

Selecting a Medical School: Thirty-Five Questions I Wish I Had Asked

From the AAMC's Organization of Student Representatives (OSR)

Medical schools, like individuals, are very different. Selecting the "best" medical school for you can be challenging.

The questions below were compiled by medical students from across the country and are designed to help you evaluate the schools you visit. While this list is by no means complete, it can help serve as a base for your own questions. Be sure to research each school before your interview so you can ask informed questions.

Don't be shy about asking questions. The interview can be one of the most valuable resources to help you decide on where to matriculate.

Curriculum

1. Are there any special programs for which this medical school is noted?
2. Please tell me more about the integrated curriculum.
3. What modalities are used for student lectures?
4. What are the opportunities for research? What are the policies for taking time off for research opportunities?
5. How do students get assistance if an academic need arises?
6. Is there flexibility in the coursework (the number of electives) and the timing of the courses (accelerating, decelerating, and time off) during the pre-clinical and clinical years?
7. Are standardized tests used such as the NBME shelf exams?
8. Has this medical school, or any of its clinical departments, been on probation or had its accreditation revoked?
9. How do students from this medical school perform on the National Board Examinations? How does the school assist students who do not pass?

Evaluations

10. How are students evaluated academically? How are clinical evaluations performed?

11. Is there a formal mechanism in place for students to evaluate their professors and attending physicians? What changes have been made recently as a result of this feedback?

Counseling/Student Support

12. What kind of academic, personal, financial, and career counseling is available to students? Are these services also offered to their spouses and dependents/children?

13. Is there a mentor/advisor system? Who are the advisors—faculty members, other students, or both?

14. How diverse is the student body? Are there support services or organizations for ethnic/cultural minorities, LGBT students, and women?

Facilities

15. Tell me about the library and extracurricular facilities (i.e., housing and athletic/recreational facilities). Is designated study space available?

16. Are students required to have a laptop?

17. What type of clinical sites — ambulatory, private preceptors, private hospitals, rural settings, international—are available or required for clerkships? Does this school allow for students to do rotations at other institutions or internationally?

18. Is a car necessary for clinical rotations? Is parking a problem?

Financial Aid

19. What is the current tuition and fees? Is this expected to increase yearly? If so, at what rate?

20. Are there stable levels of federal financial aid and substantial amounts of university/medical school endowment aid available to students?

21. Are there students who have an "unmet need" factor in their budget? If so, how do these students come up with the extra funds?

22. Are spouses and dependents/children covered in a student's budget?

23. Are there services/staff available to assist students with budgeting and financial planning?

24. Does this school provide guidance to its students and to its graduates/alumni, on debt management?

Student Involvement

25. What medical school committees (e.g., curriculum committee) have student representation?
26. Are students involved in (required or voluntary) community service?
27. How active is the student council/government? Are there other active student organizations?

Policies

28. What is the student medical insurance coverage and what is the cost to students?
29. Is there an established protocol for dealing with student exposure to infectious diseases?
30. Does this school provide, or does the student pay for, vaccinations against Hepatitis B or prophylactic AZT treatment in case of a needle-stick or accident?
31. Is disability insurance provided to cover exposure?
32. Is there a school honor code? Is there a grievance process/procedure? Are the students involved?

Residency

33. May I see a list of residency programs to which this school's recent graduates were accepted?

Questions to Ask Yourself

34. Does this school have strengths in the type of medicine (primary versus specialized care, urban versus rural practice environment, academic medicine versus private practice) that I will want to practice?
35. Would I be happy at this school for at least the next four years?