What's been your favorite part of the journey to apply to professional schools?

Every experience I have participated in during the journey to medical school – from my clinical experiences to my classes – has reminded me of the passion I have for this field. At the end of this process, despite the challenges and unknowns, it has been rewarding to realize I could not imagine myself in any other career.

What were some of the challenges you came across when preparing to apply to schools (what was tougher than you expected)?

Studying for the MCAT was tougher than any undergraduate class had prepared me for. I quickly discovered that this test is more about strategic critical thinking rather than pure knowledge, meaning that you could know all the organic chemistry in the world but still be bad at answer passage-based questions or time management. I revised my strategy for studying a few times and realized that devoting more time to practice questions was beneficial to my test-taking strategies.

How did you prepare yourself for the process of applying to schools?

As a particularly Type-A person who loves structure, I created a four-year plan document early on in my college experience. This level of structure carried through into my application process. While self-studying for the MCAT, I created an Excel spreadsheet to document my study hours to keep myself on track and accountable for my efforts. While I started considering schools to apply to, I made another document for relevant information for the schools I was interested in, including cost of application and deadlines. When pre-writing and writing secondary application essays, I kept all drafts of all of my essays in one giant document so I could cross-reference certain details and sentences. Having this level of structure certainly isn’t for everyone; this type of planning just helped me keep me calm and have a sense of order during this somewhat stressful process.
What organizations were you involved in as an undergraduate student?

I was involved with the American Medical Student Association for all four years of college, serving as treasurer for two years and as president for during my senior year. While at ECU, I also started TEDxECU, a local chapter of the nonprofit TEDx, which helps local speakers display their personal stories and innovative ideas in a keynote speaker manner during an annual event. I served as the community service chair for ELITE Pirates, tutored K-8 students with P.A.S.S, and volunteered with Campus Kitchen at Operation Sunshine.

What services or organizations would you recommend pre-professional students utilize?

The PPAC was a great resource for MCAT study materials and advice! I recommend thoroughly perusing the application (AMCAS and ACOMAS) and school websites for information regarding deadlines, timelines, and pre-requisite requirements (don’t wait until the last minute to do this!) Specifically, the MSAR (Medical School Admissions Requirements) is a good online tool to purchase ($28 for a one year subscription) to look at school-specific requirements, deadlines and costs.

Looking back, what advice would you give to students who are interested in professional schools? What do you wish you had known earlier?

The costs for applying to medical school add up. While the AMCAS application allows you apply with a set fee per school for primary applications, secondary application costs vary anywhere from $30-150 per school. Additionally, some schools require CASPer, a 90-minute online situation judgement test that has a fee per school that you decide to send your results to. Make sure you are prepared by budgeting for these costs ahead of time.

What type of shadowing did you do?

I participated in the Primary Care Physician Shadowing program, where I was able to shadow in pediatrics, internal medicine, general surgery, and emergency medicine. I also participated in the East Carolina Heart Institute summer internship through the Honors College, where I was able to shadow in cardiac, vascular, and thoracic surgery. I reached out to doctors individually as well, allowing me to intern and shadow in rheumatology, radiation oncology, ophthalmology, radiology, family medicine, and obstetrics and gynecology.

What type of volunteering did you do?

I primarily volunteered with the Greenville Community Shelter Clinic (GCSC) and the Pitt County Care Clinic (PCCC), two local free clinics run by medical students that primarily served underserved populations. I served as a pre-med volunteer, where my responsibilities involved patient intake, taking vital signs, and EHR data input. This experience helped me realize my interests in health disparities, prevention, and underserved care. Additionally, I had the opportunity to utilize my public health skills and volunteer as a Care Manager at GCSC, where I worked with patients one-on-one to set positive health goals, practice motivational interviewing for behavior change, and provide patients with resources to benefit and instill their disease preventing habits.

Where are you going to school?

UNC School of Medicine
Did you do research? If so, what was the topic?

I had the opportunity to work on 4 different research projects, resulting in three publications by the time I applied to medical school. This is definitely not a requirement by any means; I just enjoyed participating in various research projects.

I worked with Dr. Mansfield at the Brody School of Medicine in the Department of Biochemistry during my freshman year on a project regarding hypoxia in kidney cells. I participated in the Summer Biomedical Research Program that following summer, where I started working with Dr. Virag in the Department of Physiology studying the effects of a high-fat diet on cardiac structure and function (this actually turned into my senior honors thesis!). I helped write a narrative qualitative psychology paper examining the use of values-driven behavior change in cardiopulmonary rehabilitation patients during my sophomore year.

I am currently involved in a clinical research project studying the relationship between medical financial hardship and pediatric health outcomes.

What was your most rewarding experience at ECU?

I had the opportunity to study abroad for a semester in the Netherlands during my junior year. This certainly complicated my application process; I ended up doing my PPAC committee interview via Skype while I was still abroad. Still, I have no regrets; during the 6 months I spent abroad, I learned far more about cultural humility, diverse perspectives, independence, and my own worldview than I could have ever learned in an ECU classroom. I had the chance to visit 10 different countries and interact with people of various nationalities! I definitely recommend studying abroad in college if you have the chance to! (definitely look into scholarships if cost is a prohibitive factor – my entire experience was only possible with the help of a few different scholarships!)

Any other advice, recommendations, suggestions, or comments?

As a pre-med, it is easy to get into a mental frame of comparison against others or doing activities simply because it looks good for an application. Don’t forget to stay authentic to yourself; do things because you’re passionate about them, not solely to impress a medical school or because someone else you know did it. Have activities or hobbies outside of academics to stay grounded (exercise, listening to music, reading for fun). Good luck!