

# Engaging Community to Improve Equity in the Medical School Application Process: Providing Free Support for Medical School Applicants via Giving a Boost

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## OBJECTIVES

- The exorbitant cost of consulting services and limited access to mentors of similar backgrounds are examples of barriers to an equitable medical school application process.
- Addressing these disparities led to the establishment of Giving a Boost, a student-driven organization at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine that offers free services to support applicants pursuing a medical education.
- Community engagement can leverage knowledge and experience to provide affordable, sustainable, and equitable quality support

## BACKGROUND

- The medical school application process is both highly competitive and expensive, and the trend in the AAMC's data shows the process is becoming increasingly so.
- Even while the matriculation rate across all U.S. MD-granting medical schools in 2023-24 was about 43.7%, the average number of applications per applicant was 18, the ratio of total applications to matriculants was 42, and the acceptance rate for individual U.S. allopathic medical schools remains only 5.5% on average.
- Given this daunting landscape, various companies have begun offering consulting services that provide tremendous benefit and advantage to those with access.
- However, popular consulting companies, such as MedSchoolCoach, Shemassian Academic Consulting, and BeMo Academic Consulting, charge \$3,100-\$15,997 per application cycle, costs which are highly prohibitive for many applicants.
- Addressing these disparities led to the establishment of Giving a Boost, a student-driven organization at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine that offers free services to support disadvantaged applicants pursuing a medical education.

## METHODS

From 2020 to present, University of Pittsburgh medical students were recruited as volunteer "mentors," before being matched to applicants beginning their application cycle.

Services provided by Giving a Boost mentors included support with:

- primary applications
- secondary applications
- mock interviews
- letters of interest and letter of intent
- waitlist procedures
- reapplication

Giving a Boost services were advertised through undergraduate streams including:

- department newsletters
- pre-health student organizations
- pre-health fraternities
- pre-health advising departments

At the end of each application cycle, Giving a Boost participants filled out an optional survey, where they rated the benefit of utilizing the following support resources on a Likert scale (1 = not at all beneficial; 10 = highly beneficial):

- Giving a Boost
- Other student organizations
- Pitt's pre-health advising center
- Other faculty
- Friends

## RESULTS

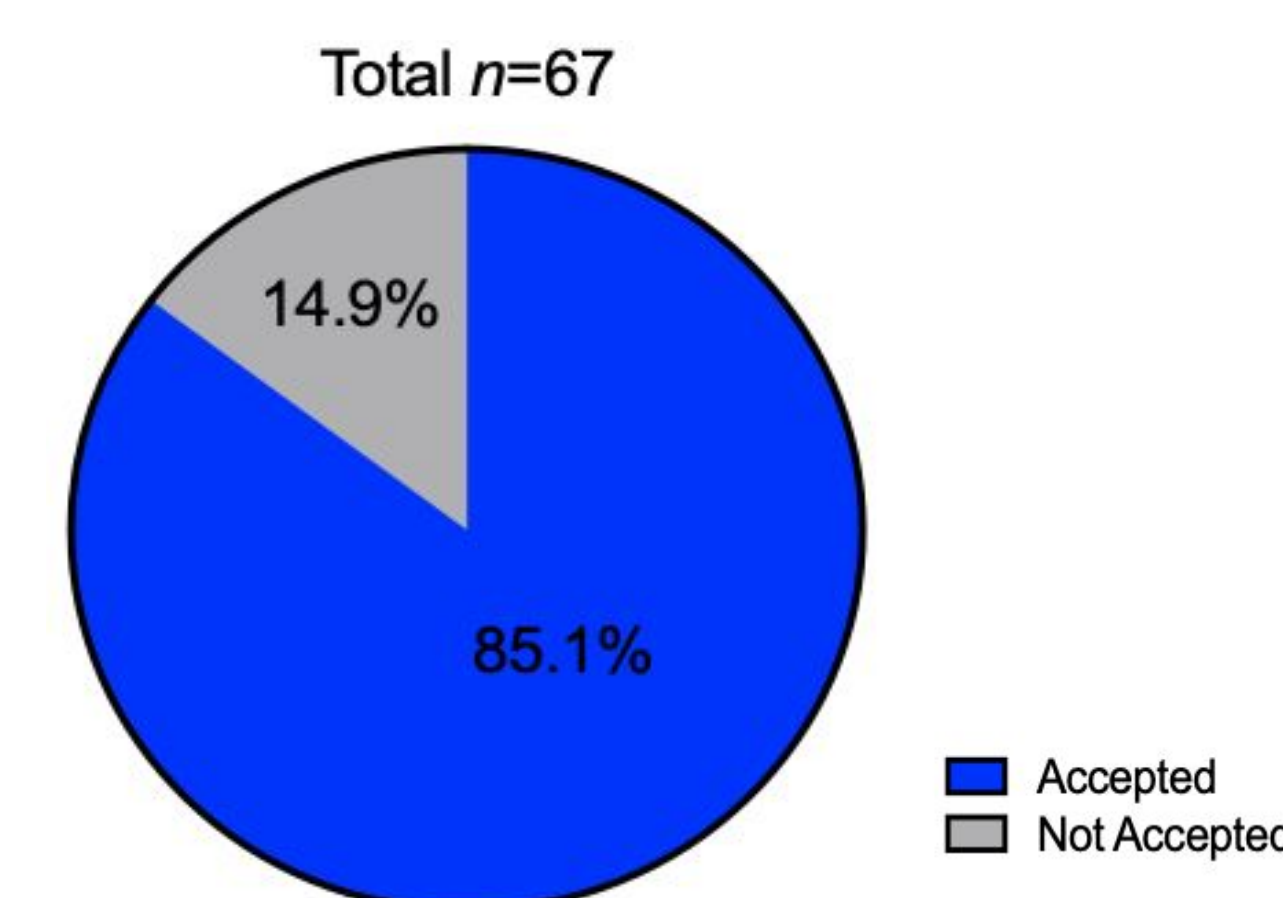
- Over the course of 3 application cycles, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine's Giving a Boost program assisted a total of 256 medical school applicants.
- Of the 256 total applicants, 67 responded (26% response rate) to the institutionally-provided survey.

**Table 1.** Average rating of medical school application resources by Giving a Boost participants (1 = not at all beneficial; 10 = highly beneficial)

Support Resources	Average Rating
Giving a Boost (n=67)	8.4
Other Student Organizations	5.0
Pre-Health Advising	5.0
Other Faculty	5.6
Friends	7.1

- Of the 67 survey respondents, 57 applicants reported being accepted into at least one medical school.

Application Cycle	Number of Survey Respondents	Giving a Boost Matriculation Rate (%)	National Matriculation Rate (%)
2022-2023	6	100	41.2
2021-2022	22	90.9	41.2
2020-2021	29	72.7	36.3



**Figure 3.** Giving a Boost survey respondents accepted to medical school across 3 cycles from 2020-2023

## DISCUSSION

- Our recruitment process exemplifies how one can mobilize medical students to engage with local communities for mutual benefit
- On average, applicants reported benefiting more from Giving a Boost than from any other individual support resource, with an average rating of 8.4/10.
- Highlighting the power of communities, applicants reported that friends (7.1/10) provided more benefit than faculty (5.6/10), other pre-health student organizations (5.0/10), and pre-health advising (5.0/10).
- Although we only had a 26% survey response rate (67 of 256), the success of the respondents offers insight into Giving a Boost's overall impact.
- Of note, Giving a Boost survey respondents achieved a higher medical school acceptance rate of 85.1% (57 of 67) when compared to the national average of 43.7% in 2022-23.

## CONCLUSION

- Giving a Boost continues to be a free and accessible service available to all students seeking guidance during the medical school application cycle.
- This evaluation demonstrates Giving a Boost's approach to supporting applicants has been a successful and sustainable method for engaging the local community, while providing a more equitable means for future physicians to find assistance as they begin their journey.

## REFERENCES

- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). 2023, 2023 FACTS: Applicants and Matriculants Data, <https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/students-residents/data/2023-facts-applicants-and-matriculants-data>
- Freedman J. Medical School acceptance rates by race, Major, MCAT/GPA. MedEdits. November 30, 2023. Accessed March 13, 2024. <https://mededits.com/medical-school-admissions/statistics/acceptance-rates/>