

MCAT Test Prep Pilot Project Focus Group
May 7, 2003

The following responses are taken from the MCAT Test Prep Pilot focus group held on May 7, 2003.

Question: Please describe your test prep experience.

All of the students said they took the Kaplan test prep course. One student noted that Kaplan's test prep course was very helpful in his preparation for the MCAT. He explained that Kaplan exams were more difficult than the actual MCAT exam. Another student added that Kaplan's resources are its strength. Most students agreed with this. Another student pointed out that Kaplan's classes were weak and noted that she had some problems with their methods. She indicated that her verbal score was actually higher before she started the course. She felt that after learning Kaplan's techniques, her score did not improve.

All of the students agreed that Kaplan's reputation for the MCAT is the reason why they chose them over the other test prep providers. One student explained that the Kaplan classes were not great. However, not all of the students agreed with this point. Some said that the classes were helpful. A different student noted that the Kaplan class schedule was helpful because if she missed a class, she could make it up in another group's class. All of the students agreed that the test prep program was very helpful in coping with the MCAT.

Question: How did you find out about the MCAT Test Prep Program?

Most students said that they found out about the program through a class presentation given by Nicole Hosten.

Question: Would you have still taken the test prep course even if the College did not pay for it?

Most students said they would have taken the course regardless of whether or not the College funded it. Students in the BA/MD program said they would have to take the course anyway to ensure that their scores were high enough for them to stay in the program. One student explained that he was recently married and the program helped give him some financial relief so that the money he would have used to pay for the course could be spent on something else.

One student questioned if it is a good idea for so many BA/MD students to be in this program. He explained that BA/MD students would have taken a test prep course regardless of this program. Another student suggested that the course should be used for non-BA/MD students because it is likely that most students in the BA/MD program are capable of getting the required scores of nine in each section. He stated that everything

over nine in each section is just a way to pad their scores. These students will be attending Downstate Medical School as long as they score a nine in each section.

An additional student stated that BA/MD students are generally very strong students. However, if there are students from this program who are struggling, then they should have the opportunity to participate in this program. Students agreed that the test prep program should not restrict students based on whether or not they are in a particular academic program.

Lastly, a student who was not a BA/MD student stated that if it were not for the test prep program he would not have taken the course.

Question: Should financial criteria be part of admissions?

Most students answered “no”. A student explained that the \$1,349 dollar cost of the course is a burden for most students. He concluded that financial criteria could be one component of admissions, but should not be the deciding factor.

Question: What types of workshops would be useful for pre-med preparation?

Students agreed that a pre-med course requirement workshop should be offered for entering freshman. One student noted that entering students should be directed to the pre-professional advisor. In addition, another student recommended that there should be a workshop for how undergraduates can prepare for medical school. He suggested that either the college website or the course bulletin should list program requirements for pre-med students. There was a suggestion that a handbook should be developed which outlined these requirements. Students emphasized that these types of workshops would be very useful to students who are not in the BA/MD program. Marie Fiorello indicated that many of the students’ suggestions are being worked on.

Another student suggested that there should be the development of a pre-med freshman block. This block would provide students with mentoring, scheduling, and registration. The program would also provide an opportunity for students in the block to take classes with their peers.

Scheduling was an issue for students not in the BA/MD program. A student explained that often pre-med students are “locked” out of the classes they need. She also agreed that a first-year block program would be beneficial.

Question: How do you juggle all of your responsibilities?

Students said that time management skills were the key to how they juggled their responsibilities. Students also explained that scheduling the exam right after spring break really helped them manage their responsibilities.

Question: Where do you see yourself five years from now?

Students said that in five years they should be graduating from medical school and will be preparing to start their residency program. One student noted that his eventual career goal was to start a pediatric practice.