



July 8th, 2021

D.O. student doing research on the side

To get into medical school you must develop two distinct parts of yourself simultaneously. The academic/medical side and the part of yourself that exists outside of medicine. The academic has wonderful grades in all of their classes, got a great MCAT score, is involved in research, and has clinical experience. It is hard to be this person, and this lifestyle is synonymous with what we think of as the generic medical school applicant. Developing this part of myself was truly a snowball effect. I took honors general chemistry my freshman year of college and it remains the most difficult course that I took at the University of Pittsburgh. I loved the course and the challenge forced me to learn how to study efficiently and with purpose. After this course, all of my other classes became so much more attainable. Constantly develop study strategies and find what works. What worked for me was practice oriented studying. Rather than fixating too much on lecture slides or notes, answering problems and learning objectives was much more helpful to me. This allowed me to do well in critical classes for medical school: organic chemistry, physics, biochemistry, psychology, sociology, and statistics. So far in medical school, biochemistry and honors statistics have been the most helpful. There are only two classes that I wished I had taken in undergrad: anatomy and neuroanatomy. These classes are not tested on the MCAT, but comprise most the failed course in medical school.

After I learned how to study and started excelling in my classes, I truly felt a snowball of opportunities that were opened to me. In the fall of my freshman year, I joined a volunteer group at a hospital. I liked interacting with the patients so much that I decided to get my EMT license during the following year. Once I attained my EMT license I started practicing as an EMT/Fireman at my local fire department in my hometown. I let my passion keep driving to the next logical step until I had done something impressive. Similarly, I liked my honors general chemistry laboratory, so I applied for Pitt's First Experiences in Research class where I was able to join a research laboratory during my freshman spring semester. I loved doing research there so much that I decided to apply for undergraduate research programs. The first one I got accepted to was Pitt's Summer Undergraduate Research Program where I worked full time in the Molecular Genetics Department. The next summer I decided to broaden my horizons and apply outside of the state. I was accepted to the University of Massachusetts Medical College's Summer Undergraduate Research Program. Through my passion for research, I was able to work on three different projects which resulted in abstracts, publications, posters, and presentations. These were just a natural consequence of doing something I loved, and working fervently at it.

In doing all what I have stated above, this did not get me interviews or acceptances. It only got my foot in the door. I realized this when I went for interviews. The interviewers would occasionally ask me about my research, but the majority of the time they would ask about me coaching diving and pole vault, or the reference letter that my art history professor wrote, or about

my cooking skills that I wrote about in my personal statement, or my job teaching high school. In the interview, they wanted to know about the other person you must become. This person is unique and lives genuinely outside of medicine. It's almost funny that medical schools require you to have fun to gain acceptance, but it's true. Find something passionate and productive to do outside of medicine. Mine was teaching, coaching, and cooking. I don't have an awful lot of advice on developing this side of yourself because this all relies on your passions and interests. It's also much easier to pursue these things if you have friends with common interests that all of you can explore together.

In total, pursue your academic and nonacademic passions with vigor and you will end up doing amazing things on both fronts. Opportunities will present themselves and you will be able to seize them!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stefan Kaliszuk". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'S' at the beginning.

Stefan J. Kaliszuk

University of Pittsburgh Class of 2020