

# Medical school applications up—what that means for premeds

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Early trends indicate that medical school application volume will be higher during the 2020-21 application cycle. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), which oversees the admissions process for MD-granting medical schools, applications to the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) were up 16% year over year at the end of August.

Reporting data from early September, DO-granting programs also are seeing a spike in unique applicants, with a rise of 16% year over year, according to the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM). The AAMC was unable to provide the number of unique applicants in AMCAS.

A rise in applications, such as the one reported by the AAMC, could mean a similar number of students applying as in previous years but applying to more programs. The number provided by AACOM, however, totaling individuals rather than applications, indicates more people are applying to medical school.

Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine (OU), one of 37 member schools of the AMA Accelerating Change in Medical Education Consortium, has seen an 11% increase in applications from this time a year ago, according to John D. Schriener, PhD, an associate dean for admissions and student affairs at OU.

“Applications are up, so it’s going to be another competitive year,” Schriener said. His advice to applicants: “Continue to work hard. Leverage your volunteer opportunities. Don’t lose sight of the reason you want to do this—to serve, and make sure you stay on top of your game in the application process.”

Learn about which college majors prepare you best for medical school.

## Economy down, applications up

Schriner says he has seen applications “ebb and flow” in his three decades working in admissions. Historically, one reason applications increase is a bad job market for potential college grads, which is certainly the case during a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic that has sent unemployment rates soaring.

“One of the things I think is basically recession-proof there’s always going to be a need for providers,” he said. “Certainly, the projected physician shortage speaks to that.”

The rise in applications also “could be attributed to people are seeing what’s going on right now in our world,” Schriner said. “What better way to change things than to become a physician?” Find out how COVID-19 is affecting medical school admissions.

## Think carefully about why you’re applying

An applicant who is pursuing a career in medicine because of a struggling economy is probably not one who is going to perform well in the interview process, Schriner said. Instead, as in any other application cycle, he and other admissions officers across the country are on the lookout for potential medical students who are pursuing medicine for altruistic reasons.

Learn more about being ready to answer this question: Why are you pursuing a career in medicine? Interviewers will ask.

The rising number of applications shouldn’t necessarily change any individual applicant’s approach, Schriner said.

“Getting into med school is a competitive endeavor whether, you are up 1% or 11% in applications. We’re still looking for all the same qualities and characteristics. Your approach should remain steadfast to being the most viable candidate you can be.”

## Longtime standards still apply

That means applicants should be hitting all the usual marks that medical schools look for, in terms of research and volunteer experience, and showing “a passion for service,” he said. Learn more with the AMA about how research experience can strengthen your medical school application.

The application cycle being more competitive isn't a reason to wait a year or two to apply, said Schriner. Still, taking a longer look at which medical schools you are applying to, and possibly increasing the number, could be helpful.

"You'd certainly want to cast a wide enough net to optimize potential opportunities," he said. "You want to be strategic about it. You want to make sure the institutions you are applying to are ones you can see yourself attending. It might not be a bad idea to cast a little broader net in a more competitive climate with applications being up."

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.