

MD Program

Student Physician Activities (SPAs)

The Emory University School of Medicine Executive Curriculum Committee has stated the outcomes of the MD program in terms of the activities characteristic of a physician that students will learn and do. These “Student Physician Activities” (SPAs) define what students should be able to perform prior to graduation.

The MD curriculum is divided into four phases (view a chart of the 4-year MD Curriculum):

Foundations of Medicine (18 months):

Following a week-long shadowing experience, known as “Week on the Wards,” students begin “Healthy Human”, a 4-month study of healthy human physiology. During this time, students begin their clinical skills training, meeting twice a week with their small group – forming a close relationship with classmates and their faculty mentor early on. Small group discussions about professionalism, ethics, communication, cultural competency, and other “How to be a Doctor” skills add to the “whole person approach” to medical education.

Using those new skills, students begin seeing patients in an outpatient clinic (OPEX – outpatient experience) in the early months of medical school. Reporting for service one afternoon every other week for 12-months, first-year medical students are able to learn from a healthcare team – and their patients – in a longitudinal experience.

Approximately 5 months into the curriculum, students begin studying human disease in organ systems-based blocks for the duration of the Foundations Phase. Anatomy lab also takes place during this time period. Each of 24 dissection tables is equipped with a computer to display cross-sectional imaging, study guides, lecture notes, and other electronic references.

An integral part of the MD student experience is the Community Learning and Social Medicine course. This 4-year structured learning experience combines community service with preparation, action and reflection. Learners work with over 50 community based organizations/partners focused on one of four underserved or disadvantaged populations including elderly, disabled, economically disadvantaged, and immigrant/refugee populations.

Upon completion of the formal courses in Foundations, students are given two months of study time for Step 1 of the United States Medical Licensing Exam.

Grading is Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory for the Foundations phase of the curriculum.

Application of Medical Sciences (12 months):

Providing students with core knowledge of the basic clinical medical and surgical fields, each student will complete required rotations in Surgery, Medicine, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Neurology, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Radiology, Primary Care, Dermatology, Ophthalmology, Palliative Care, and Anesthesiology.

Students complete these rotations at Emory and Emory-affiliated healthcare facilities throughout the Atlanta area, including:

- [Grady Memorial Hospital](#)
- [Emory University Hospital](#)
- [Emory University Hospital Midtown](#)
- [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston](#)
- [Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Hughes Spalding](#)
- [Emory Wesley Woods Center](#)
- [Atlanta Veterans Affairs Medical Center](#)
- [The Emory Clinic \(multiple sites around Atlanta\)](#)
- Other clinical sites in and around Atlanta

During the Application phase, students still regularly meet with their Small Groups to further develop their professional identity and to process and reflect on their clinical experiences.

Discovery (5 months):

The Discovery phase is a structured time for students to conduct a hypothesis-driven research project under the direction of a faculty member. While the Discovery project must be a scientific inquiry based in medicine, students are able to combine their interests in other areas, such as creative writing, public health, community development, education, or health policy, into their project. Some students are also able to include an international experience in their Discovery project. This is an opportunity for students to renew their creative energies and explore a new facet of medicine under the tutelage of an Emory faculty member.

Students must carry out a research project that meets the standards established by the Discovery leadership for the MD degree. This project can be part of the student's second degree program, and may be designed and undertaken as part of that program. The Discovery leadership is responsible for assuring that the project fulfills the requirements for the Discovery phase of the MD curriculum.

During Discovery, medical students work full time on their projects with minimal other academic commitments except occasional seminars or workshops relevant to their research. Many students publish their Discovery work in peer-reviewed scientific journals and all students are required to present their Discovery project at Medical Student Research Day in the fourth year.

Translation of Medical Sciences (7 months):

This phase prepares each individual for the transition to physician. Required senior rotations include Emergency Medicine, Critical Care Medicine (ICU), 3 months of electives, and a sub-internship in Surgery, Medicine or Pediatrics; there is sufficient time for away-rotations during this year. The Translation Phase concludes with a required month-long Capstone course that offers carefully designed lectures, workshops, panel discussions, and exercises which equip the soon-to-be graduate with the practical skills and information that will be crucial to their success as residents.

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