

MCAT - Medical College Admission Test

General Information

The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is a standardized examination for prospective medical students in the United States. MCAT is not offered in Myanmar, but is available in Thailand. It is designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, reading comprehension, and writing skills in addition to knowledge of scientific concepts and principles and to assist admission committees in predicting which of their applicants will perform adequately in the medical school curriculum. Prior to August 19, 2006, the exam was taken entirely on paper with the option of taking a computer-based version at select testing sites beginning in the fall of 2005. Since January 27, 2007, all administrations of the exam are computer-based. Nearly all medical schools suggest that you take the MCAT in the spring of the year you apply.

Description of the Test

The test was formerly administered twice a year, in April and August. Since January 2007, the exam is offered 22 times per year on 19 different testing dates. The exam was shortened to 5 hours and 24 minutes, which allows the test to be offered either in the morning or in the afternoon. Some test dates have both morning and afternoon administrations.

The test consists of four sections, listed in the order in which they are administered on the day of the exam:

- Physical Sciences (PS)
- Verbal Reasoning (VR)
- Writing Sample (WS)
- Biological Sciences (BS)

The Verbal Reasoning, Physical Sciences, and Biological Sciences sections are in multiple-choice format. The Writing sample consists of two short essays that are typed onto the computer. The passages and questions are predetermined, and thus do not change in difficulty depending on the performance of the test taker (unlike, for example, the Graduate Record Examination).

The science sections (PS and BS) test analytical and logical cognitive abilities. The Verbal Reasoning section was implemented to test understanding of various subtleties involved in human communication and understanding. The Biological Sciences section most directly correlates to success on the USMLE Step 1 exam, with a correlation coefficient of .553 vs .491 for Physical Sciences and .397 for Verbal Reasoning. Predictably, MCAT composite scores also correlate with USMLE Step 1 success.

Scoring

Scores for the three multiple-choice sections range from 1 to 15. Scores for the writing section range alphabetically from J (lowest) to T (highest). The writing section is graded by three different readers. The first reader is Intellimetric, a proprietary computer program developed by Vantage Learning, which analyzes creative writing and syntax. The second and third readers are humans, who generally look at the overall impact rather than spelling and grammar.

The numerical scores from each section are added together to give a composite score. The score from the writing sample may also be appended to the composite score (e.g. 36S). The maximum composite score is 45T but any score over 30P is considered fairly competitive, as this is the average for matriculants to medical school.[4] There is no penalty for wrong multiple choice answers, and thus even random guessing is preferable to leaving an answer choice blank (unlike many other standardized tests). Students preparing for the exam are encouraged to try to balance their subscores; physical, verbal, and biological scores of 12, 13, and 11 respectively may be looked upon more favorably than 14, 13, and 9. (even though both tests amount to the same grade).

The standard deviation is 2.0-2.3 depending on the year and form of the exam.[5] For example, if a student received a 10, the mean being an 8 and the standard deviation being 2, then that student tested better than 84% of the students on that section.

The Physical Sciences section is administered first (prior to the April 2003 MCAT, Verbal Reasoning was the first section of the exam). It is composed of 52 multiple-choice questions related to general chemistry and physics. Exam takers are allotted 70 minutes to complete this section of the exam.

The Verbal Reasoning section follows the Physical Sciences section and an optional 10 minute break. Exam takers have 60 minutes to answer 40 multiple-choice questions evaluating their comprehension, evaluation, and application of information gathered from written passages. Unlike the Physical and Biological sciences sections, the Verbal Reasoning section is not supposed to require specific content knowledge in order to perform well.

Prior to the computerization of the MCAT there was a 60 minute lunch break after the Verbal Reasoning section followed by the Writing Sample. With the new Computer-Based Testing format the 60 minute lunch break has been substituted by an optional 10 minute break. The Writing Sample gives examinees 60 minutes to compose responses to two prompts (30 minutes for each prompt, separately timed). Each essay is graded from 1 to 6 points by each of two readers, yielding a total score of 4-24; this score is then converted to a letter scale (4 = J, 24 = T).

After the Writing Samples, there is an optional 10 minute break followed by the Biological Sciences section. Examinees have 70 minutes to answer 52 multiple-choice questions related to organic chemistry and biology.

According to the AAMC, when the exam switched to computer-based testing, each multiple-choice

section was reduced in length (both in terms of time allowed and number of questions) by approximately one-third, and students are still required to complete two essays.

Test Fee and Registration

Fees:

Regular Registration \$210

International Test Site* \$60

Late Registration* \$50

Date Reschedule* \$50

Change of Test Center* \$50

*These fees are added to the regular registration fee.

Registration:

Please note that online preregistration is required and that walk-in registration is not available. Eligibility You may sit for the exam if you are preparing to apply to a health professions school. These include schools of:

- Allopathic
- Osteopathic
- Podiatric
- Veterinary Medicine

You may take the exam up to three times in one calendar year, although you may register for only one test date at a time. At the time of registration you will be required to accept a statement verifying your intention to apply to a health professions school. If, however, you are not applying to a health professions school, or if you are a currently enrolled medical student, you may obtain “special permission” to register for the exam. (See section on Special Permissions for more information.)

Exam Dates:

The AAMC selected exam dates to ensure that scores are available to meet most medical school application deadlines. Please choose the test date that fulfills the requirements of the school(s) of your choice. (The Medical School Admissions Requirements handbook published by the AAMC outlines school requirements. If you prefer, you may contact the school directly.)

Registration Deadlines:

You must register through the online program hosted by the AAMC. You will be able to access the system approximately 12 weeks prior to each test date. The regular registration deadline is 14 calendar days prior to the test date. If you miss the regular deadline, you may be able to register during the late time period. A late fee will apply. (The AAMC will be unable to grant fee assistance, ADA accommodations, or special permission during late registration.)

Registration Fees:

The following is a list of fees associated with MCAT exam registration. Please note that payment must be in the form of a credit card (MasterCard or VISA), payable in U.S. funds. We will process your registration immediately upon submission. International sites include all countries, provinces, or territories except Canada, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The registration process cannot be reversed once it has begun, and thus you will be responsible for all fees. If you reverse the credit card charge, or if payment is declined for any reason, you must provide an alternative form of payment on request. Otherwise, the AAMC must cancel your registration and disallow future registration until arrears are made current.

About the AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP):

The AAMC believes that the cost of applying to medical school should not be a financial barrier to individuals who are interested in becoming physicians. The AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP) assists MCAT examinees and AMCAS applicants who, without financial assistance, would be unable to take the MCAT examination or apply to medical schools that use the AMCAS application.

Applicants who are approved for fee assistance in 2007 receive the following benefits from the AAMC:

- Reduction of the MCAT registration fee from \$210 to \$85 for any registration submitted subsequent to the date of approval during the 2007 calendar year
- Waiver of the application fee of \$490 for submitting the completed AMCAS application to up to 12 medical schools. Applicants pay \$30 for each school beyond the 12 free applications.

In addition, most AMCAS-participating medical schools waive their supplemental application fees for applicants who have been granted fee assistance by the AAMC.

The FAP does not draw a distinction between dependent and independent student status, and, therefore, all applicants must provide parental financial data for the FAP.

Once a FAP application is approved, this fee assistance approval may be applied to any subsequently submitted MCAT registration or AMCAS application during that calendar year. The FAP approval is not retroactive. For the MCAT, a FAP approval may be used to reduce the MCAT registration fee from \$210 to \$85. For AMCAS, a FAP approval will enable an applicant to apply to up to 12 medical schools with the application fee waived. Appropriate fees, at a rate of \$30 per school, must be paid to process an

application to medical schools beyond this initial set of 12.

You must supply complete and accurate financial data on the application, and you must certify to the accuracy of the data provided for both the applicant and the applicant's parents. Copies of Federal Income Tax forms, welfare payment statements, Social Security payment statements, and documentation for all other sources of income may be required based on an initial review of your application. University or college financial aid award statements, which indicate the amount of the total aid that was based on tuition, fees, and books, and the amount made available for room, board, and other expenses may also be required. All income data must be for the previous year (calendar year 2006 for FAP applications submitted in 2007). Changes in current year financial situations will not be considered.

The AAMC decision to approve or deny your application for the AAMC Fee Assistance Program will be transmitted to the e-mail address you provide in your application. You may also check your status by logging on and visiting the main menu of your FAP application online.

FAP Eligibility:

FAP eligibility decisions are tied directly to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' poverty level guidelines. For the 2007 calendar year, applicants whose total family income is 300% or less of the poverty level for their family size will be approved for fee assistance.

Other FAP Eligibility Rules:

In addition, you are eligible for the Fee Assistance Program only if you are a U.S. citizen, Permanent Resident ("Green Card" holder), or have refugee/asylum status. An examinee/applicant may receive fee assistance for MCAT and/or AMCAS through the Fee Assistance Program (FAP) for a maximum of five (5) calendar years during his or her lifetime, so that other examinees/applicants may also benefit from this program. You will be required to enter both biographical and financial information about yourself, your spouse (if applicable), and your parent(s) or guardian(s) (if living). Note also that the FAP does not draw a distinction between dependent and independent student status, and, therefore, all applicants must provide parental financial data for the FAP.

Testing Centers:

Hong Kong

Room 501, Hkeaa San Po Kong Sub-Office, #17 Tsuek Luk Street, San Po Kong

India

Bangalore

Maini Sadan, 1st Floor, No. 38 Lavelle Road, 7th Cross, Bangalore 560 001

Mumbai

Marwah House, Saki Vihar Road, Saki Naka Andheri East, Mumbai 400072

Gurgaon

Second Floor, DLF Infinity Tower - A, Sector 25 Phase-II, DLF City, Gurgaon, 122002

Philippines

130 H De La Costa Street, Salcedo Village, Makati Avenue, Makati City 1200

Singapore

Prometric Thomson Learning PTE LTD, #07-05 Burlington Square, Singapore, 189650

Thailand

Institute of International Education, 6th Floor Maneeya Center North, 518/3 Ploenchit Road, Pathumwan, Bangkok, 10330

How to Prepare

Like most standardized tests, there are a variety of preparatory materials available. The AAMC itself offers both paper and computerized practice tests (composed of administered test questions and diagnostics) available for purchase at its website. Many test preparation companies offer classroom based courses. Approximately half of the students taking the MCAT use a test prep company. Various books are available from test preparation companies to prepare for the test.

The best way to prepare for the exam is to find out information about the exam such as:

- Ask the test center if they have any preparation materials, like books or CDs you can borrow.
- Find out what the sections on the exam are?
- What is the style of the exam: essay, multiple choice, short answer, true/false, etc?
- How long is the exam?
- Take a preparation course before the exam
- Take practice exams
- Look for information on their website

More Information

Go to www.aamc.org for more information on the MCAT, applying to medical schools, and financial aid

for medical students. You can reach MCAT examinee services staff at 202-828-0690 or mcataamc.org. Please do not send attachments to this e-mail address.

You will receive a response to e-mail messages within 72 hours. If you need immediate assistance, please call; do not e-mail.

Contact the nearest American Center, British Council or other internet sources for locations, testing centers near you, fees, and how far in advance you must register. Seats are usually limited in testing centers and it is strongly advised to book in advance about two months.