



# **Medical School Secondary Essay Example Pack**



## Introduction

- The following series of essays is meant to give you an idea of what to write for your secondary essays for the most common prompts.
- Each example shows variations of how you may consider answering the prompts.
- For instructions on pre-writing essays, please see the secondary application guide.

## Diversity Prompt

“How will you contribute to the diversity of our medical school community?”

“Describe an aspect of your identity, background, or lived experience that is important to who you are.”

“Explain how your experiences with diversity have prepared you to work with patients from different backgrounds.”

“Discuss how your upbringing, culture, or community has shaped your values.”

“What does diversity mean to you, and why is it important in medicine?”

### Example Response #1: Statement of Commitment to Diversity

- One strong approach to this prompt is to discuss prior work with underserved or diverse populations.
- This style of response can be repurposed for several versions of the diversity prompt.
- This is a strong response for applicants who can't lean on personal demographics.

As an undergraduate in downtown San Diego, I experienced firsthand how socioeconomic disparities create a glaring contrast to the city's wealthier areas. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, I became motivated to leverage my public health major to learn how systemic issues like racial discrimination and economic disinvestment manifest in urban cities. In pursuing real-world application of this knowledge, I got involved in research regarding social determinants of health and pregnancy outcome disparities.

This experience, paired with my work at Community Wellbeing Network, a non-profit I helped start, allowed me to bridge theory and practice. Through active listening and constant dialogue with community members, my team addressed their needs. We constantly prioritized a holistic approach to health. In summary, my experiences involving community outreach, healthcare disparities, and research align with UCR School of Medicine's mission to improve healthcare for the medically underserved and will provide a service-oriented voice to their diverse student body. I know that fellow medical students from various academic backgrounds at UCR will broaden my perspective on how to develop innovative, sustainable healthcare solutions throughout my career.

### **Example Response #2: Describing Upbringing/Perspective**

- Another approach is to describe how one's upbringing or perspective shaped their approach to extracurriculars and informed their motivation to pursue medicine.
- In this example, culture/religion is used, but other factors such as a description of the community you grew up in can fill the same role.

Growing up in a Buddhist family from the fishing community of Oshima, my worldview has been deeply shaped by Buddhist principles. Central tenets such as shared destiny and mutual assistance form the foundation not just of my cultural identity, but of my approach to every aspect of care. These teachings call me to see every individual as interconnected, deserving of empathy, dignity, and respect—no matter their background or circumstances.

Buddhism teaches the importance of relieving suffering and practicing compassion consistently. This perspective profoundly influenced my experience when supporting my father through his journey with cardiomyopathy and a heart transplant. The Buddhist value of mindful presence enabled me to appreciate the power of ongoing, compassionate care in bringing comfort, healing, and dignity. As I volunteered and shadowed in hospice settings, I found myself guided by the same Buddhist ideals; I was moved to see every patient as part of a shared humanity, deserving of kindness and understanding. This insight drew me to primary care, where building meaningful relationships and understanding each person's story reflect the Buddhist emphasis on attentive, compassionate stewardship.

Likewise, Buddhism's focus on compassion and non-judgment has shaped my engagement with the opioid crisis. Facilitating recovery groups, participating in harm reduction outreach, and conducting clinical research on addiction, I approached each interaction with a commitment to alleviate suffering without stigma or blame. While shadowing an addiction medicine physician in Philadelphia, I carried these lessons with me, listening to the stories of those struggling with substance use not as outsiders, but as fellow humans in need of understanding and support.

My aspiration in medicine, grounded in Buddhist principles, is to offer trauma-informed, nonjudgmental care, striving always to see each patient through the lens of compassion and shared humanity. At Sidney Kimmel, I hope to contribute to the diversity of the student body with my background and passion. Eager to learn from my peers' diverse experiences, I envision us working together to champion equitable, inclusive, and patient-centered healthcare.

### **Example Response #3: Classical Demographic-Based Answer**

- This is a more traditional style answer to the diversity prompt which focuses on the applicant's culture and ethnicity.
- Importantly, this response also translates how the applicant's values translated to action through a volunteering opportunity.

As an Arab-Muslim, first-generation college student, and the son of refugees, my background will bring a valuable perspective to the medical profession. Growing up as a refugee in an underserved area informed my understanding of social justice. My family struggled to assimilate to an unfamiliar country with limited resources and social support. My father had

difficulty securing employment due to the language barrier, which exacerbated our financial instability. Having witnessed my family's adversity during some of the most formative years of my life, I felt uniquely positioned to advocate for refugees.

In college, I found the ideal opportunity to do so as a volunteer at Refugee Aid Chicago. I served as a liaison between the local community and the refugee population. Our organization helped refugees from all over the world adjust to life in Chicago. One particular family that left a lasting impression on me was that of Ali, a 15-year-old refugee from Syria. As we discussed his flight from civil unrest and the many struggles he faced along the way, I was struck by the similarities with my family's journey immigrating from Iraq. We discussed everything from the soccer team on his shirt to his family's lack of resources and access to healthcare.

Meeting Ali was one of many interactions I had with refugees from various cultures and backgrounds. After many such conversations, I felt compelled to use my career to benefit those facing overwhelming socioeconomic and cultural barriers. I hope to contribute my commitment to social justice and firsthand experience with diverse communities to WMed SOM.

### Challenge Prompt

"Describe a significant challenge you have faced and how you handled it."

"Discuss a time you failed or made a mistake. What did you learn?"

"Tell us about an obstacle you encountered and how you overcame it."

"Describe a time when you struggled. How did you respond, and what did you learn about yourself?"

### Example Response #1: Longitudinal Challenge

- This version focuses on a challenging life circumstance that impacted the applicant over years, and how they navigated it.
- As you will see, there is nothing super surprising or particularly dramatic about this response, however it does sound personal and genuine, which is important.
- This student was ultimately admitted to Vanderbilt School of Medicine.

Throughout childhood, I struggled to find my voice. The grip of my selective mutism and introversion often left me isolated. Social situations, particularly in the group setting, were

nearly impossible for me to navigate due to my limited ability to communicate. To make matters worse, I was one of the only Indian students from kindergarten through 12th grade. During grade school, I struggled to make friends, especially in English class. My accent elicited giggles from classmates as I read passages aloud. The self-consciousness that this provoked further hindered social interactions.

Basketball became a means for me to overcome this challenge. Small gestures like a fist bump after a well-coordinated move became my first step toward finding my voice on the court. I ensured that my teammates could anticipate my strategies and trust my decisions. As I grew more comfortable with these forms of nonverbal communication, I started initiating discussions about basketball off the court. The focus shifted from the sound of my accent to the substance of my words. Through deliberate social engagement in basketball, I overcame my communication barriers and built meaningful relationships with my teammates.

I carried this newly discovered confidence into college. I consciously sought opportunities that would push me out of my comfort zone. Leading Community Connect Houston, mentoring children at Bright Horizons Play Center, coaching youth basketball players, and serving as an executive board member for Houston Unified Sports are just a few examples of opportunities where I articulated my thoughts effectively to a diverse audience.

This process taught me that I can be resilient in the face of embarrassment and isolation. I discovered that I have a voice capable of championing diversity, inclusivity, and advocating for people who are still finding their voice. Today, I feel prepared for the challenges of medical school thanks to lessons learned in the unlikelyst of places – a basketball court.

### Example Response #2: Situational Challenge

- This example, in comparison to the previous one, this example conveys a challenge that happened in a short scenario.
- Importantly, the applicant follows a 2-part structure where they first describe the scenario, then demonstrate how they responded.
- As you brainstorm for your challenge response, focus more on what your response to the challenge reveals about your mindset, rather than focusing on whether the challenge was too big or too small to discuss.

We had already seen six patients within the first hour of my scribing shift with Dr. Walsh. As we moved quickly from room to room, Dr. Walsh dictated her findings over the loud bustling in the ER. Using shorthand phrases and abbreviations, I kept up with her meticulous dictations. When I finally had a chance to sit down and compose my notes, the unthinkable happened. My computer screen spontaneously went blue, informing me that it was time for an “auto-restart.” My notes, which were still in Microsoft notepad, had not been saved.

For the remaining nine hours of my shift I worked persistently to recover what I had lost. Like a detective, I gathered missing information while simultaneously documenting the new patients that had arrived. I sifted through past patient visit notes, medical histories, and EMS

notes to reconstruct the six patient narratives. I also approached the nurses to ask questions about the quality and duration of the patients' symptoms. Finally, I asked the doctor to provide a few missing details, making sure to interject only when it would not interrupt her work flow. The entire ten-hour shift was stressful, but I persevered until my patient documentation was complete.

### **Example Response #3: Another Situational Challenge**

- Here's another example of a situational challenge for good measure.
- It is important to note that while these responses both occurred in the setting of extracurricular activities, this does not necessarily have to be the case.
- Notice how this student spent ample time reflecting and also demonstrating how they carry this lesson forward to current experiences.

Not long after starting my role as an overnight supervisor at the Youth Empowerment Shelter, I experienced a challenge that pushed me out of my comfort zone. One morning, a dispute over noise escalated into a physical confrontation between two residents. Motivated by a sense of responsibility, I attempted to defuse the conflict alone, without seeking help from my co-staff.

I tried speaking with the residents individually in a staff room and even attempted to physically separate them, which partially defused the situation. However, my inability to fully resolve the conflict on my own led to an extended disruption for the other residents. In retrospect, my solo approach was not ideal. This was a lapse in judgment; my well-intentioned desire to handle the situation independently inadvertently prolonged a volatile confrontation. The conflict could have been resolved more efficiently had I involved my co-staff. While no further harm occurred in this instance, I could not ignore the potential repercussions had the conflict continued to escalate. This incident taught me the importance of valuing teamwork and collaboration over individual heroism. Leadership is not just about shouldering all the responsibility but also about knowing when to rely on your team. Our subsequent staff discussions reinforced the need for collaboration and open communication, solidifying this valuable lesson.

Continuing to work within various team contexts, I let this lesson guide my actions. I prioritized open communication and valued collective intelligence over individual assumptions. When planning a fundraiser as president of my university cancer outreach initiative, I encouraged my team members to ask for help or clarification, no matter how trivial a concern may seem. Similarly, now that I work on a hospice team, if I'm unsure how to communicate with a patient suffering from dementia, I don't hesitate to seek advice from more experienced staff. This approach has led to successful outcomes in both organizational and patient care initiatives in which I have been involved.

As I anticipate the transition to medical school and, hopefully, a career as a physician, I will carry this lesson with me. My first-hand experience with the importance of collaboration and open communication, especially in high-stress situations, has refined my understanding of the balance between individual responsibility and teamwork. This experience will continue to

remind me of the value of humility, the power of asking questions, and the strength in saying, "Let's find the answer together."

## Why Our School?

"Why do you want to attend our medical school?"

"Why are you interested in [School Name]?"

"What factors led you to apply to our institution?"

"Describe your reasons for choosing our medical school."

### Example Response #1: Focus on one theme

- This applicant focused primarily on one factor (diversity), and had a strong advocacy theme in their application.
- This response highlights multiple factors that align with that general theme.

SUNY Downstate College of Medicine's strong community ties and service-oriented focus make it the ideal place for me to receive my medical education. As the sole academic medical center in Brooklyn, SUNY Downstate serves an ethnically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse community. This includes a substantial Black and Afro-Caribbean community and a large immigrant community. Downstate offers numerous community engagement opportunities to learn from this vibrant diversity, such as the BK SWAG program (Brooklyn Scholars with Athletic Goals). BK SWAG involves collaboration between coaches, parents, and students interested in health, and athletes in the local community. Additionally, the Brooklyn Free Clinic is an interdisciplinary team of medical, nursing, and physical therapy students, working alongside various healthcare providers to offer free healthcare to uninsured and underserved patients in Brooklyn. I would take advantage of these volunteering opportunities not only to expand access to resources and healthcare, but also to help me accomplish my goal of becoming a culturally competent physician.

### Example Response #2: Traditional Response

- The standard approach is to list factors and point out how they resonate with the rest of the application. This version is a little bit less connected than example response #1, but still has a convincing argument.
- Realize that one of the goals of this prompt is to show that as an applicant, you have strong reasons for choosing to apply to each specific medical school.



Feinberg's 'Health and Society' component of the integrated curriculum, with its focus on social determinants of health (SDOH), dovetails perfectly with my learning style and experiences. In my undergraduate research with Dr. Tran, I studied the impacts of SDOH on pregnancy outcomes. This work deepened my understanding of how socio-economic factors significantly influence health outcomes, embedding a sense of importance for the holistic view of healthcare in me.

Feinberg's innovative approach to weave these insights into organ-based modules is particularly appealing. It mirrors my belief that studying the pathophysiology of health conditions in isolation, devoid of the societal and environmental contexts they manifest within, yields an incomplete understanding.

I'm also excited about the prospect of furthering my advocacy skills during the clinical phase. Feinberg's commitment to promoting equitable care is a mission that aligns closely with my own advocacy work. At HealthBridge STL, a non-profit organization I helped start, I strived to implement community-centric health initiatives, fostering dialogue and creating tailored solutions for community health issues. I am eager to bring this hands-on experience in advocacy to the discussions at Feinberg.

In essence, Feinberg's integrated curriculum not only resonates with my academic pursuits but also aligns with my passion for advocacy. This combination promises to bolster my objective of becoming a well-rounded physician, capable of blending scientific understanding with a steadfast commitment to social justice in healthcare.

### Example Response #3: Another Traditional Response

- Here is another example of a standard response for good measure.
- This one focuses on big-picture how the applicant resonates with the mission of the institution and cites specific evidence from their application.

GUSOM's curriculum, based on "caring for the whole person," resonates with me. A core tenet of my public health education is understanding that patients must be treated within the context of their socioeconomic environment. After speaking at length with one of my mentors, Dr. Maya Richards, a GUSOM alumnus, I am excited about the school's curriculum and the opportunity to incorporate health equity and advocacy into my future medical practice.

To me, caring for the whole person means improving patients' health on a systemic level. Academic opportunities such as the minor in Medical Humanities will allow me to further explore the historical and social intersections of medicine. Additionally, I have a deep interest in health policy and politics, as evidenced by my leadership on my school's Model United Nations team. I can think of no better place to pursue this interest than Washington, DC. As



such, I am eager to participate in the Healthcare Leadership track, with a focus on health policy and economics. With these opportunities, I hope to emerge from GUSOM as a compassionate physician leader with a deep understanding of the policies impacting my patients' well-being.

Caring for the whole person also means engaging with the communities I serve beyond the hospital. As a student at GUSOM, I look forward to immersing myself in the diverse communities of DC. While volunteering at Delonis Homeless Shelter in Ann Arbor, I worked with individuals struggling with substance use disorder on their road to recovery. I hope to carry this experience forward as a volunteer with Georgetown's Street Medicine Outreach, serving the healthcare needs of DC's unhoused population. In addition, drawing upon my experience as a tutor at Mott Children's Hospital, I look forward to participating in organizations like Big Hoya Little Saxa, helping young children improve their health literacy while fostering their intellectual curiosity.

## Activities Since Graduation

"If you have graduated, please describe your activities since graduation."

### Example Response #1: Traditional Response

- This prompt is easy to respond to. Simply list your activities in an organized fashion and describe how they improve your preparation for medical school.

For employment, I will work part-time as an Ophthalmic Assistant and Scribe. In this role, I get to be directly involved with patient care. This will allow me to witness patient progress and gain an understanding of how continuity of high-quality care influences patient outcomes. I will also serve as a Teaching Assistant for a HPSC 2930 Course, assisting pre-health students with their committee letters and application processes.

I will be continuing my research under Dr. Lisa Peng's mentorship. I am currently spearheading a series of projects exploring the clinical implications of patent ductus arteriosus. This will refine my data analysis and scientific writing skills, preparing me to interpret literature throughout my medical career.

In terms of volunteering, I will continue to manage HealthBridge STL, a non-profit organization I co-founded to aid underserved communities in St. Louis. Our team is collaborating with the Atlas Leadership Institute to launch a new initiative that provides financial literacy education—a step we believe will empower the communities we serve. Moreover, I am laying the groundwork to expand HealthBridge STL to other states, an initiative that will require my close involvement throughout the year. Additionally, I will retain my position as a board member for Unified Sports, organizing events for individuals with special needs and advocating for their inclusion. I will also complete my term as the academic chair for Phi Lambda Alpha. These service opportunities will further my experience working with underserved communities and prepare me to take on leadership roles in medical school.

### Example Response #2: Short Word Count Response

Since finishing my master's, I have continued to work full-time as a patient care technician in the trauma unit and have joined a research project with Dr. Elena Park at Bayview University's Dermatology Department. Our project seeks to understand the impact of CO2 laser treatment on wounds resulting from Mohs surgery. Additionally, I have begun collaborating with the Center for Social Work & Migration Studies lab to conduct a literature review on the Economic Integration of Refugees. I remain actively involved as the Clinic Coordinator for the CENA clinic, assisting with administrative and clinical tasks. I also continue to serve on the executive board for Project Outreach Coastal City, an organization dedicated to supporting the underprivileged in Coastal City.

## Final Thoughts

- Prewriting the above 4 main prompts is crucial to timely secondary essay submission.
- Don't overthink the content, at the same time, keep an open mind about what types of answers you can give.
- For brainstorming and editing help, feel free to reach out to us for advice on what topics to use and how to compose your final drafts!
- Good luck future doctors!