What It’s Like to Be an Undergrad in a B.S./M.D. Program

How did you find out about B.S./M.D. programs?
A couple of my cousins studied in B.S./M.D. programs, so I was aware that there were a few out there. A lot of the information for combined B.S./M.D. programs can be found online, but you have to search pretty hard to find the information you are looking for. I read college blogs and looked deeper into the programs they mentioned.

Why did you choose to do a B.S./M.D. program?
I liked knowing I had the guarantee of a medical school acceptance, especially since admissions are so competitive these days. Because I wasn’t subject to the same pressures that many other pre-med students were experiencing, I was able to explore other interests — I am heavily involved in a business fraternity on campus, I’m studying for a minor in economics, and I have completed a full-immersion Spanish study-abroad program in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

What was it like to apply? How was it different from applying to regular college programs?
The applications for B.S./M.D. programs were longer than regular college applications. In addition to the application for the undergraduate program, there were forms and essays for the combined programs; these are reviewed by either a B.S./M.D. committee or by the admissions staff at the medical school itself. Nearly all B.S./M.D. programs require interviews on-site with undergraduate and medical faculty members before a final decision is made.

Are there any criteria you have to meet before you start the M.D. program?
Every program requires that students complete the generally accepted undergraduate pre-med requirements (two semesters of general chemistry, two semesters of organic chemistry, etc.). However, each program also has slightly different expectations; some require you to take the MCAT® exam and reach a certain threshold score, some give you a limited list of undergraduate majors you must choose from, while others have a volunteering requirement. It is definitely worthwhile to look into each program’s requirements and policies when applying.

Do you interact only with B.S./M.D. students, or do you take classes with other undergrads?
I am good friends with many of the students in my B.S./M.D. class, but we don’t limit ourselves to our small circle by any means. All our classes are integrated with other undergraduate students.

When do you start medical school? In addition to having an early acceptance into medical school, what are the other perks of being in a B.S./M.D. program?
I will start medical school right after graduating from the undergraduate portion of the track. Some of my friends in the B.S./M.D. program, however, are planning to take a gap year or two to volunteer abroad, to pursue an M.P.H., to experience living and working in a different country, etc. Different programs offer varied levels of flexibility before starting medical school, so I would definitely advise that you look into that, if you have aspirations of pursuing other interests before starting medical school.

One of the biggest advantages of being in a B.S./M.D. program is the familiarity you develop with the medical school while still an undergraduate. Because physicians and researchers know that you are serious about medicine, you often find it easier to secure internships or shadowing positions. You can start developing a network beginning with the relationship you have with the advisors in your program.

What advice do you have for others who are interested in doing a combined B.S./M.D. degree?
Do your research early! Each program has slightly different expectations and requirements. All programs want to see that you have some sort of medically relevant experience and that you are truly passionate about medicine. Make sure that you are diligent in preparing your application and that you choose a program that is a good fit!

Be careful that you are applying to the right programs! Some schools have “early assurance” programs, where they allow exceptional students to apply to medical school during the end of their freshman or sophomore years in college. These are not the same as B.S./M.D. programs that accept you into their undergraduate and medical programs out of high school. Read the fine print and double-check to ensure you don’t accidentally apply to a program you didn’t intend to.