

Applying to US Medical Schools as a Couple: Our Experience

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The Experience

By the time we were ready to apply to medical school, we were four years into our relationship. We were both excited to pursue our dream of becoming physicians but felt uncertain about how the process might affect our support system. Despite the significant challenges students face during medical school and the importance of social support in higher education,^{1,2} there are no clear guidelines for couples applying to medical school together. As two successful applicants (M.D.B. and Q.N.), we share our experience, strategies, and advice for others navigating this process as a pair ([Figure 1](#)).

Before applying as a couple, it is important to understand the basic medical school application process, timeline, and required materials.³⁻⁵ Consult your university's pre-med advisors and mentors who know you well for help creating your application. Think about which programs align with your goals and strengths, prioritizing home-state schools and programs where either partner has strong ties (family, school enrollment, prior residence, etc.).

After finalizing our individual school lists, we discussed where to apply as a couple. While our goal was to attend the same program, we considered the possibility of attending different schools. We decided not to consider programs more than 3 hours apart by car, train, or direct flight, and found it helpful to organize schools into five tiers ([Figure 2](#)).

Turning Point 1: Submitting our Applications

After months of hard work drafting our applications, we faced a new challenge: waiting patiently for programs to respond. Applying alongside your partner is unique because you are intimately aware of each other's progress throughout the admissions cycle. Interview invites can be twice as exciting, while rejections can sting twice as much, especially when one partner receives more interest than the other.

Figure 1. Meet the Authors.



If one partner receives an interview or acceptance, the other should consider sending update letters to nearby schools. When Q.N. was accepted to a Florida program, M.D.B. sent updates to multiple programs nearby. Reiterating interest seemed to pay off, as M.D.B. received an interview invite from one of the schools

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Editor: Francisco J. Bonilla-Escobar
Student Editors: Adwaith Krishna
Surendran, Sara Malafa, Sarvesh, &
Sebastián Serna Rivera

Submission: Jun 5, 2025
Revisions: Aug 16, Dec 11, 2025
Responses: Sep 5, 2025, Jan 6, 2026
Acceptance: Mar 11, 2026
Publication: Mar 11, 2026
Process: Peer-reviewed

weeks later. It is generally acceptable to send updates to multiple programs if they welcome communication, but avoid sending letters of intent – in which a commitment is made to attend upon acceptance – to multiple schools.

Turning Point 2: Making a Decision

By the time interviews concluded in April, there was no overlap in our acceptances or waitlists. Realizing we could not attend the same program, or even live together during medical school, was one of the hardest moments of the cycle. We also needed to decide whether we wanted to risk waiting for Q.N. to be offered a position from the waitlist at an Arizona school – our home state – or commit to moving to Florida. After considering our options, we decided to commit to our Florida schools. We appreciated their confidence in us and wanted to ensure we could attend medical school in the same state.

Throughout this process, maintaining open and honest communication with your partner is key. It is important to establish your individual goals and priorities early and communicate frequently. Here are some hard questions we each asked ourselves:

1. Is getting accepted into medical school more important than staying close to my partner?
2. Am I willing to decline an acceptance at one of my top-choice programs for my relationship?
3. How confident am I that my partner will be in my life for the next 5 years? 10 years?
4. How far apart from my partner am I willing to be?
5. Would I enjoy attending the same program as my partner? Or would I prefer to have my own experience?

The answers to these questions will vary significantly between relationships because each one is unique. Be cautious with allowing your goals as a couple to dictate your goals as individuals. No matter how confident you are in the longevity of your relationship, it is crucial to consider your happiness at a program if your relationship does not work out.

Figure 2. Our Five-Tier System for Prospective Medical Schools.



Unfortunately, some applicants may not be accepted during their first cycle. If you are considering reapplying, take time to reflect on your application and identify areas for improvement. If one partner is accepted and the other is not, reapplying to that program or nearby schools in the next cycle remains a strong option. Having a significant other at the school can strengthen your application by demonstrating genuine interest and offering valuable insight into what medical school is really like.

Turning Point 3: Adjusting to Medical School & Key Takeaways

While we may not have known it when applying, attending different schools was best for us. We have gotten the opportunity to meet twice as many people and grow as individuals. During the week, we have plenty of time to focus on our school work, and we make the 2-hour drive nearly every weekend to visit each other. We are currently completing our third-year clerkships, recently got engaged, and are beginning to think about applying to residency in the 2027 NRMP couples match.

Our key takeaways from this process, and advice from three admissions professionals at one of our medical schools, are shown in [Table 1](#). While the advice we received from admissions professionals largely aligned with our experiences, it also highlighted potential challenges such as how relationship changes might affect class dynamics.

Table 1. Key Takeaways for Couples Dual-Applying to Medical School.

Medical Student Advice	Admissions Professional Advice
1. Seek advice from trusted mentors	1. Remain professional in all communications
2. Evaluate programs of interest individually before discussing as a couple	2. Visit schools of interest together to inform your decisions
3. Maximize your ties when building your school list	3. Be objective: the goal of the admissions team is to admit students based on merit
4. Discuss the possibility of attending different programs, and define reasonable distance	4. Understand that relationships change over time & breakups could affect class dynamics
5. Update schools where your partner was accepted, plus any others nearby	5. Consider communicating your relationship to programs so they can document your interest in attending together
6. Avoid the cycle of comparison	6. Utilize letters of interest and intent judiciously
7. Rejection is normal – but it still stings	7. Avoid compromising professional goals or interests for your partner
8. Be open and honest with your partner, you have each other to lean on	
9. The process is difficult, but worth it!	

Conclusions

Our experience highlights the importance of setting realistic expectations, considering logistics such as distance and travel, and remaining resilient when applying to medical school as a couple. Honest, consistent communication helped us make

informed decisions and support each other. Though stressful, the process was worth it. We hope our insights offer practical guidance and reassurance. You are not alone, and we are rooting for you!

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Acknowledgments

None.

Conflict of Interest Statement & Funding

The Authors have no funding, financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Writing - Review Editing: MDB, QN, LVB, LP, SL, JK; Project Administration, Supervision: LVB, LP, SL, JK; Investigation, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft: MDB, QN; Resources, Visualization: MDB, QN, JK.

Cite as

Brandt MD, Norris Q, van Blaricom L, Poole L, Lambert S, Kibble J. Applying to US Medical Schools as a Couple: Our Experience. *Int J Med Stud*. 2026 Jan-Mar;14(1):39-41.

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ISSN 2076-6327

This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/)

