



DREW VARNELL

CLASS OF 2022

STUDENT PROFILE

Hometown: Greenville, NC

Career Aspirations: Physician

Professional School: UNC School of Medicine

**Undergraduate Major: Biology, Biochemistry,
Chemistry**

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

My favorite part of the pre-med journey was meeting other students who had an interest in the medical field. Being around people with similar goals inspired me to do my best and keep going during times of doubt.

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

I participated in the Brody Ambassador Program where I was paired with a current Brody School of Medicine student to advise me on the pre-med journey and the process of applying to medical school. My mentor told me what to expect from the application and what he did to be successful. He was also generous enough to read over my activity descriptions and personal statement. YouTube is also a good resource for application advice. I also used the MSAR to know what schools I should realistically apply to.

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

The PPAC was a great resource throughout college. They sent weekly email listing opportunities for a variety of pre-professional interests. The Brody Ambassador Program was also very helpful by having a medical student mentor to walk you through the pre-med process, especially if you are the first in your family to pursue medicine/graduate school.

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

Writing my personal statement, activity descriptions, and then eventually secondaries took much longer than I had expected. Many secondaries were due on the same day, making it hard to spend extensive time on each one, especially while working a full-time job.

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

Being an introvert, it was difficult for me to stand out in class. I didn't ask many questions in lecture and rarely participated in class discussions, making it harder to find professors who would write me letters of recommendation. I was lucky enough to have worked with some of my academic professors in other areas such as research and clubs/organizations, allowing me to barely meet the minimum requirement. I would recommend students make relationships with people early on in college in a variety of different fields to avoid having weak letters of recommendation from those who barely know you.

What organizations were you involved in as an undergraduate student?

ECU Club Tennis, ECU Honors College, Pre-Surgical Society

What type of shadowing did you do?

Orthopedics (Clinic & OR), Gastroenterology, Cardiovascular surgery

What type of volunteering did you do?

I started volunteering at ECU Health in high school and continued all throughout and after college. I was a biology and math tutor through the PASC while also tutoring elementary students at my local church. During my senior year, I began volunteering through the Fresh Start Program as a health coach working with diabetic patients across eastern NC. After graduating I volunteered as an EMT with Farmville Rescue & Emergency. I also volunteered with the GCSC homeless shelter clinic and Pitt County health department clinic.

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

The summer going into my sophomore year I participated in a pediatric research internship with the Brody School of Medicine. My project worked to improve the method of treating concussions and minimizing their long-lasting effects. I also conducted clinical research with pediatric cardiology patients, working to improve mental health outcomes by monitoring their physical and sleep activity with a watch. I did evolutionary biology research in the McKinnon lab studying stickleback fish. For my Honors College and Honors Biology Thesis, I studied natural selection's role in maintaining a color polymorphism in *Telmatherina antoniae*.

What was your most rewarding experience at ECU?

My most rewarding experience at ECU was going on a research field study in Nova Scotia, Canada. The experience taught me the importance of stepping out of my comfort zone and helped me grow my independence.

Any other advice, recommendations, suggestions, or comments?

The pre-med journey is difficult and can take a lot out of you. Remember to set aside time to have fun and enjoy your time as an undergrad!