

Considering a postbaccalaureate program? What you should know

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For prospective medical students, your undergraduate education is a large part of your application profile, but it isn't set in stone.

For medical school applicants lacking in required coursework or looking to improve their academic profile, postbaccalaureate programs may be a viable option. What are the circumstances in which it makes sense to pursue one? One expert offered her insight on that question.

Learn why a low GPA may not sink your medical school application.

There are two types of postbaccs

A postbaccalaureate course of study means a student is taking course work after the completion of their baccalaureate (frequently called undergraduate) degree is complete.

"There are two different types of postbaccs," according to Carol A. Terregino, MD, senior associate dean for education and academic affairs at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "There are people like me. Thirty years ago, I was a Latin major and had a teaching degree. Then I decided I wanted to go to medical school. My postbaccalaureate program consisted of completion of prerequisites so that I could be prepared to take the MCAT and apply to medical school. Those are undergraduate courses, so that's an undergraduate postbacc for a nonscience major."

When students apply to medical school, the key metrics tend to be a student's score on the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), undergraduate GPA and undergraduate GPA in science courses. The second type of postbacc is focused on increasing GPA metrics.

“There’s postbacc programs that are undergraduate courses and upper-level science courses that are designed to increase the undergraduate science GPA of an applicant who perhaps didn’t do so well in college,” Dr. Terregino said.

There are also master’s programs that are called postbaccalaureate programs that can raise a student’s profile. As far as metrics are concerned, however, these programs don’t factor into a student’s undergraduate GPA figures.

Learn the admission criteria medical school admissions offices focus on.

Where do you stand?

Before attending a postbacc program, or even applying, Dr. Terregino recommends prospective medical students solicit feedback and look at the metrics for students being admitted to medical school. Some Offices for Admissions counsel prospective applicants and this advice can be invaluable.

“My advice would be to look at the schools and look at the metrics of the applicants that are getting into medical school,” Dr. Terregino said. “It’s doing the math to see if a [postbacc is a] cost-effective program to make a meaningful change their undergrad GPA or to show the ability to handle rigorous graduate courses.

“It’s really key that [potential applicants] speak with their prehealth adviser and contemplate what will be most beneficial. Is it to raise their undergrad GPA? At our school, we’ve decided to have a broad range of GPAs and MCATs that we accept. We say you need to have at least a B average as an undergrad and at least a 494 on the MCAT. We are very cognizant of educational disadvantage, recognize the diversity that can be seen in modest academic metrics, and know that we have academic support systems that help ensure student success.

Discover the top four questions to ask your premed advisor.

Caution about linkage programs

Linkage programs are those in which students can matriculate from a postbaccalaureate program to medical school if they meet certain requirements, but there’s some key things to consider.

“When you look at those linkage programs, ones that link with medical schools, you should look at what the success rate is to link,” Dr. Terregino said. “You need to consider that. We do ours differently

[at Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School]. We do an accelerated acceptance program. Students apply and if they met certain criteria we will interview quickly and not make them wait a year following their course of study.”

Medicine can be a career that is both challenging and highly rewarding, but figuring out a medical school’s prerequisites and navigating the application process can be a challenge into itself. The AMA premed glossary guide has the answers to frequently asked questions about medical school, the application process, the MCAT and more.

Have peace of mind and get everything you need to start med school off strong with the AMA.