

Options Before Medical School

Who takes a gap/bridge year

More than 80 percent of Northwestern undergraduates in the regular MD application cycle (excludes HPME/NUPSP applicants) take at least a year (or more) between undergraduate and medical school.

Reasons for taking a gap/bridge year

- Need to improve science GPA
- Need to improve MCAT score and/or want more time to study for MCAT
- Need more experience in health care setting
- Need more time and/or experiences to be sure medicine is the right career path
- Would like to pursue other opportunities before starting medical school (e.g. fellowships, travel abroad, other graduate work, etc.)

Timing of the application

- No time in between undergraduate and medical school:
Application should be submitted at the end of junior year (June).
- One year in between undergraduate and medical school:
Application should be submitted at the end of senior year (June).
- Two years in between undergraduate and medical school:
Application should be submitted one year after graduation (June).
- Remember: Experiences in the application matter more than intended timing plans; keep an open mind to adjusting based on your circumstances and application strength.

Northwestern offices that can help you plan your gap/bridge year

- Northwestern Career Advancement
 - <https://www.northwestern.edu/careers>
 - Job and internship strategies, resume assistance, interviewing skills, etc.
- Office of Fellowships
 - <https://www.northwestern.edu/fellowships>
 - Fellowship search and application assistance
- Health Professions Advising
 - Assessment of medical school application readiness, application assistance, gap/bridge year advising

What to do during a gap/bridge year & what medical schools want to see

- In general, medical schools want you to follow your own interests during your gap/bridge year.
- Many applicants build upon the skill set they have been developing during college.
 - Someone who has research experience may look for research jobs.
 - Someone who has tutored may look for teaching fellowships.
- If you plan on using your gap/bridge year experience to address a major deficit in your application, we would encourage you to strengthen your application before submitting it. This may mean delaying your application to another cycle.
- If you are working in a non-healthcare position, continue to demonstrate your commitment to medicine by volunteering in a patient care environment (hospitals, community health clinics, etc.).
- If you are working in a patient care environment, continue to demonstrate your service orientation by volunteering in a non-healthcare setting (tutoring kids, volunteering with a food pantry, etc.).

Going abroad during your gap/bridge year

- If virtual interviewing remains the main interviewing mode for medical schools, you can go abroad during your gap/bridge year. You would need to make sure that you have reliable internet access and take into account time zones when interviewing. However, for the medical schools that switch back exclusively to in-person interviewing, you may need to consider the factors below:
 - Consider whether you have the budget to return to the U.S. for interviews, perhaps multiple times.
 - Consider whether you have the freedom to leave your abroad commitment to return for interviews.
 - If there are budget or commitment concerns, we encourage you to consider moving your application to the next year and being fully invested in your abroad experience.

Sample list of jobs applicants have in their gap/bridge year(s)

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| ■ Medical scribe | ■ Research assistant |
| ■ Medical assistant | ■ Research study coordinator |
| ■ Health educator | ■ Healthcare consultant |
| ■ Patient transporter | ■ Program manager |
| ■ Translator | ■ Contract/temporary employment opportunities (varies by industry) |
| ■ Emergency medical technician (requires license) | |

Common types of fellowships applicants engage in during their gap/bridge year(s)

- Fulbright U.S. Student Program for research or teaching
- Project Horseshoe Farm fellowship
- Northwestern Public Interest Program
- Global Health Corps
- National Institutes of Health (NIH) Intramural Research Training Award