



# RACHEL WATKINS

CLASS OF 2022

## STUDENT PROFILE

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**Hometown:** North Wilkesboro, NC

**Undergraduate Major:** BS in Biochemistry,  
Minor in Mathematics

**Career Aspiration:** Primary Care Physician

**Professional School:** UNC School of Medicine

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

My favorite part has been participating in extracurricular activities, especially those that are medically related. There are no words to describe the feelings of excitement and fulfillment I experience when participating in service activities to help those in need or when caring for patients and knowing I was able to help them feel better, even if just for a brief moment. It reminds me how thankful I am to have found the career I am truly passionate about, and in the not-so-distant future, will be able to spend every day practicing.

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

- **MCAT** – Studying for the MCAT was tougher than I expected. Although I heard all along how difficult the MCAT was and how I should plan ahead and manage my time wisely, I still managed to fall into the trap of thinking my experience was somehow going to be easier than everyone else's. So, I recommend giving yourself way more time to prepare for the MCAT than you think because there will be unexpected obstacles that slow down your progress.
- **Application cycle** – I did not expect the application cycle to require as much time and energy as it did. First, writing the essays, gathering the required documents, and organizing your personal information for primary and secondary applications takes a lot of time. There are a ton of little details that must be filled in. Second, preparing for and attending interviews also requires a lot of time and reflection. I found it difficult at first to reflect on my journey and answer questions in such a way that my personality and goals were really evident. Finally, I think the hardest part is waiting. The application cycle is drawn out over nearly a year, so it can be mentally taxing to be unsure of what the future holds for so long.

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

I knew that I wanted to attend medical school since high school, so I started preparing myself for the application process as soon as I started at ECU as a freshman. First and foremost, I made sure I was capable of studying efficiently and maintaining a high GPA before pursuing any other activities. Then, I started to join clubs and pursue research, service, and clinical experiences as early as the middle of my first semester of freshman year. I made sure to choose activities that were meaningful to me and ones I would want to be involved in long term. Furthermore, besides schoolwork and extracurricular activities, I also kept a journal of all the activities in which I participated to serve as a reference when I was writing my essays and completing the medical school application. Finally, I made a calendar that coordinated my class schedule with when I planned to study for the MCAT, write my personal statement, fill out the AMCAS application, etc. to make sure I could successfully balance all tasks.

## **What organizations were you involved in as an undergraduate student?**

- Pirates Promoting Community Wellness
- Fuse College Ministry
- ECU Honors College
- Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society

## **What type of shadowing did you do?**

- ECU's Primary Care Shadowing Program – I shadowed in Emergency Medicine, Pediatrics, and Internal Medicine through this program before it was shut down due to COVID.
- Virtual Shadowing – I watched presentations about different specialties such as Dermatology, Anesthesiology, and Gastroenterology through online programs like WebShadowers.
- Internship – I interned with Internal Medicine physicians and Radiologists in my hometown.

## **What type of volunteering did you do?**

- Foothills Free Medical Clinic – I serve as a medical intake volunteer, so I record patients' vital signs, current medications, chief complaint, and history of present illness.
- Preemies of the Carolinas – I crochet and donate preemie items like hats, blankets, and onesies that benefit families and infants in NICUs across North and South Carolina.
- Ronald McDonald House Virtual Volunteer – I made items at home and donated them to benefit families staying at the Ronald McDonald Houses in Greenville, NC.
- Pirates Promoting Community Wellness (PPCW) – As a member and officer of PPCW, I was able to regularly be involved in service activities supporting the local community such as making breakfasts at the Community Crossroads Center.

## **Did you do research? If so, what was the topic?**

- I was a member of an interdisciplinary research team with faculty from the Departments of Public Health and Nutrition, as well as a medical student at the Brody School of Medicine. Our project focused on adapting a modified Diet Quality Index to measure the healthfulness of food-related toy sets for children, and this study was published in *Childhood Obesity* this spring!
- I was also a member of the McKinnon lab in the Department of Biology. My individual project primarily focused on stickleback color analysis, particularly in the fourspine stickleback, *Apeltes quadracus*.

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

- Pre-Professional Advising Center – The PPAC is helpful for pretty much every step of the pre-med journey, so I would take advantage of everything they have to offer from advising to the Health Professions Committee letter.
- Career Services – I highly recommend using Career Services to help with interview preparation and personal statements.
- Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) – This resource is not necessarily essential, but it helped me decide which schools to apply to as well as gave me insight regarding what the applicant pool for each school typically looks like.
- AAMC MCAT Official Prep – I definitely recommend purchasing and using all of the MCAT prep materials offered by the AAMC. These materials were representative of what I saw on test day, and I think working through the tests and practice problems during the last few weeks of studying is very beneficial.
- ECU Faculty and Staff – I have had so many wonderful professors and mentors at ECU that helped me prepare for and navigate the application process, so I would recommend not hesitating to reach out to faculty and staff members for guidance.

## **What was your most rewarding experience at ECU?**

I had so many rewarding experiences at ECU that it is hard to choose just one! In general, I would say meeting and forming relationships with new people. Looking back, I know my time at ECU would be completely different if I did not have my friends to rely on for support or my professors and mentors to look to for guidance.

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

I recommend pursuing hands-on experience in your career of interest as soon as possible. If you are pre-med, look for jobs as a CNA, EMT, phlebotomist, etc. In these jobs, you are responsible for caring for your own patients, unlike shadowing where you are just watching someone else provide care, and I think it quickly reveals whether the medical field is for you or not. Personally, I chose to become a CNA, and this was one of the best decisions I made as I love my job.

## **Any other advice, recommendations, suggestions, or comments?**

- Preparing and applying to professional school can be difficult and stressful, but do not let that define your journey. Always remember why you are pursuing your dream career. I promise you can do it, and it will be worth it!
- There is no “perfect” medical school applicant. Be proud of the person you are, the experiences that have shaped your life, and the reasons why you want to enter the medical field. Do not worry about comparing yourself to other pre-professional students or trying to become the person others think you should be - your story is what is important.