



RACHAEL MCWILLIAMS

CLASS OF 2022

STUDENT PROFILE

Hometown: Pittsboro, NC

Undergraduate Major: Biology

Career Aspirations: Occupational Therapist

Professional School: Duke University

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

My favorite part of my journey through OT admissions was being able to share my passion for the profession through my interviews and essays. I also enjoyed meeting other future OTs with similar career aspirations.

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

To prepare myself for the OT application process, I created an Excel spreadsheet of all the schools I wished to apply to along with their required prerequisites, shadowing hours, and supplemental material (essays, personal statement, etc.). I then highlighted the tasks that I already completed in green. It was very satisfying to cross things off my to-do list.

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

One of my biggest pieces of advice is for students to remember that interviews should be a two-way conversation. Not only are you trying to sell yourself to the school, but you should also be asking the interviewer questions to make sure that the school is the right fit for you. At the end of the day, you are the customer, and you are paying money to attend their institution.

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

I recommend that students utilize the services provided by Pre-Professional Advising. The advisors at Pre-Professional Advising are very knowledgeable and can get you on the right track in applying to professional school. I also recommend that students make use of the services provided by the Pirate Academic Success Center. The PASC provides tutoring and study skills coaching so you can keep your GPA up and impress professional school.

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

One of my biggest challenges was overcoming nervousness during interviews. I had to keep reminding myself that I was chosen for an interview for a reason and that I truly deserved to be there. I had not had many professional interviews prior to applying to OT school, so I was not sure what to expect.

What organizations were you involved in as an undergraduate student?

As an undergrad, I was a member of the Pre-Occupational Therapy Student Association (POSTA). I was also a lead Biology tutor at the Pirate Academic Success Center, where I tutored Human Anatomy & Physiology.

What type of shadowing did you do?

Shadowing was very difficult with Covid, so I had a mix of online and in-person shadowing. My first shadowing opportunity was online via Skype. I virtually observed a pediatric clinic that focused on sensory processing and integration in autistic children. My second shadowing opportunity was in-person at a skilled nursing facility. Here, I observed a Rehab team of OTs, PTs, and Speech Therapists. I was very surprised by how much I liked this setting. I am considering geriatrics as a possible specialty of mine in the future.

Also, Duke did not require any shadowing hours and they explicitly stated that they do not factor into acceptance. Duke took a more holistic approach to applications and asked me to write several essays on what OT means to me and why is it so important for me to go down this career path. Duke focused more on the individual's passion and drive rather than shadowing hours and test scores.

What type of volunteering did you do?

During undergrad, I would volunteer with Habitat for Humanity in the construction of their homes. I volunteered with this group twice a month.

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

I did not take part in research during undergrad.

What was your most rewarding experience at ECU?

My most rewarding experience at ECU was seeing the level of support that ECU faculty and staff provide for their students in their pursuit of higher education. When I first started applying to professional school, I was lost. I am the first in my family to attend graduate school, so all of this was new to me. My advisors and mentors at ECU were very supportive and helpful in navigating the admissions process.

Any other advice, recommendations, suggestions, or comments?

Your undergraduate years will fly by, so get out there and get involved!