

# Medical school admission in Australia and the United States: A comparative analysis

Zachary I. Merhavy<sup>1</sup>, Jack B. Ding<sup>2</sup>, Thomas C. Varkey<sup>3</sup>, Louis Xiao<sup>4</sup>, David Fahim<sup>5</sup>, Cheney E. Merhavy<sup>1</sup>, & Stephen Smith<sup>3</sup>

1. School of Medicine, Ross University, Bridgetown, Barbados
2. Adelaide Medical School, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia
3. Dell Medical School, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin Texas
4. Melbourne Medical School, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
5. Western University of Health Sciences, College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific, Pomona, California

## Introduction

- Australian medical school admission and course structure historically reflected British systems, although there have been recent reforms of North American influence.
- Historically, Australian schools were mostly of a 6-year undergraduate MBBS curriculum. However, many are now a 4-year graduate MD degree.
- Currently, the Australian medical school admission landscape is a mix of old and new systems.
- Still, there are very different factors involved in the medical school selection process between the two countries.

## Objectives

To describe and contrast the current landscape in Australian and US medical admission pathways, including pre-application requirements, application process and financial aspects.

## Methods

- The authors systematically searched PubMed and Google for relevant publications.
- A pentagonal search strategy was used – US MD, US DO, US IMG, AU undergraduate, AU postgraduate, each led by an author that had matriculated through one of the pathways within the last 8 years.
- Articles that were not peer-reviewed primary papers, publications by official government, medical school bodies, or medical licensing authorities were excluded.

## Comparison

	Australia	United States
<b>Number of medical schools</b>	21 allopathic (MD/MBBS)	154 allopathic (MD) 37 osteopathic (DO)
<b>Primary medical education</b>	5 to 7 years undergraduate or 4-year postgraduate (allopathic)	4-year postgraduate allopathic osteopathic medical degrees
<b>Offshore medical education</b>	Few Australian-born physicians hold offshore medical degrees	A significant number of US-born physicians hold offshore medical degrees
<b>Medical school funding</b>	Allopathic: all but two are public	Allopathic: 60% public Osteopathic: 20% public (48)
<b>Academic requirements</b>	Academic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized ATAR percentile (undergraduate)</li> <li>• Non-standardized GPA score (postgraduate)</li> <li>• UCAT or GAMSAT</li> </ul>	Academic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-standardized scores (GPA)</li> <li>• MCAT</li> </ul>
<b>Non-Academic requirements</b>	Interview	Interview, personal statement, letters of recommendation, relevant work experience, research experience, shadowing experience, volunteering experience
<b>Application portal</b>	Two systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undergraduate (centralized, state-based)</li> <li>• Postgraduate (centralized and nationalized through GEMSAS)</li> </ul>	Two systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allopathic (centralized and mostly nationalized through AMCAS. State-based system for Texas schools)</li> <li>• Osteopathic (centralized and nationalized through AACOMAS)</li> </ul>

**Table 1:** Comparison of US and Australian medical school admission requirements

Table 1 highlights the similarities and differences in medical school admission requirements between the two countries. The first major difference is the type of primary medical education. While there are some US medical schools that select secondary school applicants for BA or BS/MD degrees, these are rare. In contrast, there is currently near equal representation of undergraduate and postgraduate selection processes in Australia. In addition, while US osteopathic medicine graduates are seen as equivalent to US MD graduates from a medical licensure perspective, medical schools only confer allopathic degrees in Australia.

## Conclusions

- Although there are striking differences in medical school admission processes between Australia and the United States, the medical education and healthcare systems are highly developed, as exhibited by their tendencies to consistently attract foreign medical graduate immigration.
- Medical schools of both countries have significant potential in reducing costs associated with applying to medical school, particularly regarding the interview phase and 'secondary application' costs for the US. Doing so may indeed prove pivotal for reaching the high level of interview pool diversity that holistic review processes try so hard to do.

	Australia	United States
Number of schools	21 MD or MBBS	154 MD, 37 DO
Length of schooling	4 to 7 years	4 years
International schooling	Few options	Many options
Public funding	All but 2 are public	60% MD, 20% DO
Admissions exam	UCAT or GAMSAT	MCAT
Admissions focus	Academic	Holistic

**Table 2:** Summary of current medical admissions landscape AU vs. US

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