

Cliff Ching: Additional Preparation with a Medical Postbaccalaureate Program Facilitators Guide¹

Discussion

The case, *Cliff Ching: Additional Preparation with a Medical Postbaccalaureate Program* details the college career of Cliff Ching and his preparations for medical school. Cliff has been focused on going to medical school since he was in high school and he majored in a discipline that prepared him for this career. He also spent a great deal of his free time working in a volunteer capacity that gave him hands-on experience and indicated he had the aptitude, desire and compassion to be a medical professional. In fact, Cliff's work with the UCLA Mobile Clinic solidified his desire for a career in medicine and helped him to define his role as a doctor for the disenfranchised. But Cliff decided not to contact the campus pre-medical advisors, and instead worked on the application on his own, preparing the necessary paperwork to apply in his senior year. When he didn't gain an acceptance, he fortunately found another path. He was admitted to a post-baccalaureate program structured to assist students who wanted to apply and/or re-apply to medical school.

The number of post-baccalaureate programs focused on the health and allied-health fields has grown in recent years and there are over 200 programs across the country. Students who are interested in a medical career may not know about these preparatory programs that are generally a year long and that provide additional training and education prior to applying to medical school. Each program often has a particular focus. Some programs are designed to help students who did not pursue an undergraduate degree in the sciences and who need to take the required coursework. Other programs provide particular encouragement and academic assistance to underrepresented minorities who are greatly needed in the medical fields. Still others provide assistance to those students, like Cliff, who may simply need additional help and guidance with the comprehensive and complex application process itself. Many programs work with any

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student who needs additional assistance and a potential applicant should research the kinds of programs that are the best fit.

Abstract

Cliff Ching had been focused on a career in medicine since he was a high school student and chose a college major that would help him to prepare. He also took on a challenging volunteer experience that solidified his interest in the medical field and also provided him with inspiration and direction to work as a medical professional in underserved communities. Yet Cliff was too reticent to ask for help with his application. He applied to medical school on his own without the assistance of the pre-medical advisors at UCLA who have a great deal of experience in advising students how to prepare their materials. When he did not gain admission that year to a medical school, he fortunately discovered the consortium of postbaccalaureate programs at the UC medical schools. His acceptance to the UC Davis program provided a second chance and he took advantage of all that the program had to offer. He excelled in his classes and listened closely to the advice about the kinds of schools he should target in the application process. His MCAT score was acceptable so he concentrated his efforts on refining his personal statement. He was determined that his statement represents his true passion for medicine and his dedication to serving disenfranchised communities.

Pedagogy

This case will be of particular interest to students planning on going to medical school, but it can also be used in a more general way to help students think about getting prepared for an advanced degree. Although the medical school application is quite lengthy, important aspects of the process are also generally applicable to applying for any graduate school program. Students should be learning about the application process and finding out about the implicit requirements, getting pre-professional experience, and investigating additional options if they don't get into graduate school right away. Students should be asked to think about the following:

- Have you talked with someone about the medical school application process?
- Have you participated in a volunteer experience or internship? How would you go about getting substantive work experience in your desired profession?
- If you prepare well you should be admitted to at least one advanced degree program. If you don't get into a program –graduate school/medical school– what are your options?

Teaching points:

1. Getting a grasp on the medical school application process
 2. Understanding the importance of volunteer or pre-professional work
 3. What can you do if you aren't accepted into an advanced degree program?
- 1. Getting a grasp on the medical school application process.** The medical school application process is both lengthy and costly and students interested in medical school need to plan ahead. For students wanting an introduction to the medical field there are many resources available at the website of the Association of American Medical Colleges <https://www.aamc.org/> including a very detailed description of the

journey from deciding to complete a pre-med major through residency <https://students-residents.aamc.org/>. For students who want hands-on experience, the Summer Medical and Dental Education Program (SMDEP) has 12 sites across the country that provide academic enrichment experiences and career development activities. Most campuses also have medical (and dental school) advisors who have helped a number of students through the application process and are knowledgeable about helping students create competitive applications.

Applying to medical school (and dental school) is extremely costly and the average student now applies to anywhere from 14-25 schools. Preparatory test classes are expensive and there are fees not only for the primary application, but for all the secondary applications as well. Hopefully, interviews will follow the application submission, but these too can be costly, as students must pay for travel to each school. Fee waivers are available for some of the expenses, but students need to be aware of the costs ahead of time and make plans.

2. Understanding the importance of volunteer or pre-professional work.

Admissions committees want to know that applicants are serious about their chosen careers. This means students should acquire some work experience in their intended field of study prior to applying for an advanced degree. For potential medical students, doing volunteer work in a hospital, working as an EMT or even shadowing a doctor demonstrates that a student has the aptitude and the commitment to work in the field. (Work experience is important for other advanced degree applicants as well. For Masters students, internships and volunteer work can be important, and for PhD students, it is essential that they have conducted research, either on their own or as part of a team. The best advanced degree applications make it appear as if getting the degree or credential is simply the logical next step in the applicants' career development.)

3. What can you do if you aren't accepted into an advanced degree program?

Students should be well prepared for the time and costs involved in applying to medical school and should ensure, as best they can, that they are successful on their first attempt. They need to make use of advice and assistance, prepare for the costs, create a competitive application and apply to a number of programs/schools in order to have options. If, for some reason, an applicant is not accepted, they should do their best to find out the reasons why. Medical school admissions committees are very focused on quantitative measures and students also need to apply to programs that are a good fit with their interests. Cliff gives this advice in the case, "If a candidate neglects these nuances, [knowing that there are schools of medicine that focus on primary care and others on basic research, and that some schools were more open to applicants from diverse backgrounds], the application process is kind of like shooting in the dark." Medical school applicants always have the option of a postbaccalaureate program, but it requires another application process and the post-bac itself adds to the cost of a student's overall education. (In terms of PhD and Masters programs, the reason an applicant is not successful can be difficult to tease out. For a professional Masters it could be a lack of experience. For a PhD it could simply be that there

weren't any faculty members interested in the applicant's project of study. Being persistent *and polite* with program coordinators, as well as meeting with professors might help an applicant find out what they can do to enhance their application if they want to apply again.)

Additional notes: Once the discussion is concluded, instructors can tell students that Cliff Ching was admitted to Oregon Health and Sciences University for Fall 2015.