

Preparing for Pharmacy School

To prepare yourself for pharmacy school you need to think about 4 areas: classes and grades, pharmacy experience, the PCAT, and demonstrating leadership and communication skills. Although most of this document deals with course work, the other topics are as important. You should strive to excel in all of these areas; if for some reason you ended up lagging in one, then the others must become even more superlative. The Pharm. D. application process is very, very competitive and you must shine!

Courses and Grades: A list of prerequisite classes needed to apply to the University of Minnesota is available in St. Cloud State's Chemistry and Physics Department or on-line. Other pharmacy programs have slightly different requirements so you need look up the specific requirements of each program you are interested in. Your GPA needs to be a minimum of 3.0 and that is far below the average GPA for people accepted into pharmacy programs. A competitive GPA is 3.6 or higher.

In order to complete the course work in a reasonable amount of time, you need to be taking about sixteen credits every semester. To finish the prerequisites as soon as possible, each semester you should be taking one chemistry class, one biology class, one math or physics class, and one general education class. Because you may be accepted to pharmacy school before finishing an undergraduate degree, you should only take general education classes that are on the list, you can meet St. Cloud States general education requirements in your final semesters. Following these guidelines should allow you to finish the prerequisites in 2 or 3 years.

I recommend finishing the classes quickly because once they are complete you can start applying to pharmacy school; you do not need to have completed a bachelors degree to enter a Pharm. D. program. That being said, very few are accepted after only two years of undergraduate classes, you should plan on finishing your degree. Because of these classes, most students choose to be either a chemistry or a biology major, but a candidate can stand out by completing a major other than in these two areas. Remember that the admission committee is seeking to create a dynamic entering class; a little variety is a good thing.

The chemistry classes are perhaps the longest sequence. If your background is weak you should consider taking a preparatory chemistry class to boost your ability to obtain strong grades. You should strive to take CHEM 310 in the fall of an academic year, because since it is not offered in Spring, you might end up waiting for a year before you get the chance to take the class again. The biology requirements include a microbiology course. Either Basic Microbiology (206) or Advanced Microbiology (366) satisfy the requirement, but I recommend taking the Advanced in that it makes you a more competitive candidate. The advanced Microbiology requires Biol 262



and 360 as prerequisite courses that are not required for admissions to the U of MN, but the amount of time it takes to complete the chemistry classes usually allows adequate time to take the extra two courses.

Before you start the Math program, you should take the Math Placement exam. Make sure you get good math advising, and be sure to emphasize that you need to complete the first semester of the upper level calculus course (Math 221). A math professor will be able to tell you if you are ready for Math 221, or the courses you need to take in order to prepare for it. After Math 221 you might consider taking Math 222, because many majors require two semesters of calculus, but the second semester is not required for most pharmacy school. After you have completed the Math 221, you should begin your physics classes. You can take either the algebra based physics or the calculus based physics, but you must complete Math 222 before taking the latter.

You should always try to take general education classes which satisfy the prerequisites for a pharmacy program. You can worry about satisfying SCSU's general education requirements in your later years.

The PCAT: The pharmacy college admissions test needs to be taken in the Spring or summer before the summer or fall that you apply to pharmacy school. You **MUST** prepare for this exam. This merits repeating. You **MUST** prepare for this exam. Other students are preparing, how can you expect to be competitive if you don't? You should purchase a study guide, or two, or three, or even consider paying for a preparation course if your independent study skills are weak. More information on the PCAT can be found on the web. At a minimum you need to be in the 50th percentile, but you need to be in the 80th percentile to have a competitive score.

Pharmacy Experience: You need to have experience with an actual pharmacy. Most students obtain this by becoming a pharmacy technician (which requires no degree) in a local pharmacy. Experience can also be obtained by shadowing a pharmacist or volunteering in a pharmacy. Your pharmacy experience will also allow you to meet a pharmacist who can write you a letter of recommendation.

Leadership and Communication Skills: A strong candidate needs be able to demonstrate these two skills. One means to do this by ACTIVE participation in volunteer organizations or clubs. Don't just join a club. Organize some sort of activity, be it fund raising or inviting speakers, etc. By organizing you clearly demonstrate both skills. These activities will also become valuable topics of conversation during your interview.