

Myths about the UNM School of Medicine Admissions Process

Myth 1

The more times you apply, the better your chances of getting into medical school.

Wrong. In general, statistically speaking, you have a much greater chance of getting in on the first or second attempts. The competition in each admissions cycle is keen, and failure to address weaknesses in your previous application will prevent you from being accepted, regardless of how many times you apply. However, there have been a few applicants who were successful on their fourth or fifth attempts.

Myth 2

An applicant who applies early has a greater chance of being accepted.

Wrong. All applicants are held to the same standards, regardless of when they apply. You should only apply after you have received grades (C or better) for all of your prerequisite courses (except for biochemistry), have received the score on the MCAT that you wish to use for your application, and have obtained some clinical and volunteer experience. Grades and MCATs obtained after the submission of the AMCAS application will not be considered.

Myth 3

Majoring in biology or biochemistry to increases the chances of being accepted to medical school.

Wrong. Only about half of the applicants accepted to UNM SOM each year are biology majors. Many successful applicants major in the social sciences, humanities, languages, law, nursing, pharmacy and the fine arts. However, the biosciences are the foundation of modern medicine. Thus, to do well in medical school, it makes sense to minor in biology or to take several courses beyond the basic prerequisite introductory biology courses. Courses in molecular and cellular biology, genetics, microbiology, immunology, anatomy and physiology are strongly recommended.

Myth 4

A great interview can compensate for a weak academic record.

Wrong. Applicants are scored using the following formula: 50% on MCATs/grades (cognitive skills) and 50% on non-cognitive skills. However, the interview is only one way we use to evaluate non-cognitive skills, which include demonstrated interest in medicine, personal qualities important to the practice of medicine, problem solving/critical reasoning ability, and demonstrated commitment to service, background and diversity. Letters of recommendation and the written application are also very important in evaluating these skills.

Myth 5

A strong academic record guarantees you a slot in medical school.

Wrong. Last year alone, more than a dozen students with MCATs and GPAs well above the mean for the entering class were rejected based on poor non-cognitive skills. The top reasons were (1) inability to explain why the applicant wanted to be a physician, (2) lack of demonstrated commitment to a career in medicine, (3) poor communication skills, (4) poor knowledge of the health care issues at the state, national and international levels, and (5) poor problem solving and critical reasoning skills.

Myth 6

Recommendations from powerful people can be very helpful to your application

Wrong. One should obtain a 3-4 letters from individuals who know you very well through your academics, research, clinical, or volunteer activities. Recommendations from powerful people, especially those who don't know you very well, work against you. Such recommendations generally reflect poorly on the applicant as well as the author of the letter. The Admissions Committee only considers formal letters of recommendation that are **mailed directly** to the Office of Admissions. **Unsolicited phone calls or indirect contacts are never considered.** Members of the Admissions Committee with any conflicts of interest about an applicant are not allowed to score the application.

Myth 7

To increase your chances of admissions, it is advisable to say you want to practice primary care in a NM rural or underserved area.

Wrong. The primary goal of the School of Medicine is to educate physicians to serve all areas of New Mexico, including both the urban and rural areas of the state. While NM is in need of primary care physicians who want to practice in its underserved areas, it is very unwise to lie about your intent. The members of the Admissions Committee are skilled at detecting applicants who say what they think the interviewers might want to hear.

Myth 8

Entering a graduate program is a good way to increase the chances of getting into medical school.

Wrong. If you have an interest in carrying out research or applying your graduate degree (law, MPH, MBA) to your medical career, an advanced degree may make sense. However, entering a graduate program only for the purpose of making your application look better can backfire. In general, the SOM expects all students currently in graduate programs to complete all requirements for their degrees prior to matriculation. The Admissions Committee often questions the motivation and determination of applicants who start but do not complete graduate degree programs.