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A surprising number of doctors were undergrad English majors — and it's not just about GPA

Mark Abadi Nov. 16, 2017, 2:38 PM



English is the seventh-most popular undergraduate major for doctors. Shutterstock

- **English majors are surprisingly well-represented in US medical schools.**
- **They enroll in med schools at greater rates than applicants coming from science backgrounds.**
- **And it's not necessarily the case that English is easier than biology or chemistry.**

There's a decent chance your doctor didn't study biology, chemistry

There's a decent chance your doctor didn't study biology, chemistry, or any other science when they first got to college.

A surprising number of students in medical schools actually have backgrounds in a surprising field: English.

According to career site [Zippia](#), English is the seventh-most popular undergraduate major for doctors, and the most popular major that isn't a hard science or medical field.

Take a look at the list:

1. Biology
2. Biochemistry, Biophysics, Molecular Biology
3. Psychology
4. Chemistry
5. Nursing
6. Health/Medical Preparatory Programs
- 7. English**
8. Biomedical Engineering
9. Economics
10. History

People who major in English and other fields in the humanities also appear to enroll in medical schools at greater rates than other majors. According to the most recent data from the Association of American Medical Colleges, 46% of humanities majors who applied to US med schools ended up enrolling, compared to just 38% of biological science majors and 44% of physical science majors.

Humanities majors also boasted the highest MCAT scores of all applicants, Zippia found. (It is worth noting that just over 1,900 humanities majors applied to med schools last school year, compared to more than 28,000 biological science majors.)

So why do English majors seem to have an edge? While some speculate that majoring in English leads to a higher GPA and a more

speculate that majoring in English leads to a higher GPA and a more impressive resume, that likely isn't the case.

"Consider for a moment the work ethic that an English major must possess to major in something other than a pre-requisite heavy field, and then to ace the MCAT," David Luther of Zippia wrote. "Med schools do consider your narrative, medical work experience, and leadership.

"All things equal, a candidate who demonstrates passion for med school admissions is more likely to maintain sanity through the rigors of medical college."

James Pierce, a second-year medical student at the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, told Business Insider that studying English has benefited him in his post-graduate career.

"English is all about studying how to communicate," said Pierce, who decided he wanted to pursue medicine three years into his undergraduate studies at the University of California-Davis.

"Doctors tell people what they need to know and need to express it in a way that everyone can understand."

"A lot of doctors get stuck saying too much jargon, and I think on the other side a lot of doctors maybe say too little and don't address people's concerns, because they dismiss the details of what they're trying to describe as too complicated. I hope that having an English background will help me balance those two."

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