AN OVERVIEW OF THE MCATs

Introduction:

The Association of American Medical Colleges defines the Medical College Admission Test, or MCAT as “a standardized, multiple-choice examination designed to assess your problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of natural, behavioral, and social science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine.” The exam is required for admission to medical school and along with your GPA, is an important metric that medical schools use in evaluating your readiness to undertake the rigors of the medical school curriculum. The MCAT was completely revamped in 2015, and we are continuing to learn and understand the new format, scoring and content. Please visit the AAMC website for MCAT registration, test dates and additional information.

TIMING OF THE MCAT

It’s generally best to take the MCAT as close to the time you complete the required coursework as possible. Waiting for a year or more between the time you finish your science pre-requisites (biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, physics) and the MCAT test date isn’t recommended, as your knowledge of these subjects may fade. Conversely, taking the exam too early also has its drawbacks and you shouldn’t take the exam if you haven’t completed the required courses, had adequate time to prepare, or if your score will expire before you pursue all of the things you’d like to do between college and medical school. MCAT scores come with an expiration date and are good for 3 years at most medical schools. Whenever you decide to take the exam, we recommend taking the test no later than the July of the summer when you’re applying to medical school as taking it later than July will hold up your application at the secondary stage. Additionally, if your score is not as competitive as you would like, you have no options for retaking the exam prior to review of your application. See the MCAT Calendar for 2015-2016 here.

PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

There are several ways to prepare for the MCAT and it makes sense to think carefully about how you study best, where you’ll be preparing for the exam and what else you’ll be doing during your MCAT prep time. In short, there is no “one size fits all” answer to the question “How do I study for the MCATS?” One thing that is certain, however, is that you should approach the MCAT with the goal of taking it one time. All MCAT scores are released to medical schools, so never take the exam as a ‘trial run’! The MCAT is physically grueling (7 hours and 33 minutes), expensive ($300.00), requires dedicated prep time (most people recommend 2-3 months of daily preparation for about 2-3 hours per day) and you should take as many full-length practice exams as possible: 6-8 seems to be a reasonable goal. If you qualify for the AAMC Fee Assistance Program, the cost of the MCAT will be subsidized (https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/ ).

As far as what prep materials are best, the Health Professions Program at Middlebury does not endorse any one approach or test prep company over another, but simply provides you with information that allows you to make an informed decision.

The AAMC provides a number of lower-cost prep materials, including a full-length practice test, an Official Guide, and the MCAT Question Pack Bundle: https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/prepare/.

✓ Kaplan Prep
✓ Khan Academy (free of charge)
✓ Princeton Review
✓ Examkrackers
✓ Dr. Flowers
It’s easy to get caught up in wondering, which prep company is “the best”, or spend a lot of time looking at testimonials promising high scores and guaranteed success. The bottom line is that all test prep programs have fairly similar information, study modules, and practice exams, and success ultimately comes down to the amount of time one actually spends studying and taking practice exams. Good Luck!!!