

### The AAMC Fee Assistance Program and Access to U.S. Medical School

A medical school application entails expenses that occur during various steps of the process. The AAMC Fee Assistance Program (FAP)<sup>1</sup> is designed to improve access to applying to medical school for those with limited financial means. Through this program, medical school aspirants can receive substantial fee reduction in registering for the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT®) and a fee waiver when applying to medical school. Since the mid-2000s, the number of FAP applications and awards has grown in a rapid and sustained fashion. Between 2006 and 2011, FAP applications grew by roughly 20 percent yearly (from 3,850 to 9,560), as did the number of awardees (from 2,038 to 7,288).<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, MCAT examinees, American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS®) application submissions, and AMCAS applicants admitted to medical school increased yearly by roughly 3.6, 1.3, and 1.6 percent, respectively. Reasons for this sustained increase in FAP applications might include some combination of effective advertising to potential aspirants, word of mouth dissemination of information about the program, and possibly the economic downturn that began in 2008.

The extent to which FAP is supporting aspirants and applicants of limited financial means is important in light of studies suggesting a decrease in the percent of lower socio-economic status (SES) applicants and matriculants over the past two decades.<sup>3,4</sup> That decrease might be associated with factors such as perceptions of student debt, work-life balance, and the attractiveness of other health professions (i.e., factors beyond the ability of FAP to attract lower SES individuals who might aspire to a career

in medicine). This *Analysis in Brief* (AIB) examines the extent to which the increase in FAP awards is observed among: 1) those who take the MCAT, 2) those who apply to medical school, and 3) those who are ultimately accepted to medical school. The AIB also examines the medical school acceptance rate among FAP awardees versus all other applicants.

#### Methodology

These analyses used data collected from U.S. citizens and permanent residents who applied for FAP, registered for the MCAT exam, and applied to U.S. medical schools through AMCAS. The data were collected between 2006 and 2011, beginning when the current formula for determining eligibility was first used. Because AMCAS applicants who were awarded fee assistance in 2011 would not have received an acceptance until 2012, we also use 2012 AMCAS data.

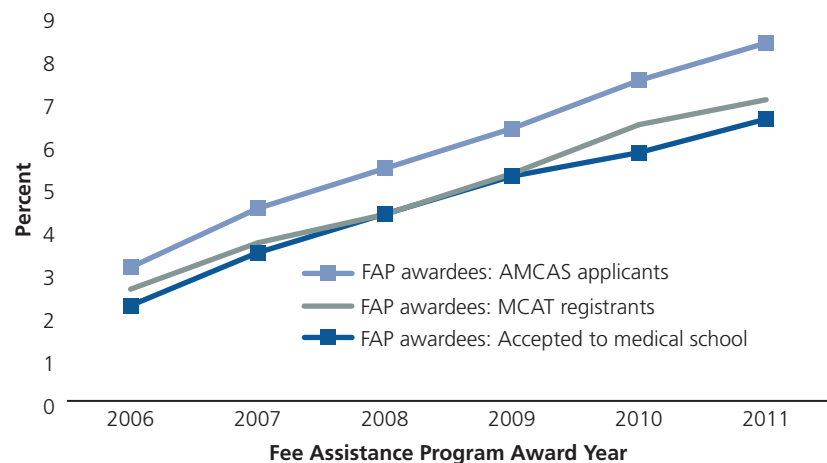
This analysis examines the relationship between FAP status (awardees versus all others) and the following two outcomes:

MCAT scores and acceptance to medical school (accepted versus not accepted). Descriptive statistics present changes over time in percentages of FAP awardees among those who took the MCAT exam, applied through AMCAS, and were accepted to medical school. Additional descriptive statistics compare FAP awardees to all others with respect to acceptance rates by MCAT score attainment.

#### Results

Results show sharp increases in the percentages of FAP awardees among those who took the MCAT exam, applied through AMCAS, and were ultimately accepted to medical school. In six years' time, from 2006 to 2011, the likelihood that an MCAT test taker was a FAP awardee more than doubled (increasing by a factor of 2.69, see Figure 1). The likelihood that an AMCAS applicant was a FAP awardee more than doubled as well (increasing by a factor of 2.68). Most noteworthy, FAP awardees accepted to medical school tripled from 2.2 to 6.6 percent of all those accepted to

Figure 1: Percentage of MCAT Registrants, AMCAS Applicants, and AMCAS Applicants Accepted to Medical School Who Were FAP Awardees, Calendar Years 2006 to 2011



1 For information about FAP: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/>.

2 Unpublished data, the AAMC.

3 Jolly P. Diversity of U.S. medical students by parental income. *Analysis in Brief*. 2008;8(1):1-2. Washington DC: AAMC.

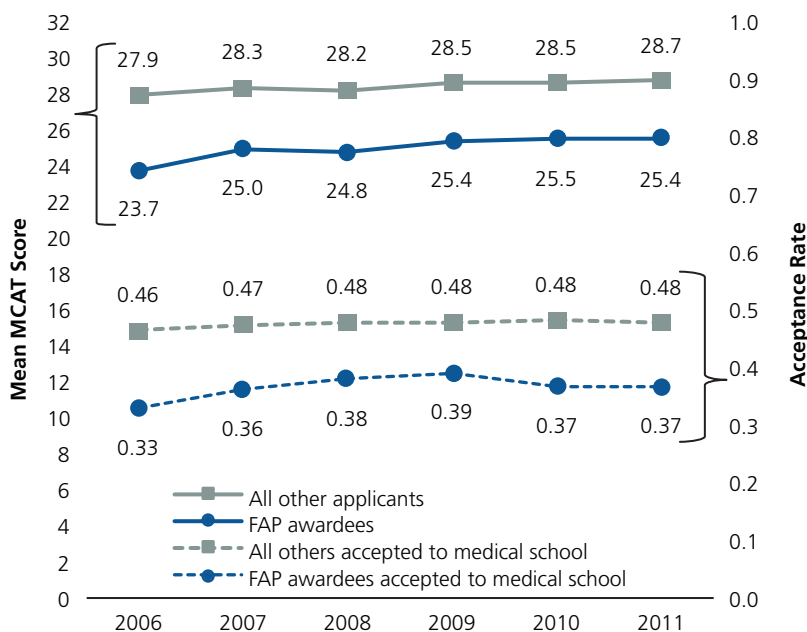
4 Grbic D, Garrison G, Jolly P. Diversity of U.S. medical students by parental education. *Analysis in Brief*. 2010;10(9):1-2. Washington DC: AAMC.

medical school. In other words, from 2006 to 2011, the likelihood that someone accepted to medical school was a FAP awardee outpaced their growth in the applicant pool (increasing by a factor of 3.0). Furthermore, the growth rate well exceeds the overall increase in the total number of admissions to medical schools, which grew from 17,361 to 19,517 (12.4%) over the same period.<sup>5</sup>

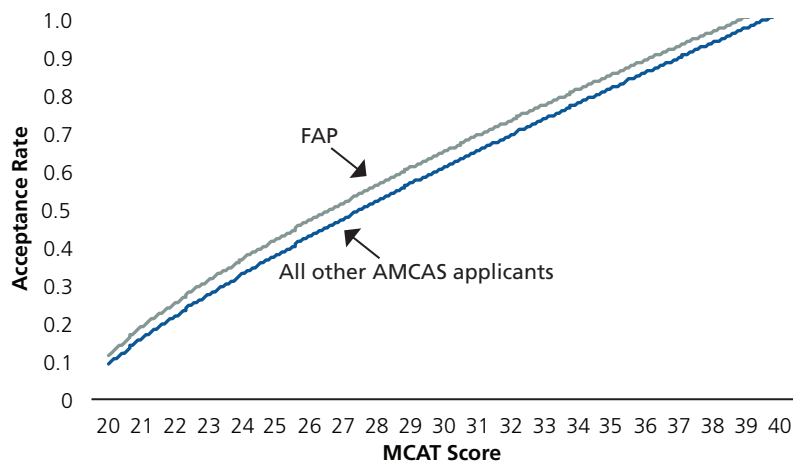
Regarding the relationship between MCAT, FAP awardee status, and acceptance to medical school, the average MCAT score for a FAP awardee is consistently lower than scores for those who are not awarded fee assistance (Figure 2). Lower MCAT scores on average correspond with a lower rate of acceptance. Consequently, a lower overall percentage of FAP awardees are accepted

to medical school compared to those who were not awarded fee assistance. However, the rate of acceptance across MCAT scores for aspirants who applied at least once to medical school between 2006 and 2011 (N=199,313) reveals that, despite the lower MCAT scores, FAP awardees (N=11,816) were, on average, accepted at slightly higher rates than all other applicants with the same MCAT score (Figure 3).<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2: Mean MCAT Scores for AMCAS Applicants Who Received a FAP Award and All Other Applicants, Calendar Years 2006 to 2011**



**Figure 3: Acceptance Rates for AMCAS Applicants Who Were FAP Awardees Versus All Other Applicants, Calendar Years 2006 to 2011**



Note: These results are for individual applicants who applied at least once during the calendar years 2006 to 2011.

**Conclusion**

The results of this study show that the number of FAP awardees is on the rise among MCAT registrants, AMCAS applicants, and those accepted to medical school. Over the time period in study, the total number of medical school matriculants increased by 12.4%, while the percentage of those accepted to medical school with a FAP award increased by 200%. The findings of this study suggest that those with limited financial means who enter the applicant pool each year have become more likely to apply for and receive fee assistance, thus improving access to applying to medical school among well-qualified applicants of lower income backgrounds.

This improved access supports, though not necessarily increases, SES diversity of medical students. Results show that a FAP awardee has a slightly higher likelihood of being accepted into medical school compared to a non-FAP awardee with the same MCAT score. This finding indicates that FAP awardee status might be associated with personal attributes and lived experiences that are considered attractive by many admissions committees, such as personal experiences in overcoming educational adversities.<sup>7</sup> In sum, findings point to fee assistance, in combination with other indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage, as a factor supporting medical schools' efforts to achieve a diverse student class.

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5 See: <https://www.aamc.org/download/321494/data/2013factstable17.pdf>.  
 6 The authors ran a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of acceptance to medical school based on two variables: applicant's MCAT scores and whether or not they had received a FAP award. The results showed that the slightly higher rate of acceptance for FAP awardees presented in Figure 3 was statistically significant at the .001 level. That is, when accounting for applicants' MCAT scores, FAP awardees were 1.3 times more likely than non-FAP awardees to be accepted into medical school.  
 7 Witzburg RA, Sondheimer HM. Holistic review – Shaping the medical profession one applicant at a time. *New England Journal of Medicine* 2013; 368(17):1565–1567.