

Latin American Medical School

Frequently Asked Questions

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? How many students are currently studying at ELAM? From which countries?

As of January 2007, there were 8705* students at all campuses, from 29 countries, including the United States. Currently, there are 85 students from the US enrolled at ELAM. This number is expected to top 100 in 2007.

Countries with Students at the Latin American Medical School, All Campuses

Argentina	Ecuador	Mexico
Belize	El Salvador	Nicaragua
Bolivia	Guatemala	Nigeria
Brazil	Guinea Bissau	Panama
Chile	Guinea-Conakry	Paraguay
Colombia	Equatorial Guinea	Peru
Costa Rica	Haiti	United States
Cape Verde	Honduras	Uruguay
Djibouti	Jamaica	Venezuela
Dominican Republic	Mali	

Source: Latin American Medical School, December 2006.
*At press time, 1300 new students were projected to enroll by March 2007.

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How can I apply to ELAM?

Scholarships are offered through the Cuban diplomatic missions in every participating country and through non-governmental organizations, governments, political parties, and Cuba Friendship Societies, among others.

On average the application process takes three months. However there can be wide differences from country to country, and for some countries, application time may vary depending on where the applicant lives.

In general, students must be:

- From a low-income family;
- Between 18 and 25 years of age when they apply.* (*US students, due to academic requirements, may apply until age 30);
- High school graduates, or have a BA or BS (bachelor's) degree or equivalent in their country of origin;
- Without a criminal record and free from substance abuse or addiction;
- Physically and mentally fit;
- Willing to abide by ELAM rules and regulations; and
- Able to pass the admission aptitude tests and interview.

Students are also required to make a commitment (non-binding) to practice in underserved areas in their own community or a similar one upon graduation.

Students from anywhere but the USA should contact the Cuban embassy in their country. For a list of Cuban embassies around the world, click [here](#).

US Students

The US recruitment and application process is handled by the Interreligious Organization for Community Organization (IFCO/ Pastors for Peace). IFCO offers workshops about ELAM throughout the United States. Applications are accepted twice a year, and require supporting documentation such as: academic transcripts, letters of reference, criminal background check and medical history. An interview is required. MCAT is not required.

US students interested in information about ELAM should visit IFCO at http://www.ifconews.org/MedicalSchool/freq_asked_questions.htm

Or, contact IFCO at:
418 West 145th Street, New York, NY 10031
Tel: 212-926-5757, Fax: 212-926-5842
Email: iasm@igc.org
ifco@igc.org

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What are living conditions like?

For the first two years, students are housed at the ELAM Havana campus, located approximately 22 miles (35 Km) west of Havana's center.

Housing: Students live in dormitories. The dorm units are small, cramped and house from eight to 14 students in bunk beds. Dorm units are part of larger sections that include up to 100 students. Dorm living is very simple-- each student gets a small closet for personal belongings; there is no air conditioning; and the communal bathrooms do not have hot water. Students should expect to adjust to lack of privacy and shared spaces. Students may be housed in dorms with their classmates from the same country of origin or with mixed nationalities by year of admission.

Meals: Students eat at the dorm dining hall. A small snack bar is also available. Meals consist of simple Cuban food. There are few options to eat out.

Study areas: students have access to libraries and study halls; classrooms are made accessible after hours.

Extracurricular activities: There are many extracurricular activities ranging from art and dance classes to intramural sports. There is an active soccer tournament. Students can also join in cultural activities that highlight their national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds through dance, music, theater, literature and film. Throughout the year, there are cultural nights that highlight each country. Similarly, students are encouraged to participate in major Havana-based events such as the Latin American Film Festival and International Book Fair.

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What exactly does a “full scholarship” include and what do I have to promise in return?

A scholarship covers full tuition, room and board, school uniform, school supplies, textbooks in Spanish, basic toiletries and a modest monthly stipend in Cuban pesos.

Students are required to make a commitment (non-binding) to return to practice in underserved areas upon graduation.

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What is the curriculum at ELAM?

ELAM offers a six-year, semester-based program. All courses and materials are in Spanish. The program is divided into three cycles: basic biomedical and social sciences during the first three semesters, basic clinical sciences during the fourth and fifth semester and clinical sciences through clerkships from the sixth to the tenth semester. The final year is an internship.

Basic biomedical and social sciences: Students have their first contact with Cuba's health system in the first semester through the course Introduction to Family Medicine. This course has both a classroom and practical component in different communities throughout Havana

and sets the stage for a community-based primary care orientation, the underpinning of the bio-psycho-social model.

The teaching/learning model for this course divides students into small work groups supervised by a professor. The teaching emphasizes placing a person, ill or healthy, within his/her social context. Once this first experiential community work ends, the students start the human body unit which includes Cellular and Molecular Biology, Histology I and Anatomy I, in addition to four courses on general education that include History and Medicine I, Medical Informatics, English and Physical Education.

The biomedical courses are organized by organic systems resulting in a coordinated study plan. Courses include Metabolism and its Regulation, Histology, Anatomy, Physiology, and Embryology.

Basic sciences consist of Biological Agents, Anatomical Pathology, Genetics, Immunology, Medical Psychology and Introduction to Clinical Medicine.

These two cycles take place at ELAM's Havana campus during the first two years. Classes consist of students from almost every country. After finishing the second year, students do clinical clerkships at one of the 21 schools of medicine throughout the country.

Click [here](#) to see the full ELAM curriculum.

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How are students evaluated?

There are three kinds of evaluations:

Frequent evaluation: Specific learning objectives are evaluated through frequent oral and written exam questions based on lectures, seminars, hands-on and laboratory practices.

Partial or Mid-terms: These evaluate topics/themes through projects and exams.

Finals: A three-hour final exam evaluates comprehension of general objectives for each course. Final exams may be theoretical or practical. When a course has both types of exams, passing the practical exam is a prerequisite for taking the theoretical exam.

State exam: After their sixth-year internship, students are required to take a Cuban state exam, presented to a state examination board.

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In what language is the coursework? What if I don't speak Spanish?

The program is taught entirely in Spanish. Students must be able to read, write, and participate in class discussions and make clinical diagnoses in Spanish.

Although the majority of students come from Spanish-speaking countries, there are students whose native language is not Spanish, including those from Belize, Brazil, Cape Verde,

Jamaica, Nigeria, and the United States. Additionally, there are students who speak an indigenous language as their first language such as Bribri, Guarani, Quechua, and Aymara.

Those who are not sufficiently proficient in Spanish enroll in Spanish as a Second Language, a 20-week immersion course. Students are enrolled at one of three levels, depending on their level of Spanish as determined by a placement exam. There is flexibility in the organization of the course depending on arrival date and native language. Students may receive up to five weeks of intensive Spanish as a Second Language and afterwards may be integrated into the premedical course, continuing to receive daily Spanish instruction.

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What is the Premedical Program?

The Premedical program serves as a bridging mechanism to ensure that all students have the necessary knowledge base in science and humanities. The premed program also familiarizes students with approaches of Cuba's health system and includes work in problem-solving and practical issues such as handling of laboratory equipment.

The premedical program includes the following courses: Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Math, Spanish Composition and Literature, History of the Americas, Introduction to Health Sciences and Medical Geography. An additional course, "Learning how to Learn," covers learning theory, study strategies and skills, as well as independent study habits.

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The health picture in Cuba is different from my country – how is this addressed in the curriculum?

Various courses cover health problems and diseases most commonly found in students' countries of origin. For example, the course Biological Agents covers diseases that are not present in Cuba or that have been eradicated, such as leishmaniasis, cholera, and polio.

Additionally, students carry out an interdisciplinary project coordinated by professors of three different courses: Introduction to Family Medicine, History and Medicine, and Psychology. The project design requires students to conduct an assessment of the health situation in their own communities. These health situation assessments may serve as the basis for the Student Health Teams' action projects when students return to their communities during summer break.

Student Health Teams plan health education and health promotion projects in their countries of origin. These teams were created by the students themselves and are now fully supported by faculty sponsors. These projects help establish links with the communities in the home countries as well as with health sector personnel.

Student Health Teams have worked in 16 countries so far, including Guatemala, Venezuela, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Bolivia and Peru.

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**? What happens when I graduate from ELAM?
Will I be able to practice back home?**

Each country has different approaches to accreditation of foreign medical graduates. You should check with your national or state accreditation authorities for more information.

In the United States, foreign medical graduates are required to take the same examinations as US graduates—the US Medical Licensing Exam; information is available [here](#). In addition, individual states have requirements for licensing a physician to practice.

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Further Information

To read other interviews with ELAM students, please see:

Studying Medicine in Cuba, First Impressions
http://www.medicc.org/publications/cuba_health_reports/010.php

Profiles in Commitment: Interviews with ELAM students
http://www.medicc.org/medicc_review/0805/mr-features.html

Cedric Edwards, MD
First U.S. Graduate of the Latin American Medical School
http://www.medicc.org/medicc_review/0805/mr-interview.html

Links:

Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization
http://www.ifconews.org/MedicalSchool/freq_asked_questions.htm

Escuela Latinoamericana de Ciencias Medicas (ELAM)
<http://www.elacm.sld.cu>

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