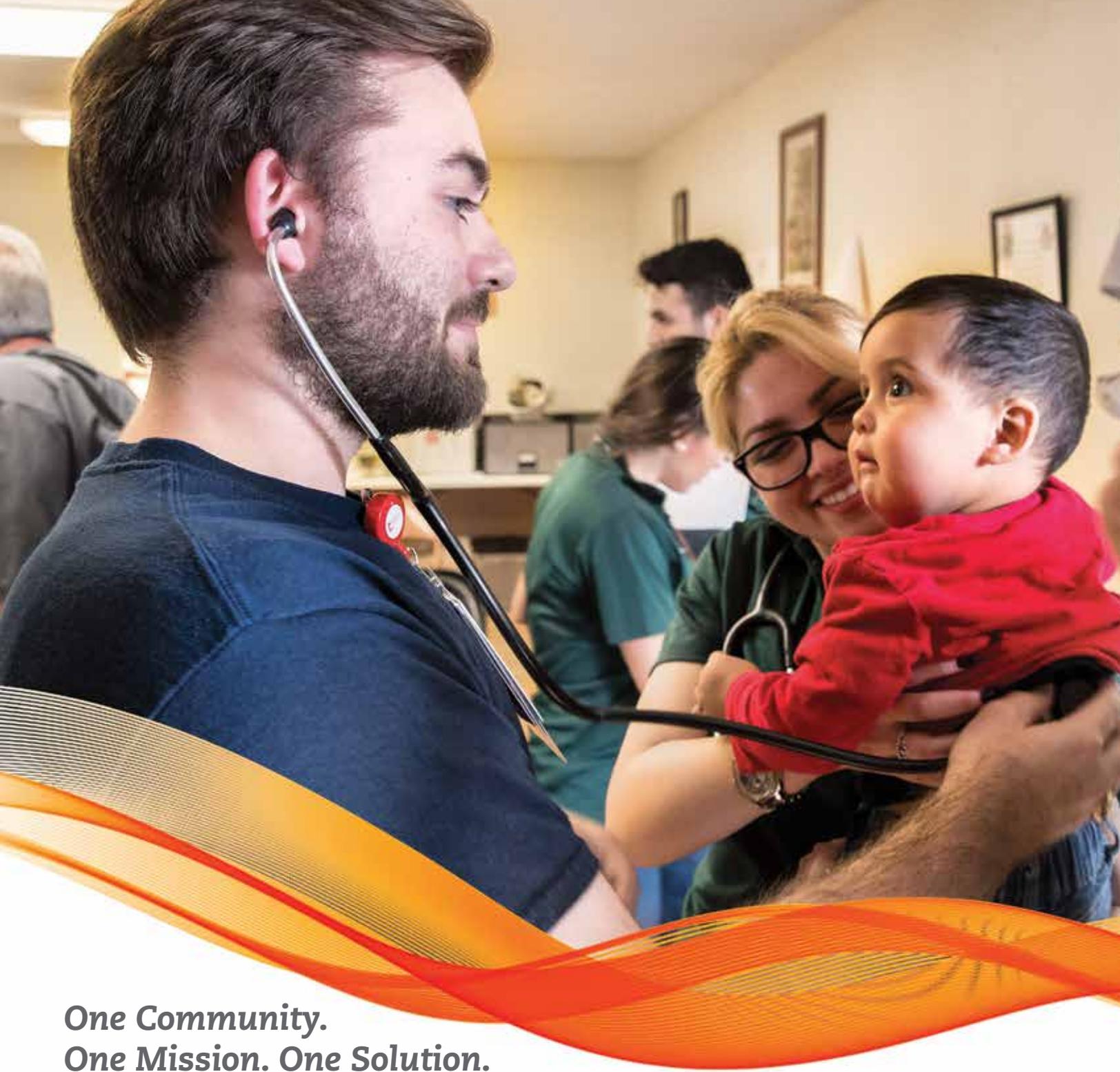
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# FILLING THE GAP

## WHAT APPLICANTS SHOULD KNOW *about* GAP YEARS

**D**uring the time that I served as the medical school admissions dean in San Antonio I was frequently asked about gap year(s) by students and applicants to both medical school and dental school. My response was always “It depends.”

According to the dictionary, gap is defined as “an unfilled space or interval.” Using this definition, a professional school admission gap year may apply to (1) a year or so after being denied admission to medical or dental school including efforts to apply again, (2) a deliberate year or more after graduation from undergraduate school to pursue other interests thereby delaying application to professional school, or (3) the year(s) spent in another vocation before deciding to apply to a healthcare education program.

Each of these scenarios represent different contexts, and I will hopefully provide some guidance for each. Within these three situations, there are two descriptors I consider very important: enrichment and value. I like to suggest that a gap year is an enrichment year in which your experiences enrich your desire and/or qualifications to study medicine or dentistry. Adding academic effort, clinical experiences, community service or volunteer activities all enrich your desire and qualifications to pursue a career in healthcare. The second descriptor is value. Whatever it is that YOU believe will enhance your qualifications, it is important that the value be clear in your mind. I always tell students not to do anything just to get into professional school...do it because it has value to you in your

**DAVID J. JONES,**  
M.S., Ph.D.

future. Understand, the first essay question on the TMDSAS application is “Explain your motivation to seek a career in medicine or dentistry. Be sure to include the value of your experiences that prepare you to be a physician/dentist.” This is a great question; hence I always ask applicants to help me understand why they involved themselves in those experiences. Was their effort regarding those activities to support their decision to study medicine or dentistry?

So, let’s examine the three scenarios I mentioned and see how an applicant in those situations should regard the potential effects of a gap year.

### **REAPPLICANTS**

For students who are pursuing a gap year due to an unsuccessful application to medical or dental school, it is very important to carefully consider the question on the TMDSAS application regarding what YOU have done to strengthen your application. Realize that there is a very small window in time to make major improvements in your qualifications. To substantively improve your application, it may take more than one year. If so, that

is okay, but make sure it is your own decision. It is critical that YOU consider what might have been the limitations of your application and address them through your activities. Of course, I encourage you to meet with a pre-health advisor and/or professional school admissions dean. However, my question to you would still be...what do YOU consider the reasons why your application was not successful. When an advisor (especially a medical or dental school admissions dean) points out what they consider the issue(s) to be, you may have expectations that once you have addressed those limitations your next application will be successful. Recognize that this may or may not be the case.

To improve your qualifications, you should not jump too quickly into a post baccalaureate program, the coursework of which, may do little to address what YOU perceive to be the weaknesses in your application. If the weakness is your entrance exam score (MCAT or DAT) or lack of appropriate clinical experience, a largely coursework-oriented program would do little to enhance your qualifications. If you decide on such a program for the purposes of

improving your grade point average, carefully choose the program that is right for you. There are master’s degree programs that may not boost your academic qualifications in the view of medical or dental school admissions committees. Importantly, consider that you will only be a few months into the program if you apply during the next application cycle, so there may not be much for the admissions committee to consider regarding academic progress. Such programs are often expensive and may last more than a year, so you need to be very clear about the value of the program in helping you be successful applying to professional school again.

### **POST-GRADUATES**

There are many reasons a student might intentionally delay application to medical or dental school. Often, it is to strengthen the student’s application through more clinically-related experiences. These experiences not only add to overall qualifications but also may cement their interest in the profession. During this time, students may engage in volunteering in medically-related fields or by shadowing or clinical research. Regardless of the setting, I would always ask during the interview “what did you learn from the experience that would apply to your future professional activities?” Again, hopefully the student can describe the value of the gap year experiences.

A student may also be in a degree program where completing professional school admission



prerequisites might require an extra semester or two. Health or personal reasons may also delay coursework progress and graduation. Given these possibilities, it is always important to pursue along with coursework additional activities such as clinical or volunteer experiences, or, if needed, employment. Studying for and taking the MCAT or DAT may also require a year delayed entry into medical or dental school. This may be for taking the exam for the first time or to improve their entrance exam score. Commercial review courses (such as Kaplan, Princeton Review, Exam Crackers, etc.) can be valuable but students must understand that a review course will do nothing for them without significant engagement and hard work on their part. Don't be one of the applicants who squandered away the value of the review course by not applying themselves through personal motivation, discipline and focused study.

Finally, you may want to take time off to decompress after a rigorous four years of undergraduate study. Frequently students realize they will not have much time to experience unique opportunities of work, travel or reflection before starting professional school, residency (if necessary) and beginning their careers. This is entirely understandable, but again you must be able to describe the value of your gap year experiences. Don't be the "I'm-going-to-hang-out-at-home-and-play-video-games" applicant (yes, I had an applicant really tell me this!!). Good use

of your time is essential as it is an opportunity to strengthen and solidify your application as well as prepare you for the long road of study ahead.

### **CAREER CHANGERS**

I spent quite a bit of time counseling individuals regarding a change in career path, or as some might describe them, "non-traditional" applicants. Typically, some unique event or experience led to the decision to study medicine or dentistry and they have made a substantial sacrifice to prepare themselves for the application process. Not only is it a financial burden, but it can also be a serious challenge to family life for those students who are married or in relationships. On the plus side, career experiences combined with unique approaches to the educational environment add to the diversity of a professional school class and especially the richness of the educational experience for all students.

For students who are turning to healthcare education later than typical, the need to determine their commitment to such a career path is greater than students who have not been in an alternate vocation. Admissions committees seek to make certain that the student is not only academically capable but also, through clinical experiences, sure this is the right decision for them. By doing so, admissions committees will have a pretty good idea the student is motivated and committed to adjusting to a demanding academic environment.

Admissions officers also want to make sure that plans are in place to balance the time commitment for other responsibilities (studying, clinical rotations, on-call schedule in hospital, etc.). While a heavy exam schedule and other academic demands are substantial for any student, it is especially challenging for students who have been successful in an alternate career; the cost is not only financial but also personal regarding family and friends. The good news is most professional schools have resources to support non-traditional students such that, quite frequently, they are some of the most successful students in the medical or dental school class.

Hopefully I have been able to provide a bit of guidance concerning the three scenarios for gap years. The underpinnings of my message in all three situations are not only the importance of value and enrichment, but also YOUR role in deciding what to do to support your application during these gap year(s). If you are passionate about, and committed to, a career in medicine or dentistry, good decisions and enriching your application through academic effort and clinical experiences will greatly contribute to the goal of a career in healthcare, regardless of your timeline.

**Dr. Jones is Emeritus Professor and former Senior Associate Dean for Admissions at the Long School of Medicine, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.**

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# Journal Your Way to Success

BY ENRIQUE JASSO, JR., M.A.

The benefits of journaling are often touted for personal growth, developing meaning from experiences, and even serving as a stress relieving practice. Pre-health students can customize their journaling to allow for reflection on experiences, maintaining a record of activities, and planning for the professional school application all in one place. The best thing about journaling is that it only has to make sense to you.

By establishing this practice, you can pursue your goals more deliberately as you will be better equipped to reflect, plan, and track trends in your experiences and preparation.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reflecting on activities will help you synthesize what you encountered during your shadowing/volunteering/work experiences. Think about how these activities relate to each other and enhance your desire to pursue

a healthcare profession. Ask these questions at the end of each activity for a week:

- What strengths did you use?
- Where can you improve?
- How are these experiences supporting your goals?
- What insights did you learn about your desired profession?

Freewriting can help you find meaning from your experiences by jotting down your thoughts as they occur to you. Perhaps you shadowed a doctor that reminded you of a relative and you paid closer attention to their interpersonal skills. Do you have those skills? Did they make this physician a more effective caregiver?

Maybe you thought, “I wish I knew Spanish well enough to talk to patients as well as that nurse did.” How can you improve your language skills for healthcare? These thoughts spark several points that you can act on to make you a more competitive applicant when the time comes.

## KEEP TRACK OF THINGS

Your journal can also serve as a log for helping you keep track of

hours volunteered, shadowed, and/or worked on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. The rise of Bullet Journaling gives us plenty of examples of how you can arrange your planner and customize it for your experience. As a pre-health student, you’ll want to use it to look forward to activities and events as well as a tool for tracking these experiences.

## WHAT IS A BULLET JOURNAL?

Bullet Journaling is a journaling method that allows users to “track the past, organize the present, and plan for the future.” Developed by digital product designer Ryder Carroll as a tool that can promote the “art of intentional living”, fundamental aspects of a Bullet Journal include:

- an index for all items in your journal
- a “Future Log” that tracks several months at a time
- a Monthly Log and Task List
- a bulleted list of entries such as events, tasks, and notes

You can also incorporate lists (such as a workout log or MCAT content tracker), weekly logs and task lists,



or anything else you'd like. You can customize the scope of your journal however you see fit.

Plot out your time and notice where you have opportunities to maximize your efforts. Give it a try for a week – notice those 6 hours watching *The Office* again? This time can be reallocated to tackle test prep or take on extra duties where you're shadowing. Don't forget to allow for some leisure time though!

During the application cycle, it will be paramount that you optimize your schedule and be prepared to travel for interviews. Keeping your plans up to date in your journal will drastically reduce the stress of managing your schedule and allow you to shift your focus to the interviews.

## **PREPARE FOR THE APPLICATION**

It's never too early to start thinking about the application process!

Check out the essay prompts on the TMDAS website and start brainstorming your responses. Look back through your thoughts from your activities and the connections you made. Emphasize the strengths you identified and integrate them with your experiences to form a powerful example of what you bring to the table.

**Mr. Jasso** is Coordinator of Research, Advising Services and Digital Media at the Texas Health Education Service. He is also the host of TMDAS Podcast.

As you visit schools during your interviews, write about your reactions, responses to questions, and aspects of the school that stand out to you. What did the current students say about the school? What was your reaction to seeing the campus? Take a first attempt at ranking the schools. If you're a Texas resident medical applicant, these notes will come in handy as you rank and select your School Preferences leading up to the TMDAS Match.

Getting into this reflective mindset will let you step out of your experiences and start to notice patterns in your behavior and beliefs. This insight is invaluable as you plan your application for scrutiny along the Core Competencies and schools' values and missions.

Journaling aligns your experiences, preparation, and goals, but the benefit is dependent on what you put into it. Developing the habit of keeping a journal will provide you with powerful insights through personal reflection, planning and logging your activities, and preparing for the application and beyond. Research how others use journals and find out what works best for you. The most important step is to get started – happy journaling!

## Pro-Tips

- Save some space in your journal to jot down resources you've found... like a book, podcast, video series, or group. May I suggest the TMDAS Podcast Roadmap episodes to keep you get on track?
- Keep a few pages for things that inspire and motivate you. Write down that compliment you received from a patient while shadowing, or the inspirational quote you found, or a screenshot of that time you aced your O-Chem test. Check back on these pages when you feel disheartened and reignite the spark that shows you that you're on the right track!

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## TMDSAS PROFILE

# Alanna Edwards

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

As someone who has been an applicant to professional school, I understand the anxiety applicants experience and enjoy being a part of helping them through this process. I know there is a host of misleading advice out there about how the process works, so we work hard to make sure applicants have all the resources they need to submit a quality application. I love what I do in being instrumental in helping applicants achieve their dreams of becoming dentists, physicians, and veterinarians.

### How long have you worked at TMDSAS?

The entering class cycle of 2020 will be my third full application cycle. Prior to coming to TMDSAS, I worked as a support specialist in a medical clinic.

### Tell us about your role at TMDSAS.

I started my career at TMDSAS as an application processor and was promoted to Senior Academic Evaluator in the spring of 2018. This position involves coordinating a team effort to review and transmit to the schools all applications received throughout the cycle – this year almost 7700! The process involves reviewing applicants' coursework, residency, and ensuring that all information is entered correctly before the application is sent to the professional schools. In the fall, our team validates the application, cross-referencing applicant course entries to their official transcripts.

We also find time to engage in several special projects to improve the service we provide to applicants, the schools, and the advisors. This past year we started on a project to publish listings of approved courses on our website and we will continue to add schools to our public listing. We are making exciting updates to the application this year that will be unveiled in the entry year 2020 application handbook.

### Any advice to TMDSAS applicants?

I recently went through the application process for graduate school and used an application service like TMDSAS. I was able to put myself in the place of our applicants and learned first-hand what the process feels like. If there's any advice that I can give to applicants, it would be to use the resources that are provided. For example, our application handbook is easy to navigate and provides almost everything you need to have confidence that you're filling out every section properly. Make sure you have it open and reference it as you work through your application.

### Tell us more about yourself, Alanna!

I am from Grand Rapids, Michigan... so I am glad to have escaped those harsh winters! I have a bachelor's



pursuing a graduate degree in public health from the UT Houston School of Public Health. And...my favorite color is blue.

### What do you like to do when you are not at work?

I moved to Austin almost five years ago and one of the best things that I did was join a non-fiction book club which I have belonged to ever since. When not at work, I also spend time volunteering with the Junior League of Austin. I have been a member of the organization since 2016 and have worked with some wonderful community partners.

I also love to be with my husband, Steve, and play with my dog, Jeffrey, who is an adopted lab/greyhound mix.

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

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