

General Health Careers Advising



Ms. Helen Kull
Sudhir Nayak, PhD
Mitchell Sitnick, PhD

- What does the MCAC do?
- Do I need the MCAC?
- How do I get to medical (dental, optometry, etc.) school?
- How do I become pre-med?
- Where do I get reliable information?
- What do I need to apply?
- Am I a good candidate for medical school?
- What courses do I need?
- Do I have to be a biology major?
- Do minors help?
- Do I need to shadow more than one doctor?
- Do I need research?
- When should I get started?
- What are my chances of getting in?
- How important is the MCAT?
- Is the GPA more important than the MCAT?
- Does my major matter at all?
- Is my C in Orgo going to keep me out of medical school?
- What is the minimum GPA to apply? Is there a minimum MCAT to apply?
- MD vs DO?

● **Can you talk to my parents?***

- How long should I study for the MCAT?
- Should I take an MCAT prep course?
- When should I take the MCAT?
- I want to stay (or leave) NJ?
- Which schools? How many?
- Does it help to be in state?
- When should I apply?
- Is it better to apply early?
- How many letters of recommendation?
- Who gets a composite letter?
- What happens if I don't get a composite letter?
- What are my chances of getting in?
- Should I take the MCAT again?
- Should I apply to MD, MD and DO, or DO only?
- What happens if I apply later in the cycle?
- When should I think about a gap year(s)?
- When will I know if I get in?
- If I'm on the waitlist does it mean I'll get in?
- What happens if I don't get in?
- Are post-bac programs worth it?

Medical Careers Advisory Committee [School of Science](#)

[HOME](#) [ABOUT THE MCAC](#) [CAREER OPTIONS](#) [PREPARING](#) [APPLYING](#) [FAQS](#) [RESOURCES](#)

Events, Workshops and MCAC Links

Information about how the MCAC can help YOU – There are **TWO IMPORTANT Information Sessions** Scheduled in early February! Come get informed!

The MCAC will host a **General Health Careers Information Session on 2/5/25, at 11 am in P-117** in the Science/Physics building. We will cover various health professions requirements and preparation information, such as MD, DO, DDS, PA, PT, and DVM. We can answer your questions and help you.

Members of the MCAC will also be the featured speakers at the first meeting of **AMSA, 2/12/25, at 4 pm in P101**. We will discuss **"opening a file"** with us, and what you need to do **if you are ready and preparing to apply to med/dental school** this summer, to start med school in the Fall of 2026 ("2026 app cyc").

Keep in mind that typical med school application cycles are at least a year long, and with the prep required before hand, **NOW** is the time to begin getting ready if you want to start med school in the Fall of 2026. (The process for starting med school this Fall, 2025 is already underway and applications are closed!)

SOME MCAC Links:

- > [Link to Information about the TCNJ/SKMC Scholars Program](#)
- > [Link to 2024 PARENT ADVISING Presentation, 9/18/24](#)
- > [Link to Sept 2024 MCAC/AMSA Basic Pre-Med Information Session](#)

Medical Careers Advisory Committee (**MCAC**)

MCAC Chair

- Sudhir Nayak, PhD
- Professor of Biology
- >15 years at TCNJ

Allied Health Advisor

- Mitch Sitnick, PhD
- Clinical Lecturer
- >6 years Allied Health advising

MCAC Administrative Support

- Ms. Helen Kull
- General Advisor, Program Assistant, and Knower of Things
- Department of Biology
- >15 years at TCNJ

Ad Hoc MCAC Members (examples):

Biology: Dr. Jeffery Erickson, Dr. Tracy Kress, Dr. Keith Pecor

Chemistry: Dr. Benny Chan

Biomed Engineering: Dr. Christopher Wagner

Kinesiology and Public Health: Dr. Anne Farrell

Psychology: Dr. David Blake in HSS (while Dr. Leynes on sabbatical)

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TCNJBiology

Web: mcac.tcnj.edu

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Psychology:

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- Dr. Shawn Wiley

Who are you?



Who are you?

- **What year?**

- 1st year, 2nd year, etc.?

- **What is your long-term goal?**

- Physician: MD, DO
- Podiatrist: DPM
- Dentist: DMD/DDS
- Optometrist: OD
- Veterinarian: DVM
- Other?
- Physician Assistant: PA
- Physical Therapist: PT
- Occupational Therapist: OT
- Registered Nurse: RN
- Nurse Practitioner: NP
- Other?

MCAC vs Allied Health at TCNJ

- **MCAC aka “med careers” (Sudhir Nayak, PhD)**

- Allopathic, osteopathic, podiatry, dental, optometry
 - MD, DO, DPM, DMD/DDS, OD
 - Typically take MCAT, DAT, OAT exams
- Genetic counselling (MSGC)
- Veterinary medicine (DVM/VMD)

- **Allied Health (Mitch Sitnick, PhD)**

- Physicians assistant, physical therapist, occupational therapist, nursing / accelerated nursing, speech-language pathologist, and several others.
 - PA, PT, OT, RN/NP/DNP
 - Typically take GRE or PA-CAT exams

MCAC

- Assist **TCNJ students and alumni** applying to medical school and other health professional schools
 - Help students **from any major**
- Provide validated resources
 - Web: <https://mcac.tcnj.edu/>
- Presentations (like this one)
- Data-driven advising and mentoring
 - Group and individual
- Generate the **composite** (or **committee**) **letter**

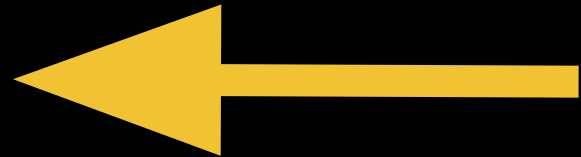
Useful resources

- PAWS group for **everyone** (next slide)
 - **QR code to sign up (get your phones ready!)**
- Our Canvas non-credit Advising Courses
 - **MCAC 101** for freshmen + sophomores (QR code)
 - MCAC 201 for students **READY** to apply to prgms
 - MCAT completed (or scheduled)
 - Updated mid-**February** for new app cycle
 - By request through mcac@tcnj.edu



Form to Join either/both:

- **MCAC-Canvas “Basics” MCAC 101 Course**
- **HEPR group in PAWS (Health Professions)**



(For Fall 2024 - Spring 2025 Academic Year)

MD (Allopathic) -vs- DO (Osteopathic) Medicine

- **Both programs = physician**
- Similarities
 - 4 year course of study
 - Residencies programs vary - **Most programs are accepting either exam (USMLE or COMLEX)**
- Differences
 - Philosophy
 - >60% of DO graduates are in primary care
 - <30% of MD graduates are in primary care
 - **Criteria for acceptance**

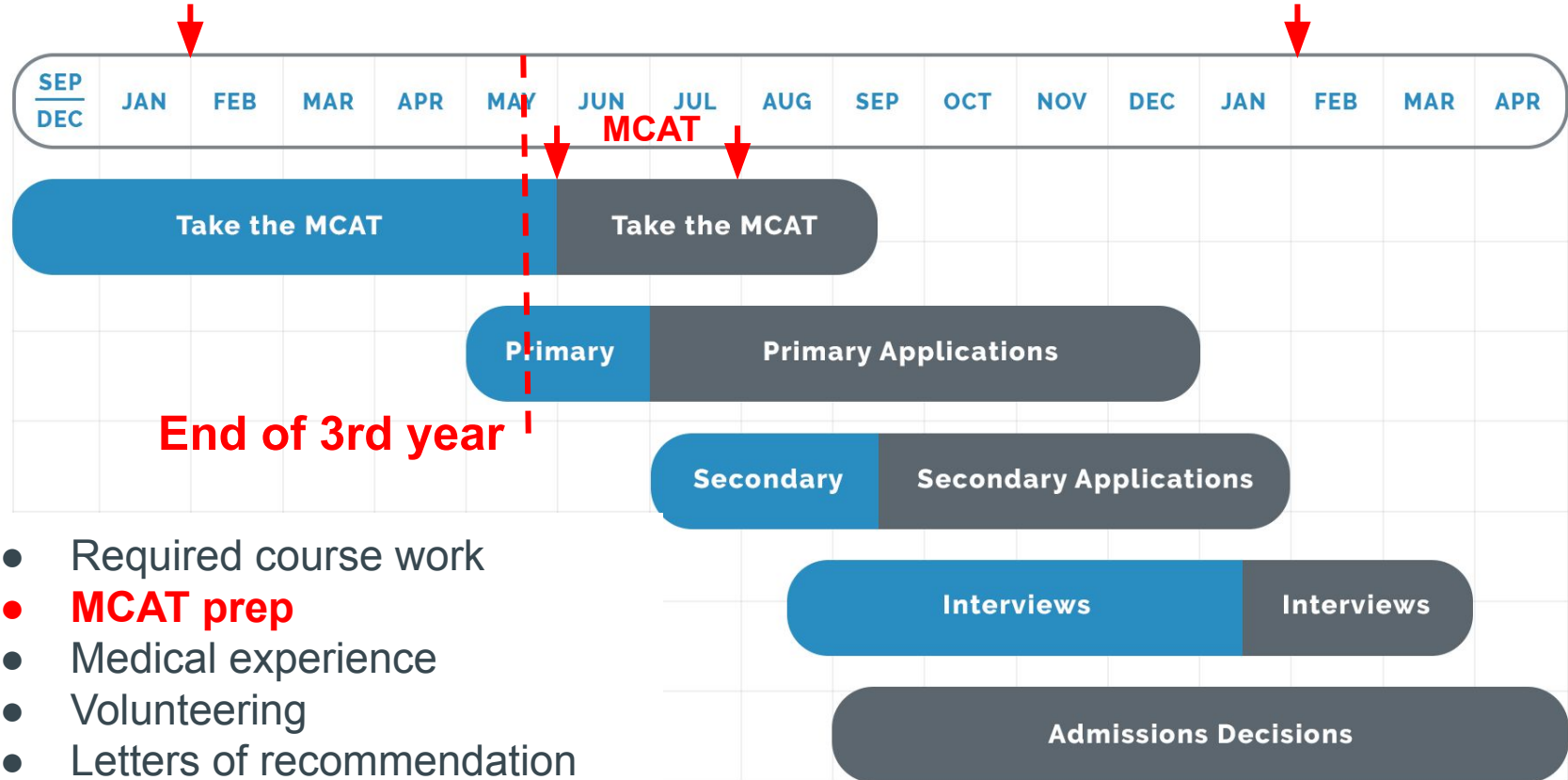
Timeline - 18 months, 18 months, 18 months

- Think **18 months** ahead
 - The application cycle is 18 months
- What are you trying to achieve?
 - MD, DO, DPM*, DDS/DMD, OD, PA, OT, PT
- Are you a good test taker?
 - Which test do you need?
 - **Test prep is where things go terribly wrong**
- Will you need summer courses at TCNJ?
 - BIO 201, BIO 231, CHE 331/332, MAT 127, PHY* 201/202
- **Will you need a GAP year? Years?**

Timeline - In cycle (no gap year)

- Application cycle naming convention uses the intended start year at med school
 - **E.g. this is the 2026 medical school application cycle**
- MCAT
 - Ideal: Taken by the end of **May JUNIOR year**
 - Latest: Taken by the end of July
 - Your application does not exist without an MCAT
- Open a file with the MCAC
 - Spring of junior year (February 15th)
 - **≈18 months prior to intended start of med school**
- Application cycle services open about 16 months prior to intended start date at med school

Medical School Admissions Timeline



- Required course work
- **MCAT prep**
- Medical experience
- Volunteering
- Letters of recommendation
- MCAC file

Paths to Medical School

- Complete 4-yr undergraduate degree (**apply in your 3rd year!**)
 - Traditional or standard route
- Nationally: **>60% take gap year(s)**
 - Med school start age: 24-26
 - Overwhelming majority go this route
- Others
 - RWJMS early assurance
 - First-generation college and low-income (PELL-eligible) students
 - Jefferson early assurance (Dr. Keith Pecor)
 - First-generation college and low-income students
 - Rowan SOM early assurance (DO, 4+4 **pending**)
 - St. George's University (MD, 4+4 **pending**)

What do I need to apply?

- Undergraduate degree*
 - Accredited college or university
 - Required coursework (application -vs- matriculation)
- Appropriate **standardized test** examples
 - More important for MD/DO programs
 - **Look out for minimums!**
 - Minimum -vs- competitive scores
- Experience with patients
 - Direct patient contact > shadowing
- Demonstrated service to others
- Letters of recommendation

Required Coursework MD/DO

- Standard
 - 2 semesters of Biology with laboratory
 - **BIO 201 and BIO 211**
 - 2 semesters of Inorganic Chemistry with laboratory
 - **CHE 201 and CHE 202**
 - 2 semesters of Organic Chemistry with laboratory
 - **CHE 331 and CHE 332**
 - 2 semesters of Physics with laboratory
 - **PHY 121/201 and PHY 122/202**
 - **Most do not require calculus based physics**
- Your grades in these courses are important
 - The MCAT is more important

Required Coursework MD/DO

- Most medical schools also require:
 - 2 semesters of English or writing intensive courses
 - **Any TCNJ major covers this**
 - 1-2 semesters of Math
 - MAT 127 and STA 215 (or MAT 128)*
 - **Non-STEM majors need to address this**
- Other considerations
 - Courses have prerequisites
 - Examples: MAT 127, CHE 201
 - Recommended: **Biochemistry***, genetics, Psych/Soc, public health, microbiology*, advanced courses, etc.
 - Will vary for MD, DO, dental, optometry, etc.

Which test do I need to take?

- Allopathic, osteopathic, podiatric
 - MD, DO, DPM = MCAT
- Optometry
 - OD = OAT
- Dental
 - DMD/DDS = DAT
- Physicians assistant
 - PA = GRE, PA-CAT

Letters of recommendation

- 3-5 **STRONG** letters
 - STEM professor x2
 - Other professor
 - Volunteer
 - Professional in the field (DO, DVM/VMD, DPM, OD)*
- Personal statement
 - Consistent?
 - Don't overthink this and don't spend too much time on it
- Target schools?
 - Look for school specific requirements

Exceptions you should look out for

- Biochemistry
 - Some medical schools require a second course in biochemistry
 - BIO 211 counts as the first
 - **With organic chemistry as a prerequisite**
 - Examples: Arizona, Arkansas, Florida State, etc.
- Specific course requirements
 - Microbiology (e.g. Duke)
- Calculus B
 - A couple of medical school require/recommend calculus B
- Odd English course requirements
 - 2-3 English courses **taught by the English department**
 - FYW, FYS, mid-level writing, and senior seminar do not count
- **Minimum MCAT or grade requirements**

Is research critical?

- **No.**

- There is no difference between the admission rates
- Can doing research help? (Positive)
 - Strong letter **if you do a good job**
 - Problem solving skills
- Can doing research hurt? (Negative)
 - What if you do not do a good job because it is a secondary activity?
 - **Takes time away** from medically relevant opportunities
 - EMT, volunteering, shadowing, MCAT prep

- Exceptions

- MSTP (medical scientist training programs) aka combined degree
- MD / PhD, DO / PhD, OD / PhD, DMD / PhD

Do I need research?

- American Medical Association (AMA) Position
 - Research isn't required to secure a residency position (or for admission to medical school)
 - Research is not required for admission to medical school
 - Survey of program directors conducted by the National Resident Matching Program
 - 12 other factors were seen as more important over “involvement and interest in research”
- Really, the answer is **NO**
- You should do research if you like it

There are a lot of applicants

- NJMS: ≈ 7000
- RWJMS: ≈ 6000
- Hackensack Meridian: > 6000
- Sidney Kimmel Medical College (Jefferson): $> 10,000$
- Penn State: $> 9,000$
- Rowan (Osteopathic): > 6000
- Most MD/DO program get between 5000-10,000 applicants

Are you a candidate or a good candidate?

- **Do you exceed the averages of the school?**
 - In state -vs- out of state bias*
 - Public -vs- private
- Strong GPA*
 - 3.6 is OK, >3.7 is better
- Strong test score*
 - MCAT - 510 is OK but 512 (>80%) for MD is better
 - DAT - 20 or better (>75%)
 - OAT - 330 or better (>75%)

Reflect: Are you a good candidate?

- Academics
 - GPA, coursework, **MCAT**
- Service and/or clinical experience
 - Shadowing vs **direct patient contact**
- Strong letters of recommendation
 - Please, please, please, **select your writers carefully**
- Strong communication and people skills
 - The interview is important
- Long term commitments: **“Ask them if they are just checking boxes or actually committing to things.”**
 - George Heinrich, MD NJMS

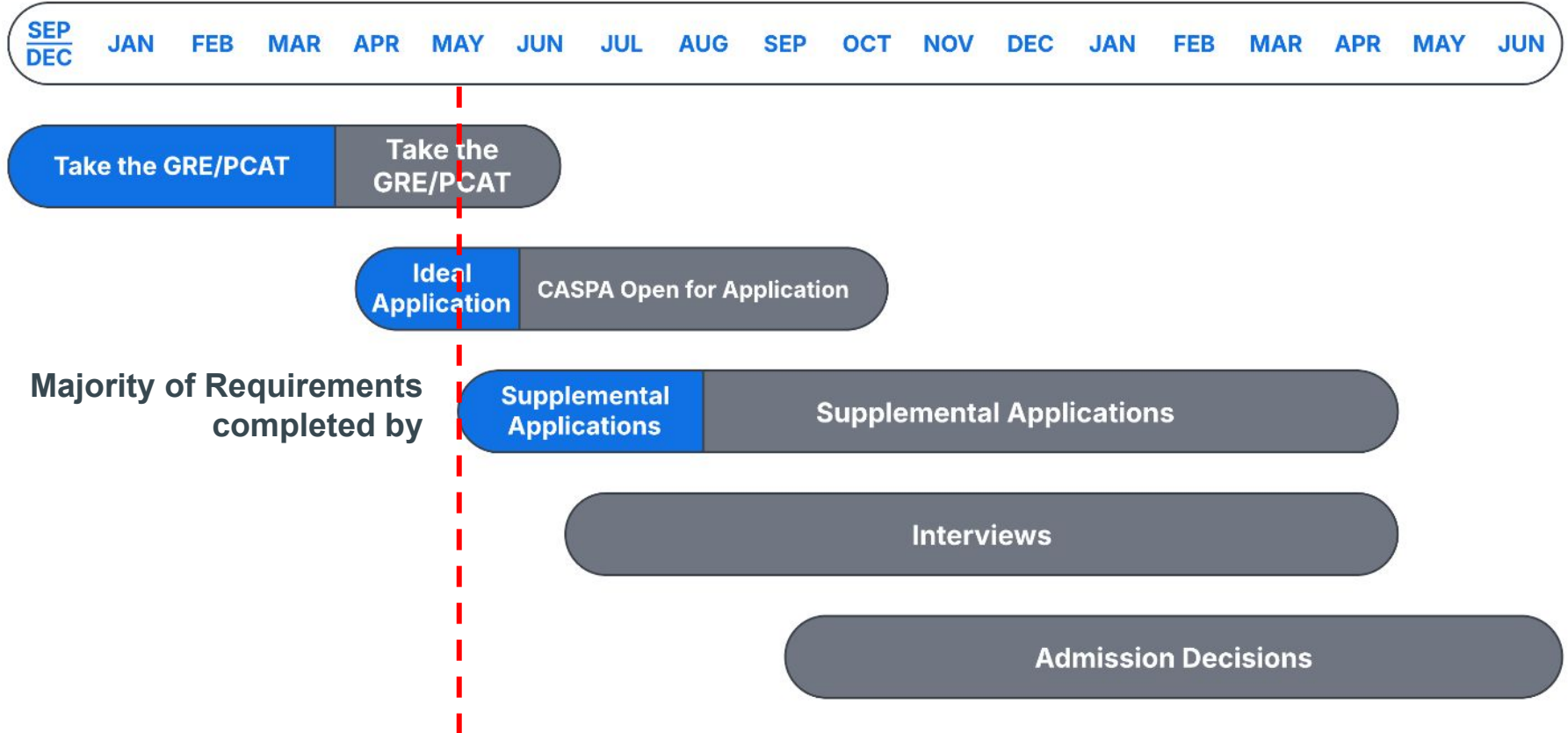
Timeline - PA

- As soon as you decide you want to be a PA look at the different programs you might be interested
 - No clear consensus on what you need
- You want to submit everything when the portal opens
- **≈16-18 months** prior to the desired start date is when your application should be ready
 - Required Coursework*
 - Experiences
 - Letters of Recommendation
 - Standardized Tests

Timeline - No gap year

- GRE/PA-CAT
 - Ideal: Taken by winter/early **spring JUNIOR year**
 - Retake by mid summer
- CASPA opens ~April (check your schools)
 - Submit your applications by May of your junior year
 - **Applications need to be VERIFIED by application deadline**
 - Most programs are filled by summer
- Look for secondary applications around May/June of junior year
 - ~1 month after submission of application
- Remaining prerequisites Fall semester senior
 - Limit to 1-2 course

Physician Assistant School Admission Timeline



Required Coursework PA

- “Common Core”
 - 2 semesters of Biology with laboratory
 - **BIO 201 and BIO 211**
 - 2 semesters of Inorganic Chemistry with laboratory
 - **CHE 201 and CHE 202**
 - 2 semesters of Anatomy & Physiology with laboratory
 - **BIO 301 and BIO 302**
 - 1 semester of Microbiology
 - **BIO 312**
 - 1 semester of Statistics
 - **STA 215**
 - 1 semester of psychology
 - **PSY 201**
- Your grades in these courses are important

Required Coursework PA

- Other classes you might see
 - Biochemistry
 - Should confirm whether BIO 211 will count
 - INFO on BIO 211 name change and course content:
<https://biology.tcnj.edu/resources-for/current-students/regarding-the-name-change-for-bio-211/>
 - 1-2 Semesters of Math
 - STA 215 and some Calculus (MAT 120/127)
 - Genetics
 - BIO 231
 - Medical Terminology
 - KHS 200
 - Other random gen ed classes (social sciences, other health, public health etc.)
- These classes do not consider prerequisite courses

PA things to consider

- Major doesn't matter as long as you have the courses
- Rigor Matters
 - If there are multiple versions of a class, be sure it is of an “acceptable” level
 - E.G. At TCNJ there are 3 versions of A&P
- When you need to finish classes before application
- When you took/take your course matters
- How many times you took a class

PA activities you need

- Each school has different requirements regarding activities that are required vs. recommended
- Patient Facing is good
 - Volunteer or paid, if it has a clinical aspect it is good
 - Shadowing
 - Clinical research
- Research is good
- Things to consider regarding activities
 - Hours matter but so does quality*
 - Absolutely should have PA specific experience
 - Some schools allow virtual shadowing/healthcare




Are you a good candidate? - PA edition

- Do you meet the minimum requirements for ____?
 - Minimum means they will not immediately reject your application
- Competitive means you are WELL above the minimum
 - GPA
 - GRE/PA-CAT
 - Experience Hours
- Most schools want at least a 3.0 cumulative GPA
 - Minimum is 3.0 cumulative GPA, 100-300 hrs of experience.
 - Competitive/Matriculated average: 3.6 - 4.0, Thousands of hours of experience, >300 on GRE

Things to be aware of

- Your GPA in PAWs is not necessarily your application GPA
 - As part of verification you need to input the grades for all attempts of your classes
 - Where, when, grade etc.
 - This includes repeated attempts
- CASPA then will categorize and calculate your GPAs during verification
 - Cumulative
 - Science
 - Prerequisite
 - Year
- Repeating the class doesn't remove the grade
- Not all A's are created equal
 - RIGOR matters!
- Need a minimum grade for class to count as a prerequisite

PA - CAT

- It's coming
- The PA MCAT
- 3hr test, 180 multiple choice based on 12 general PA requirements
 - Anatomy & Physiology 26%
 - Gen. Biology 13%
 - Microbiology 9% 
 - Gen Chemistry 11% 
 - Org. Chemistry 9%
 - Biochemistry 12%
 - Statistics 3%
 - Medical Terminology 1%
 - Sociology 4% 
 - Psychology 8%
 - Genetics 4%

Required Coursework PT

- 2 semesters of Biology with laboratory
 - **BIO 201 and BIO 211**
- 2 semesters of Inorganic Chemistry with laboratory
 - **CHE 201 and CHE 202**
- 2 semesters of Anatomy & Physiology with laboratory
 - **BIO 301 and BIO 302**
- 2 semesters of Physics
 - **PHY 201 and PHY 202**
 - **Most do not require calculus based physics**
- 1 semester of Statistics
 - **STA 215**
- 2 semester of behavioral sciences
 - **psyc/soc/public health**
- Your grades in these courses are important

Take home messages

- Everyone has their own path
 - Apply when you are ready
 - **There is no guarantee of admission**
- The **MCAC** is here for advice and support
 - Have a schedule and a plan, but **be flexible**
- Our advice
 - Focus on your undergraduate studies
 - **Build measurable skills**
 - You cannot repeat your college career
 - **Academic damage is difficult to undo**
 - Be self reflective and realistic
 - **Know when to consider other medical careers**

Homework: What is your pathway?

- Consider the things we covered in this presentation
- What schools are you going to target?
 - Are you a good candidate? Minimums -vs- competitive?
- What standardized do you need to take?
 - When do you need the score?
 - When are you going to study?
- What courses do you need specifically at TCNJ?
 - When are you going to take them? Do you need them for a standardized test?
 - BA or BS? Summer?
- How are your STEM grades? Overall GPA?
 - Are they consistent with your long term goals?
 - MD, DO, etc.
- What experiences are you going to seek out?
 - Volunteering, patient care, etc.
- Are you planning a gap year?
 - Or more?

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