ADVICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 2006:
BEING PRE-MED AT DARTMOUTH

CLASSES:

-“I was a bio major and really enjoyed, for the most part, the classes I took for my major. I think the department has an undeservedly bad reputation from Bio 16 and 15. I took 19, not 15, and didn’t take 16 until my sophomore spring (when I had already declared a bio major). So far, Bio 16 is my single worst grade at Dartmouth. I’m glad that I was far enough into the Bio department that I didn’t let that class discourage me. Bio really gets better from there...so don’t let it discourage YOU from your science/premed ambitions either. Some of my favorite science classes have been: Endocrinology, Neurobiology, Advanced Neurobiology, the first half of Orgo (Hughes makes up for the terribleness of all the memorization), and Immunology...all good ones, try to take them.”

-“I think that taking required pre-med classes later in my college career was probably a smart move. I didn’t take physics until junior year, and I think the benefit of that was knowing how to handle college classes. Since it’s important to do well in those classes, I’m glad I was able to wait a little while to take them.”

-“TAKE A WIDE RANGE OF COURSES!!!! don’t stick to just the sciences but take courses in esp. psychology as well, things like behavioral psychology, abnormal psychology, social, developmental, adolescent and child, etc. or similar courses in other departments. A lot of med schools want some background in social science classes and not just hard sciences. I didn’t know that and now I’m really really really happy I’m a psych major b/c I inadvertently fulfilled that requirement.”

-“If you think you want to be a doctor when you get here freshman year, take Bio 2. Not only is it an amazing class but it will let you know for sure if medicine is what really interests you. Also, it will give you a chance to meet Lee Witters, the most important man to know on this campus if you want to be pre-med!”

-“Classes: Clinical Biomedical Research with Kevin Curtis. He is amazing, the class is great.”

-“If you need to double up on science classes, I suggest taking physics 3 or 4 as one of the classes. Biology and chemistry courses are a little more time-intensive (especially those with lab components) and are a bit harder to double up on, unless you take a very easy course as your third.”

-“I would suggest that everyone take Bio 2 before you attempt to take the MCAT. Basically a large majority of the biology section of the MCAT is covered in Bio 2, and I found it difficult to get up to speed when studying for the biology section because I hadn’t taken it, whereas the people I knew who had taken Bio 2 (even those who had never taken a single science course beyond Bio 2!) seemed very comfortable with the material.”
MCAT:

-“The MCAT: Try to relax. I didn't take a course, you don't HAVE to, if you're motivated and can study by yourself...and YES you can study by yourself, just buy the ExamKrackers books and take easy classes in the winter (although maybe my feelings about this will change when I get my scores back!) It doesn't have to totally rule your life, but start early (January for April test).”

RESEARCH:

-“If you're interested in research, take advantage of the fact that Dartmouth gives research grants to support you over the summer. These are very generous and made it possible for me to do some cool independent research for two summers. Also there's a first-year research grant too, wish I had thought of a project to apply for one of those, that would have been a fun way to spend my first summer (instead of babysitting). When thinking about research, sit down first and think of what you're really interested in and passionate about in health/medicine, and then try to find a research project that's related to that. You'll enjoy it so much more than if you're just doing research about some random gene that doesn't really matter to you.”

BALANCING ATHLETICS WITH BEING PRE-MED:

-“I remember freshman spring when I first decided that I wanted to go to med school and I was scared that I wouldn't be able to handle the classwork while being a varsity athlete. In the end, it wasn't really that hard, and so I shouldn't have been worried about it.”

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:

-“Spend time exploring, and then choose a couple things that you're really passionate about and find meaning in. Pursue those instead of spreading yourself too thin.”

-“Don't ever do an extracurricular activity just because you think it is the type of thing that the medical schools want to see. From all the people I know who applied, doing the "traditional" medically-related activities does not seem to be the main emphasis that admissions committees are looking for. Of course, you should probably have set foot in a hospital or doctor's office at some point, but shadowing through the NSS a few times is actually probably sufficient; as long as you can demonstrate an understanding of the realities and demands of the profession, it's OK if you haven't spent every moment of your undergrad career working directly with medicine. The admissions committees like to see something different and a little bit unusual, so if you have outside interests, like being on a Varsity sports team or joining a dance group, go for it! They like to hear in interviews that you are passionate about your interests, and it’s easy for them to tell when they're speaking with you what activities you did because you felt you had to, and what you really loved. It's OK, and actually encouraged, to not be the "traditional" applicant!”
"You don't have to do it all. You don't have to be a part of every club on campus. By all means, if you enjoy doing 10 different things at once, go for it, but I would say to choose one (or two) club/association/committee that captures your interest and in which you like the people. Take that club, and really become involved in it, get to know the people, form lasting relationships, and let your interest grow. Don't wear yourself out by signing up for everything. Trust me, you don't need to do that to have a successful future."

"One thing I wish I had done a lot earlier (maybe during the summer after freshman year) was volunteer in a clinic/health setting. I still haven't been able to do this really intensively. It's harder to get to do than you think, since there are so many fledgling MDs out there clinics are naturally skeptical of people who want to volunteer and then only come in once. It was hard for me to do this during the year because of the sport I did/not having a car, blah, blah. Anyway, I feel like this is something you need to plan how you're going to do if you haven't already. so (nike) just do it. The NSS shadowing program is good too, try it out for a couple terms, see different things."

"Do the take-your-professor to lunch thing often, they have fun and it is really cool to get to know your profs better. I was nervous about asking but they are usually flattered. You can do it once a term!"

"Also, take advantage of the things that NSS has to offer, like shadowing a doctor. The programs are great and will expose you to real medical practice. Shadowing a doctor/being in the hospital was the most important thing I did in my four years as a Dartmouth pre-med. And remember, you have to work to live, not live to work. Good luck!"

**GENERAL THOUGHTS:**

"The most important thing during undergrad is: whatever you want. If you hate lab work, don't go anywhere near a lab. Get non-premed friends. There are a million things that are important to the practice of medicine, and a millions things that can make you a better doctor. Go after the things that interest you most. Just about any major I can think of could be merged with medicine, and is applicable to your later life. Any kind of community service work is ok. Most kinds of research can relate to medicine."

"You'll learn everything you need to know in medical school; don't worry about becoming an MD during undergrad, that's not what it's for."

"If you are someone who did not come into college being pre-med but has developed an interest in the sciences, it's not too late! Don't be discouraged by the fact that some people seem to have been planning on medicine for their whole lives; it's definitely something that you can decide on later. I didn't take a single science class until my sophomore winter, and I didn't decide to be pre-med until halfway through my junior year, but I will be graduating with a science major, I still managed to take the MCAT my junior spring and apply during my senior year, and I will be attending medical school directly after Dartmouth. So, it can be done no matter when you decide on medicine as a career path; don't ever think you're too far behind to catch up!"
"If you need advice about what classes to take, what schools to apply to, how to write a personal statement, etc., I would go to your older peers who have applied already. Career services has some names of recent alumni who are attending various schools that have indicated that they are willing to be emailed by Dartmouth undergrads (look in the big red binders of medical school surveys on the shelf in Career Services), so if you don't know anyone personally you can get names there. The actual Career Services staff, even the specifically pre-med advisors, were not very helpful or, in fact, very knowledgeable."

"First of all, do not forget that you are at a liberal arts college. I'm sure you will go to med school one day so take advantage of non-science classes offered here. Major in something that isn't science, unless that is your absolute passion. But if you can major in something else do it. Travel abroad. Don't sacrifice the great things Dartmouth has to offer just because you "think" it wouldn't look "good" to medical school admissions committees. I mean, do we really know? Probably not."

**CHOOSING A MEDICAL SCHOOL:**

"The difference in medical schools is often in the opportunities during the 3rd and 4th year. Don't worry so much about the 1st and 2nd year curriculum... all schools will teach you what you need to know. Focus on what is available to you during your clinical rotations."

4