

CATHERINE GRAY

CLASS OF 2017



STUDENT PROFILE

Hometown: Hamilton, Massachusetts

Undergraduate Major: Public Health

Career Aspiration: Physician

Professional School: The Brody School of Medicine

Did you do research? If so what was the topic?

Yes, I was fortunate enough to do research in undergrad as well as during my gap years. During my senior year I worked under Dr. Walter Pories at the Brody School of Medicine looking at the effect of the Mediterranean diet on gut health and type 2 diabetes. After graduating, I worked at the UNC School of Medicine as the research coordinator the SPARK for Autism nationwide study. This study was focused on the genetic component of autism.

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

I would say that if you have your mind set on medicine, start planning early. Four years of undergrad will fly by, so having a detailed academic plan will be extremely helpful. However, remember that things don't always go as planned, and that's okay! When I first found out I had to take a gap year, I was devastated and felt like a complete failure. Now looking back, I am so incredibly happy that I took a gap year (well actually 3 gap years!). Not only did it allow me to gain incredible experience in the healthcare field, but it also allowed me to grow as a person. So although gap years were not part of my original plan, they allowed me to become a much more competitive applicant for medical school.

What type of shadowing did you do?

I participated in the Primary Care Physician Shadowing Program (where I shadowed in family medicine, meds/peds, internal medicine, emergency medicine and pediatrics). I also shadowed in pediatric neurology, cardiology, and orthopedic surgery.

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

I have thoroughly enjoyed my encounters with patients and finding lifelong mentors in the healthcare field.

What type of volunteering did you do?

A few of my volunteer experiences included the Greenville Community Shelter Clinic, Rocking Horse Ranch (a therapeutic horseback riding center), being a counselor at Victory Junction and serving as a tutor at Cornerstone Baptist Church. I also recently founded a non-profit that is aimed at saving dogs and cats from euthanasia in Eastern North Carolina.

What was your most rewarding experience at ECU?

I would say my most rewarding experience at ECU was graduating a semester early with honors. I worked incredibly hard and my hard work finally paid off!

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

I started preparing for applications early. Before applications even opened I spent a lot of time reading blogs, books and listening to podcasts to get an idea of what medical schools were looking for when reviewing applications. I prewrote all of my secondary essays so that I would be able to submit them the moment I received the prompts.

What organizations were you involved in as an undergraduate student?

Alpha Phi Sorority, AMSA (American Medical Student Association), Omicron Delta Kappa (a national leadership honors society) and the ECU Equestrian Club.

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

The pre-professional advising center was truly one of the best resources. Getting involved in the PPAC gives students access to great opportunities on campus and in the community.

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

Preparing for and taking the MCAT was definitely a lot more difficult than I thought it would be. Also, before starting my application, I do not think I was truly prepared for the level of self-reflection this whole process would require. I had a very hard time articulating “why medicine” to the admissions committees and reflecting on my experiences in a deeper way. I knew why I wanted to practice medicine, but putting it into words that did not sound cliché was very difficult for me.

Any other advice, recommendations, suggestions, or comments?

If I could go back and tell myself anything, it would be to believe in yourself! If you want something bad enough, you can make it happen. This journey is a very long, very difficult one. But one day, when you receive that call from the dean of a medical school telling you that you were accepted, all of the stress will be worth it.

It took me two cycles to get into medical school. When I didn't get in the first time, my friends and family kept asking me what my “plan B” was. I decided early on in this process that I would not have a plan B. Pursuing any career other than being a physician was just not in the cards for me. Having this tenacious mindset allowed me to push through the self-doubt and difficult times to make it to medical school.