



A Systematic Review of Pre-Medical Gap Year Literature

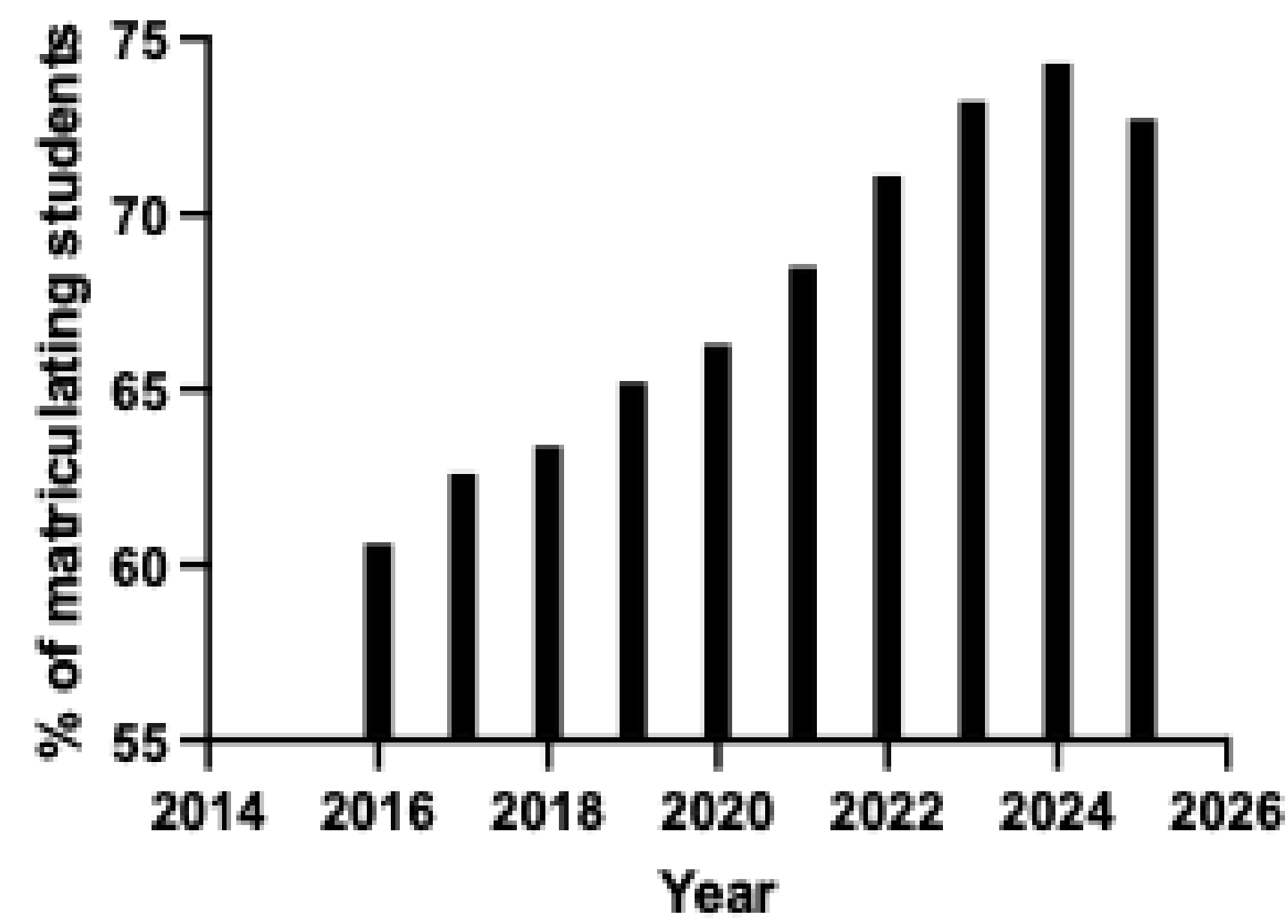


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Background

In 2025, 72.7% of entering U.S. Medical Students took a **gap year**—one or more years between completing an undergraduate degree and matriculating into medical school.

Matriculating Medical Students Taking 1+ Gap Years 2016-2025



AAMC Medical Student Questionnaire Data 2016-2025

Since 2016, the proportion of students taking a gap year has **increased by 22%** highlighting a growing trend in medical school admissions.

Objective

The goal of this project is to identify and compile current scholarly literature on pre-medical gap years through the lens of medical school applicant readiness, using the AAMC Premed competencies.

AAMC Premed Competencies

Commitment to Learning and Growth	Reliability and Dependability	Human Behavior
Empathy and Compassion	Resilience and Adaptability	Living Systems
Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others	Self-Awareness	Critical Thinking
Interpersonal Skills	Service Orientation	Quantitative Reasoning
Oral Communication	Teamwork and Collaboration	Scientific Inquiry
	Understanding Others	Written Communication

AAMC.org, 2026

Methods - PRISMA Guided Search Query

Google Scholar		Web of Science		Pub Med	
Literature Search: "gap year"		Literature Search: "gap year"		Literature Search: "gap year"	
Records Identified: 25,400		Records Identified: 331		Records Identified: 72	
		Updated Search "English"			
		Included: 315	Excluded: 16		
Title Screening: 25,803					
Included: 29	Excluded: 25,371	Included: 21	Excluded: 294	Included: 19	Excluded: 53
Abstract Screening: 69					
Included: 22	Excluded: 7	Included: 16	Excluded: 8	Included: 14	Excluded: 5
Full Text Screening (All Search Engines/Databases): 52					
Included in Review: 11					

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they focused on:

- Gap years between secondary and undergraduate education
- Gap years between medical school and beginning residency
- Programs not leading to a U.S. M.D., D.O., or D.D.S. degree

Data Sorted According to AAMC Premed Competencies

Example of Sorting Criteria:

Professional Competencies	AAMC Definition	Key Words
4. Interpersonal Skills	"Demonstrates an awareness of how social and behavioral cues affect people's interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; recognizes and manages one's emotions and understands how emotions impact others or a situation; and treats others with dignity, courtesy, and respect."	"interpersonal skills" "manage emotions" "emotional intelligence/EI" "professionalism" "respect"

	Commitment to Learning and Growth	Understanding Others	Empathy and Compassion	Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others	Interpersonal Skills	Oral Communication
References	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11	2, 4, 8	1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11	N/A	1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11	1, 5, 8, 10
Data	4	N/A	1, 4, 8, 10	N/A	1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11	1, 5, 10

	Reliability and Dependability	Resilience and Adaptability	Self-Awareness	Service Orientation	Teamwork and Collaboration	Understanding Others
References	N/A	1, 2, 4, 7	4, 8	1, 2, 4, 5	7, 11	2, 4, 8
Data	N/A	1, 2, 4	4	4	N/A	N/A

	Human Behavior	Living Systems	Critical Thinking	Quantitative Reasoning	Scientific Inquiry	Written Communication
References	6	3, 5, 7, 10	3	N/A	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11	N/A
Data	N/A	5, 10	N/A	N/A	4, 6	N/A

Key Findings

Competencies with the Most "References"

Commitment to Learning and Growth

- 8 articles
- pursuing graduate degrees, gaining clinical experience, improving GPA/MCAT scores, and affirming commitment to medicine

Scientific Inquiry

- 8 articles
- participation in research, including clinical research and increased scholarly output (e.g., publications)

Competencies with the Most Data

Interpersonal Skills

- 6 articles
- Self-reported survey data from medical students emphasized professionalism and real-world skills (Regester)
- Statistically significant differences in emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills scores between:
 - Dental students with vs. without gap years (Wen et.al)
 - Residents with vs. without pre-medical gap years (Shahid et.al)

Empathy and Compassion

- 4 articles
- Advisor surveys emphasized increased maturity (Charland)
- Student self-reports highlighted improved patient care skills (Soonthornprapuet)
- Statistically significant differences in empathy scores were observed in residents who took a gap year (Shahid et.al)

Other Notable Findings

Medical students who took gap years reported significantly lower burnout scores (Guang)

Discussion

- Limited research on gap years from an admissions standpoint
- This gap highlights the need for future research to:
 - Identify factors that determine whether a pre-medical student may benefit from a gap year
 - Evaluate how a gap year may strengthen a medical school application
 - Determine whether a gap year predicts successful matriculation into medical school