I'M A JUNIOR. I SHOULD APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOL IN JUNE. TRUE OR FALSE?

It depends....

The answer is true IF you are able to present the best, most competitive application at that time. If not, consider these factors:

**Grades:** Is your GPA not as strong as it should be (optimally 3.5 or higher, both overall and science)? Would another year of grades help?

**Primary Application:** Will you be able to file your primary application at the beginning of June?

**Clinical Experience:** Have you had enough quality clinical experience?

**Research:** If you are doing research, will you have done enough to speak in-depth about your experience? Would another semester or two in the lab strengthen your application?

**MCAT:** Are you planning to take your MCAT before the end of June (mid-July at the latest)? MCAT scores take about a month to come in and you want the schools to get them as close to the time you file your primary application as possible. Is your score on the MCAT competitive enough?

**Letters of Recommendation:** Will you have enough quality letters to support your application? Will you be able to get at least 5 letters and meet the other HPO requirements in time to get an HPO interview and committee statement?

There are many myths out there regarding the application process. We encourage you to meet with an HPO advisor to discuss your application game plan. A “gap” year is not a year off. It is a chance to make your application as strong as possible. As corny as it sounds, you only get one chance to make a first impression and you do not want to “throw your hat in the ring in case you get lucky.”

**Letters of Recommendation**

While the HPOdrome will tell you which letters have been received, only an advisor can tell you about the quality of your letters.

Regardless of the type of program, you will need letters that are supportive and specific to your goal — be it a graduate program or medical or dental school. Only an advisor can assess the usefulness and value of the letters you have already collected. Only an advisor can tell you if something is lacking or if something more is recommended.

Just a reminder: letters on file at the HPO cannot be used for employment or non-health-related programs. Also, we will NOT send unsigned letters. Finally, we will keep letters on file for 5 years after you graduate but older letters may not be very helpful to your application. Generally, schools want letters that reflect where you are now, not where you were several years ago.
Attention 1st and 2nd Year Students

Rutgers University has two joint programs leading to a joint BA/MD degree and one program leading to a joint BA/DMD degree. These are very competitive programs which will allow accepted students to begin medical or dental school a year early. Certain courses and credits from that first year of medical or dental school will count both toward the undergraduate degree (BA) and the professional degree (MD or DMD). This acceleration (3 years of undergraduate plus 4 years of medical or dental school) saves a full year compared with the tradition application process.

There are significant differences between the programs and students may only apply to one program.

For more information, flyers are available at the HPO and on our web site at: http://hpo.rutgers.edu/special-programs

Applications become available after Spring Break and may be submitted as early as April 1st, though no applications are reviewed until after the deadline.

Tips for BA/MD Applicants

Things you can do now if you are a sophomore:
- Start asking for letters of recommendation. The number of letters required varies depending on which joint program you are applying to (visit https://hpo.rutgers.edu/special-programs/academic-programs for specific requirements for each program). Recommendations from Teaching Assistants are acceptable. Additional letters are acceptable and need not be from RU faculty.
- Have your high school transcript submitted to the HPO.
- Transfer students must have an official transcript submitted from each institution attended.
- In anticipation of the interviews, continue reading medically-related current events article.

Things you must do later:
- Rutgers transcripts should not be submitted until the spring grades are posted. After your grades have been posted, go to the Registrar’s Office and fill out the necessary form.
- Applications will be available after Spring Break. Applications will be accepted beginning April 1st. Deadlines vary.

Important Information about Release Forms!

The HPO must have the appropriate release form to send out letters stored in our office. The HPO will select the best letters from your file and upload them to the appropriate application service.

Please note: We are only able to upload letters to AACOMAS (DO) and AADSAS (Dental) once. We cannot add letters later. All letters must go together at the same time so don't submit your release form until you have all your letters in! For AMCAS (MD) packets, additional letters may be added after the initial release of the letter packet. Requests to add letters to your AMCAS packet must be made in writing, so if you would like us to do this for you, please email us at hpo@biology.rutgers.edu and request that we add new letters to your packet.

The fee for the HPO to process MD, DO and Dental Release Forms is $60.00. The HPO will accept cash or checks made payable to Rutgers University.

Letters for foreign medical schools and podiatric schools will be mailed, so students will need to use the General Release Form and provide the proper address(es).
Letters:
Work on getting your letters of recommendation in order. Medical schools require a minimum of 3 letters of recommendation. The HPO requires a minimum of 5 as one of the qualifications for an HPO committee interview. These letters should include: 2 science letters, preferably from upper level courses and from professors, but TAs are OK. If your major is a science, you need letters from at least 1, preferably 2, upper level science (300 or above) specific to your major. If your major is not science, you should also have at least 1, preferably 2 letters from your major. The remaining letters should be mostly from academic sources, including anyone who supervised you in research. You may also have letters from outside of the classroom experiences such as shadowing, volunteer work, paid work etc. There is no limit to the number of recommendations you may submit to your HPO file. Avoid letters that are subjective personal testimonials.

Personal Statement:
You should have a working draft of your personal statement by now. For more help, give it to friends to read, put it in a drawer for two weeks and look at it again with fresh eyes, or attend a career services workshop for additional assistance (careers.rutgers.edu).

MCAT:
If you have not taken the MCAT already, you should be studying and have a target date in April, May, or June to take the exam. It takes at least 4 weeks for your scores to be processed. Remember a good portion of your final study time before the exam must consist of taking practice exams in conditions that closely simulate the real exam conditions. Remember, most people score better on their practice exams so if you are barely making your target score on your practice exams, you are probably not ready for the exam. More information and registration information is available at: https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/

DAT:
Same as MCAT, except you can take the exam a bit later because scores are processed immediately. More information: www.ada.org/dat.aspx

Autobiography and Resume:
Both are additional requirements to qualify for the HPO committee interview. The autobiography is not your personal statement. It is a brief story of your life from day one to the present. Please include experiences that exemplify the core competencies for entering medical students, as outlined by the AAMC (https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/competencies/). Only the highlights please, meaning 2-4 pages total. This is only used by the HPO to help prepare for your interview and to get to know you a bit better. You do not need convince us of how great you are for medical school, rather give us a narrative version of your life and experiences so we get to know you a bit better. Resume is self-explanatory. There is a place to post both your resume and autobiography to your online HPOdrome account.

End of Semester Goals:
- Strive to get excellent grades in your spring semester coursework.
- Continue working on personal statement. Finalize by the time your application cycle opens.
- Finalize MCAT plans (if not taken already).
- Create an account with the appropriate application service:
  AAMC: https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas.
Applications open in May. First day to submit is on or near June 1.

AACOMAS:
http://www.aacom.org/InfoFor/applicants/Pages/default.aspx Applications open early May.

- Have transcripts sent to appropriate application services, following their directions. Be sure to have Rutgers send the transcripts that include your spring grades. As a reminder, we do not handle the sending of transcripts here in the HPO office, this is done by the registrar.

June/July:
- Submit your primary application as early as possible
- Release your letters of recommendation
- Work on your secondary applications

Mid-August:
- Have all of your application materials in to the medical schools. This includes your MCAT (or DAT), primary and secondary applications, letters of recommendation, etc.
- Podiatry and Optometry schools have later deadlines, find out more here:
  Podiatry: AACPM: http://www.aacpm.org
  Optometry: OPTOMCAS: www.optomcas.org

**Reminder: Remember that the process for obtaining a committee letter has changed for this cycle.
If you have not done so already, you must attend an HPO pre-application workshop and submit an intent to apply form by 5 p.m. on February 28. More information and a list of remaining workshop dates can be found on our website: https://hpo.rutgers.edu/hpo-committee-statement.