

# The MS1's Guide to Summer Planning



DREXEL UNIVERSITY  
College of  
Medicine

OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

*Career Development Center*  
for Medical Students

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# The MSI's Guide to Summer Planning

## Introduction

While many students take some time to breathe and relax over the summer, most also use some of the 8 to 10 weeks of study-free time to explore other opportunities for personal and professional development. What will you do during your “last summer”?

The following information was compiled by the Career Development Center to assist first year medical students in planning their summer before second year. This guide is meant to be a source of general advice and may not have specific recommendations for every career interest and goal. If you would like to discuss your particular situation and plans after having done some preliminary research, please don't hesitate to make an appointment with Marie Hartman, Marie.Hartman@drexelmed.edu, or Caitlin Kaltenbach, Caitlin.Kaltenbach@drexelmed.edu, in the Career Development Center.

Acknowledgement:

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## Timeline

- **October:**
  - Attend the “Planning Your Summer” workshop hosted by the Career Development Center
  - Start thinking about what you’re looking to get out of the summer
- **November:**
  - Finalize what you plan to do for the summer (vacation, research, volunteering, etc.)
    - This doesn’t have to be specific, but rather a general type of experience you’re interested in
  - Start researching and making a list of deadlines for specific programs
    - Some programs have deadlines in December and January so it’s important to start the search early to make sure you have enough time to complete the application process
- **December-March:**
  - Set up a meeting with Marie Hartman or Caitlin Kaltenbach to discuss your plan and any questions you may have
  - Apply to 2-4 programs if you’re looking for a more formal, structured program
    - If you are not looking for such a program, the timeline is a little more flexible, but it is still helpful to contact PIs early as research positions fill up quickly
    - Keep in mind that structured programs are often paid. It is a little more difficult to get funding for opportunities you find on your own
    - Many students don’t apply to summer programs simply because they don’t think they’ll get in. In general, the competition is not as competitive as you think because there is such a wide range of programs and medical students have varying interests. If you are interested you should apply
  - Request a letter of recommendation, if needed (**more information on page 9**)
  - Apply for funding opportunities for international programs or positions not formally organized through a program
- **April-May:**
  - Finalize summer plans
  - Make living arrangements, etc.



## Frequently Asked Questions



- **Is it okay to just relax and go on vacation?**
  - You just survived your first year of medical school. You should absolutely take some time off to rest and recharge. It is possible (and recommended) that students also use this opportunity to do something that is meaningful for them and may help them gain a better perspective about their future career goals. Remember that residency directors are looking at your application as a whole and that a summer experience is only one component. However, this is a significant amount of time available to you and it can be used to your benefit
- **How should I plan my summer if I am unsure of my specialty interests?**
  - Students often find planning their summer difficult because they are unsure of their career goals. This is common at this stage in your training. If you are in this situation, keep it simple and do what sounds most interesting to you now. Make the most out of the experience by developing new skills, making new contacts, and gaining new perspective on your career path
- **How will what I do over the summer impact my residency application?**
  - The summer is a great time to build and strengthen your residency application. This can be done by gaining experiences through career exploration, leadership, research, service, teaching etc. All these experiences, whether it is a new experience or an area of prior interest, provide the opportunity to develop transferable skills. These are skills valued by residency programs. Describing and communicating these skills and attributes will allow you to present a broader picture of the skills and interests you will bring to a residency program as a potential resident
  - A summer experience may allow you to explore different specialty options while networking or establishing connections
  - Doing something over the summer can be especially beneficial for students who didn't have time to participate in extracurricular activities during the academic year. This will allow them to demonstrate their interests and skills outside the classroom
  - Many students have said the most beneficial part of a summer experience is a great mentor who you can go to whenever you need help in the future. This mentor could be a research mentor or a program advisor
- **Do I need to do research?**
  - While it is useful to have had some kind of exposure to research while in medical school, it is not a requirement. Research can be an important factor in your residency application, depending on the specialty and program in which you are applying. Research is considered more important in the highly competitive

specialties such as Dermatology, Orthopedics, ENT, Ophthalmology, Radiology, Radiation Oncology, Plastic Surgery, Urology etc. and in strong academic residency programs

- Conducting research will help you to develop critical thinking, problem solving, and written and oral communication skills, change the way you think as a physician and will allow you to critically review literature. Research can also help you identify a career interest
- **How important are publications?**
  - Publications will strengthen your application, but may be difficult to accomplish solely during a summer. Equally significant to a publication is showing dedication and continued interest in research, as well as learning skills that you can apply in the future
- **Does the research need to be in the field I plan to specialize in?**
  - The most important part about research or any activity, from a residency director's perspective, is the demonstrated interest, knowledge and skills you obtain. It will show a true interest in research. The knowledge and skills that you obtain from any project are applicable to other areas. As long as you gain something from the project, it is a valuable experience
- **What type of research can I get involved in?**
  - There are several types of research you can choose from including basic science, clinical, translational and quality improvement research. Below are brief descriptions of each:
    - Basic science research refers to studies done to increase our knowledge and to answer a defined question that may be used as the foundation for further research. Basic science research is also commonly referred to as “wet lab” or “bench” research because most experiments are conducted in a laboratory using test tubes, pipettes, gels, and cells
    - Clinical research generally refers to patient-focused studies that attempt to answer questions regarding the effectiveness of treatments, medication, and preventative measures. Oftentimes, this involves administering surveys in a hospital, analyzing patient data for trends, or observing patients who have undergone a procedure
    - Translational research takes basic science discoveries and applies them to patient care or patient outcomes in a clinical setting. Scientific discoveries typically begin in the laboratory with basic research then progress to the clinical level
    - Quality Improvement Research seeks to improve the quality of care of patients is a fundamental obligation of health care providers. The QI process involves evaluating and learning from experience

- When deciding what type of research to do, examine your strengths and weaknesses. What skills do you hope to develop or improve? When searching for research opportunities, think about your academic and career interests. What are you hoping to learn or take away from a research experience?
  - Research will allow you to develop critical thinking, problem solving, and written and oral communication skills
  - Most importantly, you should find a subject or project that interests you and a good mentor.
- **Tips on choosing a research project**
  - Identify the type of research you would like to pursue
  - Find a subject or project that interests you. Consider projects related to fields you are strong with or have experience in
  - Do a preliminary search of the subject you're interested in at the institution in which you are hoping to do research. For example, if you are hoping to stay in the Philadelphia area, search the subject you're interested in at different institutions such as Drexel, Temple, Jefferson, UPenn etc.
  - Contact several potential research mentors and ask if you could meet with them to discuss their research. A sample email can be found on page 10
  - Identify Mentor - Ideally this is someone you "click" with. Another important factor to consider is if the PI has had experience mentoring students. Ideally, you should try to find a PI who is more experienced and who has a good understanding of what it's like to sponsor a medical student. Here is a [list](#) of faculty who have sponsored medical students in the past
  - Is the proposed project possible within the time you have available? Make sure your PI is aware of the amount of time you are able to commit to the project
  - Seek advice from faculty, Student Affairs Career Advisors, upperclassmen etc.
- **Is this my last "free time" ever?**
  - It may be hard to believe, but the answer is no. There will be other opportunities to take time off. For example, fourth year students get 12 weeks off. You can always create an opportunity for yourself if there is something else you want to accomplish while in medical school. In the past, students have taken a year off to pursue an MPH or an MBA, to do research, to be involved in international health work and more

## Types of Experiences

Remember, you are not limited to just one or any of the following. You can do as many and as few of these as you would like. This list is not exhaustive.

- **Vacation**
  - As mentioned before, you can both vacation and do something productive to continue to build your CV
- **Research**
  - Opportunities at Drexel:
    - Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship  
<http://www.drexel.edu/medicine/Academics/MD-Program/Medical-Student-Research/Medical-Student-Research-Fellowship/>
    - Other basic science and clinical research opportunities:  
<http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/cdc/researchopportunities.asp>
    - Review the lists of Drexel faculty who have provided research opportunities to medical students in the past. Contact them directly to see if an opportunity to work with them exists. You don't need to wait until the application process for the summer research fellowship program begins in order to set something up with one of these faculty members  
<http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/cdc/Drexel%20Affiliated%20Faculty-Past%20Research%20Sponsors.pdf>
    - Search the Drexel websites with key words related to your area of interest and email faculty directly to see if they or someone they know have an opening for you
    - For additional information about research opportunities at Drexel University contact Dr. Jane Clifford, Professor and Chair, Biochemistry, jane.clifford@drexelmed.edu. Prior to contacting Dr. Clifford for assistance, please complete an independent search of the Drexel Med research website
  - **External Opportunities**
    - List of external research opportunities:  
<http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/cdc/medResearch.asp>
      - Programs that students have done in the past are highlighted in blue
    - Careers in Medicine list of research opportunities:  
<https://www.aamc.org/cim/specialty/skillsandexperiences/clinicalandresearchopportunities/>
    - AAMC research grants and scholarships
    - Perform an independent search online. Contact people directly based on your interest in their work. Always ask if they or someone they know have any opportunities available. It may be easier to arrange things this way if earning money is not a necessity for you. You can also apply for funding through external grants if you confirm your research position early enough to meet grant deadlines

- **Community health experiences**
  - You can also contact Elissa Goldberg, [Elissa.Goldberg@drexelmed.edu](mailto:Elissa.Goldberg@drexelmed.edu), in the office of Community Experience, for help in finding opportunities in the Philadelphia area
  - List of community, educational, and externship opportunities: <http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/cdc/medResearch.asp>
    - Examples: camp counselor, teaching experiences
  - Bridging the Gaps: <http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/CommunityExperience/bridging.html>
- **Volunteer work**
  - Consider continuing volunteer work from the school year during the summer. With many students away, there is a greater need for students and more opportunities. For example, the HOP clinics are always looking for more volunteers over the summer
- **International experiences**
  - Office of Global Health Education: <http://www.drexel.edu/medicine/Community-Engagement/Educational-Programs/Global-Health-Education/>
  - If you are considering an international experience, contact Dr. Nielufar Varjavand, [Nielufar.Varjavand@drexelmed.edu](mailto:Nielufar.Varjavand@drexelmed.edu), to discuss your plans
- **Shadowing**
  - If you are doing basic science or clinical research with a physician, ask if you can also shadow them when they are in clinic
  - Contact one of the specialty interest groups at Drexel for more shadowing opportunities if you will be in the area
  - Reach out to physicians directly in whatever area you will be in
  - While shadowing is a great way to gain exposure to a variety of specialties, on its own, it is more of a personal development experience than something you put on your CV. You can also shadow over winter or spring breaks
- **Clinical externship**
  - Are programs developed to provide student with clinical experience in a specific specialty (ties) or hospital/Institution, i.e.
  - The Medical Student Summer Clinical Externship (MSSCE) program has been developed for medical students with a strong desire for clinical experience in the field of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (PM&R) [http://www.physiatry.org/?page=programs\\_MSSCE](http://www.physiatry.org/?page=programs_MSSCE)
- **Spanish immersion programs:** Also contact Dr. Nielufar Varjavand, [Nielufar.Varjavand@drexelmed.edu](mailto:Nielufar.Varjavand@drexelmed.edu), to discuss your plans.
  - Amerispan Salud Program [http://www.amerispan.com/salud\\_medical\\_spanish\\_programs/](http://www.amerispan.com/salud_medical_spanish_programs/)

## Factors to Consider

As you can see, the possibilities are endless when it comes to your summer plans. So how do you decide? There are a number of factors that you should consider when finalizing your decision:

- **Financial situation**
  - Do you need to earn money?
  - Funding opportunities (below is a sample list):
    - [AAMC Caring For Community Grant](#)
    - [AΩA Medical Student Service Project Award](#)
    - [Arnold P. Gold Student Summer Service Fellowship](#)
    - [Albert Schweitzer Fellowship – Philadelphia](#)
    - [Christian Community Health Fellowship \(CCHF\)](#)
    - [David E. Rogers Fellowship Program](#)
    - [GE-NMF Primary Care Leadership Program](#)
- **Location**
  - Do you want to be near your family and/or significant other?
  - How will you find housing?
  - Are you interested in exploring a city or doing any other activities besides work?
- **Emotional needs**
  - How much time do you need to re-energize?
- **How active were you during the school year?**
  - If you didn't have time during the school year, it may be more important for you to get involved in something over the summer.
- **Goals**
  - What are your ultimate career goals?
  - How can what you do over the summer help you achieve these goals?
  - What are you looking to get out of this summer?

## Applications

- **Letter of Recommendation:**
  - Course directors and faculty advisors are willing to write letters as long as you provide your CV and information about past work experiences in the area. Be sure to contact them well in advance of when it is due so they have enough time to meet with you and write a good letter
  - You can also contact professors and employers you have worked with in the past. Follow the specific application's directions
  - The Dean of Student Affairs can also write letters of recommendation or letters of good standing. Please complete [this form](#) and either email it to Karen Ulrich, [Karen.Uhlrich@DrexelMed.edu](mailto:Karen.Uhlrich@DrexelMed.edu), or drop it off in Student Affairs. Allow 10 business days
- **Enrollment Verification:**
  - Follow these instructions:  
<http://www.drexel.edu/drexelcentral/courses/enrollment/Verifying%20Enrollment/>
- **Writing a CV:**
  - <http://webcampus.drexelmed.edu/cdc/medCV.asp>
    - Samples can also be found on this page
  - Check your email for upcoming CV Writing Workshops
  - **If you would like your CV reviewed, please send it as a Word document to CDCReviews@DrexelMed.edu. We will review your CV and return it to you within 5-7 business days**
- **Sample Email for Contacting Physicians:**

Dear Dr. Mario,

I am a first year medical student at Drexel University College of Medicine. My specific research interests are in \_\_\_\_\_, so I'm reaching out to you because of your work in the field of \_\_\_\_\_.

I read your paper on \_\_\_\_\_ and I am very interested in your work. I see that you are currently working on \_\_\_\_\_ and I was wondering if you have any openings in your lab as I would love to contribute to your research this summer. Please let me know if this is an option and if you would like any other information from me (my CV is attached).

If you don't have any openings in your lab, but know of someone else exploring \_\_\_\_\_, please let me know as I would love to get involved.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,

Suzie Drexel

M.D. Candidate | Class of 2019

Drexel University College of Medicine

## Additional Information

- **Malpractice Insurance**
  - You are not covered by Drexel's Malpractice Insurance for summer experiences which are not a required part of the curriculum
- **Affiliation Agreement**
  - There may be a few institutions that require an Affiliation Agreement from Drexel in order for you to participate in research. Find out early what the requirements are before accepting a position. Contact Dr. Fuchs's office if an Affiliation Agreement is needed