Introduction

To be licensed in the United States, physicians must pass the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE) series. The exam is divided into four parts: the Step 1 exam, the Step 2 clinical skills exam, the Step 2 clinical knowledge exam, and the Step 3 exam. The Step 1 Exam is a multiple-choice exam that you are required to take before beginning Phase 2. The Step 2 Clinical Skills Exam is an objective, structured clinical exam given at several sites across the United States. The Step 2 Clinical Knowledge Exam is a clinically focused multiple-choice exam. The two parts of the Step 2 Exam should be taken no later than April of a medical student’s fourth year of school. The Step 3 exam must be taken before the end of the internship year.

The USMLE website is an important reference that students should review regularly ([www.usmle.org](http://www.usmle.org)). Another very important resource is Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates website ([www.ecfmg.org](http://www.ecfmg.org)) which will direct you appropriately as a University of Queensland student.

The University of Queensland (UQ)-Ochsner Clinical School revises this study plan annually with the input of prior students who were successful on the Step 1 examination. Because the Step 1 Exam is usually the most difficult of the steps, preparation should begin from the first day you begin your studies at UQ. It is impossible to do well on the Step 1 Exam if you wait to begin your preparations one or two months before the test.

Every year, successful students emphasize the relevance of the UQ curriculum to Step 1 study. Data from previous classes show clearly that scores on the clinical science courses correlate directly with step 1 scores. Striving for a high score in these courses will help with your Step 1 study. Align your Step 1 study plan with your UQ curriculum during the first two years. Classroom work will help solidify and clarify topics that you are reviewing in the USMLE resources.

Study Resources

Resources listed below are divided into essential resources, which you must completely master, and secondary resources, which include excellent resources for areas of relative weakness. Textbooks can be very expensive and may not be readily available in Australia; you may wish to purchase these in the US. The Book Depository ([www.bookdepository.com](http://www.bookdepository.com)) is a good site to obtain references and texts while in Australia, and many good texts are available electronically through the UQ library ([http://guides.library.uq.edu.au/medicine/clinical_science](http://guides.library.uq.edu.au/medicine/clinical_science)).

UQ will provide First Aid for USMLE Step 1 and a 2-year subscription to Boards and Beyond ([https://www.boardsbeyond.com/](https://www.boardsbeyond.com/)) near the beginning of Year 1. A six-month subscription to the USMLEWorld QBank will be provided to you beginning in Semester 2 of your second year as part of the USMLE Step 1 preparation course (see below).

Roadmap to Step 1 Seminars

The Roadmap to Step 1 seminar series was introduced into Years 1 and 2 of the MD program in 2018. There are one to two seminars per semester which are jointly presented by Faculty and upper-year student peers. The purpose of these seminars is to bring together students across the cohort who are studying for Step 1, provide
study advice and tips to help achieve success in both medical school and Step 1, and allow regular opportunity for students to hear from their peers who have successfully completed Step 1 about their approaches to study and resource use. The seminars also provide check-points throughout Years 1 and 2 to reflect on individual progress, identify areas where study habits and techniques may need to be adapted, and discuss avenues available for further support. There will be opportunity for students to ask any questions at the seminars.

**UQ to First Aid Study Links**
The ‘UQ to First Aid Study Links’ spreadsheets for semesters 1-4 are also available on the Year 1 and 2 Blackboard community sites. This mapping of the Clinical Science curriculum was completed in 2018 and is intended to help guide study for Step 1 alongside the UQ curriculum. By knowing the topics that UQ will address in certain weeks and what will come up in future semesters, study for Step 1 can be planned around it to reduce the feeling of ‘studying two different curricula’.

**Preparation for US Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE) Step 1 (MEDI7282)**
Offered for the first time in 2019, this 2-unit dedicated preparation course provides students with protected time and structure to support intense study leading up to the Step 1 exam at the end of Year 2. Co-designed by successful Step 1 exam takers, this course predominantly consists of tutorials led by near-peers who have passed the exam, with a focus on “high yield” topics and approaches to assessment. The course is compulsory for all UQ-Ochsner students, and attaining a passing score on the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) Comprehensive Basic Science Exam (CBSE) is required to pass the course and progress to Phase 2.

**Recommended resources:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential text resources:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Aid for USMLE Step 1 - this is the key text that most effectively covers all areas tested. Many students use this to take notes and consolidate information into one place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid Review Pathology was described as transformational. This text helps formulate understanding of pathology and interconnected physiology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rapid Review Biochemistry, Lippincott’s Biochemistry, or Principles of Medical Biochemistry (the last book is available online through UQ Library) to help with biochemistry review</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question bank resources:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USMLEWorld (6-month subscription) and USMLEWorld self-assessments (essential). Most useful for the last six months of study. USMLEWorld assessments often over-estimate step 1 score.</td>
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<tr>
<td>USMLE Rx Qbank – A good Qbank to start; tests more general concepts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaplan USMLE Step 1 QBank</td>
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<tr>
<td>MedBullet USMLE Step 1 QBank (Free, 1000 question QBank, Optional) <a href="https://step1.medbullets.com/">https://step1.medbullets.com/</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>Video Lectures:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boards and Beyond – has emerged as an essential video resource. Use it to supplement topics in the UQ curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathoma – considered essential by most students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sketchy Micro, Pharm and Pathology – also considered essential by most students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USMLE Rx – short and concise.</td>
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Timeline for Study

Year 1

During Year 1 at UQ, your study plan should coordinate USMLE study with the topic you are studying that week using the UQ to First Aid Study Links described above to consolidate and identify additional learning opportunities. Preparation prior to the CBL sessions is essential! Attend and actively participate in all your case-based learning tutorials. Watch Boards and Beyond videos correlating to information in the UQ curriculum to reinforce the information. These follow UQ material but go into USMLE depth. Sketchy pharmacology, Pathoma and Osmosis videos can also help with preparation. Make your own notes when using these resources. Anki or other types of flashcard can be used to consolidate learning.

Join a tutoring group to aid with your case-based learning (CBL) and preparation for the Step 1 exam. Tutors can guide you along the path to step 1, answer questions, and offer suggestions. Attend Road Map to USMLE seminars to support your self-directed learning style.

Summer

While summer is a great time to enjoy your observership and to do some traveling, make sure you continue to study. It is important to consolidate your learning within Year 1, focusing on areas that you found difficult. Most students recommend review of biochemistry and microbiology and starting a question bank, like USMLERx during this time.

Year 2

During Year 2, you will steadily intensify your study preparations. Your review of USMLE topics should again be coordinated on a weekly basis with those topics covered in your Year 2 Clinical Science curriculum. Coordinate your UQ study with First Aid for USMLE Step 1, Boards and Beyond, and USMLEWorld QBank. When working with question banks, read the explanations for both correct and incorrect answers. Add notes to First Aid. Consider Anki cards every day to reinforce information you’ve learned. If you’ve done well during your first year, consider volunteering as a tutor for first years – this helps solidify your knowledge.

Flashcards allow repetition:
ANKI – Helps reinforce material learned through video lectures and texts.
Premade Zanki (https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BznB_08yTTjLd0JsR3hpck16dVU/view), Brosencephalon and Torky (https://mega.nz/#I3cQxxDylI6NC4Dgip7eZ4q-YxBGJbvoVMy5rn84VxWTSXcmNYEog) cards
Firecracker
Osmosis

Secondary resources (you may need to copy and paste the URLs into a browser):
Firecracker http://firecracker.lww.com/students.html
UQ Anatomy Notes
Cram Fighter (https://cramfighter.com/) helps you create a schedule to ensure you cover all resources you want to review.

Available in the UQ library online resources:
Guyton and Hall Textbook of Medical Physiology (13th ed)
Robbins Basic Pathology (10th ed)
Clinical Anatomy by Systems
Neuroanatomy: An Illustrated Color Text (6th ed)
The Developing Human (11th ed)
Medical Pharmacology at a Glance (8th ed)
Review of Medical Microbiology and Immunology (15th ed)
The Step 1 exam is about eight hours long and requires prolonged mental and physical concentration. For this reason, you should train for this endurance event by sitting for 3 eight-hour simulated exams from the USMLEWorld question bank. These exams should be performed under test-like conditions during the six to eight weeks prior to your test date. Consider making a list of “stupid mistakes” which you have found that you consistently make and bring this with you to the exam site to review up until the start of the exam.

Scheduling the USMLE Step 1 Exam

The Program Rules for the Doctor of Medicine (Ochsner) state that students enrolled in the UQ Ochsner MD program from 2017 onward must attempt the USMLE Step 1 examination before commencing Phase 2 of the program. Successful completion of the Step 1 exam is required to participate in research at OCS, to do an external rotation during your fourth year, to serve as an officer in OMSA, and to enter the Match in your fourth year.

As Step 1 is not offered during the first two weeks of January, this means taking the exam prior to December 31st so that you can be settled in New Orleans for the week of mandatory orientation events that take place prior to the start of Block 1.

You should plan your schedule so that you can sit for the exam in the US, because scheduling the exam in Australia can be difficult. Actively plan and manage the time between arriving in the US and sitting for the exam. Prepare early for your departure and identify an effective location to study during your dedicated study time. You will require at least 4 weeks of dedicated study time. Do not plan anything other than Step 1 study during December of Year 2. Family and friends must understand and not interfere. Ensure that your environment for study is: 1) without a lot of distractions; 2) conducive to studying; and 3) near your Prometrics testing center. Ensure you continue to maintain your health during this extensive study period and avoid people who are sick.

The Faculty suggests you register for the December 2020 – February 2021 Step 1 eligibility period. This eligibility period will not be confirmed until mid-September. You must have completed all your Phase 1 requirements by the start date of your examination eligibility period. If you select an eligibility period that begins before you have completed Year 2 coursework, the Faculty will not approve your application, and you will suffer significant delays in your application.

ECFMG Certification

All details about the ECFMG certification process are available in the ECFMG 2020 information booklet. Read the booklet before starting the certification process. The first step of ECFMG certification is registering for a USMLE/ECFMG Identification Number, which can be done using ECFMG’s Interactive Web Applications (IWA). Register with ECFMG at the beginning of Semester 2.

March-July of Year 2

No later than March of your second year, you should begin a question bank, like USMLERx. Some students recommend starting as early as January because the question banks are very large. When doing the question banks, you should be sure that you understand the rationale for all the correct and incorrect answers. Take your time reviewing questions.

The USMLEWorld QBank is your best question bank resource, as it has many questions that are similar and, in some cases, identical to those on the real Step 1 exam. You should begin using the USMLEWorld Qbank no later than July. There are approximately 2400 questions in this question bank. Aim to complete at least 40 questions per day, every day on tutor mode, reviewing every question in detail.
- ANKI, Firecracker and USMLE Flashfacts are very helpful as a flashcard resource.
- USMLERx is one of the better question banks to review as a backup to USMLEWorld.
- Kaplan QBank is optional, but it has good physiology, law and ethics questions, and it will truly test your knowledge/concepts on these subjects.
- The Pastest and Medbullet QBank are free and well-written Qbanks.
- By the end of semester 3, know First Aid cover to cover.

A consistent question-intensive study plan results in better performance than study plans based on reading texts or viewing videos. You should review questions related to the topics covered in class and review the First Aid for USMLE Step 1 textbook at least weekly. When reviewing questions, take your time reading all the answers and take notes, particularly on questions you miss. Plan to review the USMLEWorld question bank twice, concentrating on questions you missed the second time.

**July-November of Year 2**

As part of the new USMLE Step 1 Preparation course, you will be **REQUIRED** to sit THREE NBME exams (two CBSSA and one CBSE). While passing the first two CBSSA exams is not required to pass the course overall, you should **aim to achieve a passing score in the first practice exam**. Passing the third (final) CBSE is required to pass the course and progress to Phase 2.

The NBME provides a snapshot of your current knowledge and preparedness for Step 1. You should use the results of each of these NBME exams as a guide for topics for future study.

One week prior to your scheduled step 1 exam you should utilize the free 120 USMLE tutorial test questions offered by USMLE (http://www.usmle.org/practice-materials).

You will be spending October and the beginning of November studying for your final UQ exams, which typically occur at the beginning of November. During this time, you will have little time to study for USMLE. **Do not defer and try not to fail the end-of-semester exams**, as this will severely limit the remaining time available to study for the Step 1 Exam.

**November**

You should have completed the USMLEWorld question bank before the start of the final exam period. Intensify your preparation following final exams in November by completing a second review of the USMLEWorld question bank, being sure of the rationale for answers to the questions. Consider accessing one of the other question banks for fresh questions if necessary. You should be spending about eight hours a day studying. In the last two weeks of study, you should be answering about 150-200 questions per day as you ready yourself for the testing conditions on exam day.

Taking additional NBME exams prior to your Step 1 exam will help you boost your confidence, develop exam fitness and identify areas you need to focus on.

Once your NBME practice exam scores are $\geq 200$ (USMLE Step1 equivalent), you should be confident that you will achieve a passing score. If your practice exam scores do not reach this level, reach out to your Society Head for advice BEFORE taking Step 1. **Do not take the Step 1 exam until you are ready to achieve a passing score.**

**One week prior** to the exam, consider taking a shorter practice exam at the Prometrics testing center where you
intend to take the exam. Drive to the center so that you have no surprises on the day of the exam. The exam questions will be the same as the free 120 USMLE tutorial test questions. This Prometrics practice exam will familiarize you with the site, the testing conditions, and the identification requirements at the site. This preparation will help remove surprises about the testing conditions during the real exam so that you can focus your full attention on the exam and not be distracted by other events.

**General advice**

Successful students from prior classes have emphasized the importance of being honest with yourself regarding strengths and weaknesses. Work very hard on your weaknesses. Start studying early and understand that repetition is essential.

Reflect on why you’re struggling. Are you having trouble with recall questions? Make or purchase flash cards. Are you having trouble with problem-solving? Re-read First Aid or watch Pathoma, DIT or Kaplan to figure out why.

If you cannot figure out why you are struggling, talk to your peers or faculty - they are always here to help. This is where the small group tutors are most valuable. Consider working question banks in groups to talk out successful critical thinking patterns that you can emulate.

Beware internet forums like the student-doctor network and USMLE forum. While there might be an answer there, information is often inaccurate. Moreover, conversations there might increase your anxiety and impair your performance.

It is extremely important to incorporate exercise and good nutrition into your lifestyle during your study preparations. Relax the day prior to the exam. Don’t cram and get yourself stressed just prior to the exam. Get plenty of rest two to three days prior to the exam. Have a plan for nutrition and fluids during the exam. Think positively and be confident in yourself! You have put in the hard work and now it is time to show off!

Please contact Dr. G Dodd Denton (gdenton@ochsner.org), your society head (studentaffairs@ochsner.org) or USMLE Step 1 preparation course team at UQ (med.usmleprep@uq.edu.au) should you need advice or have any questions. This study plan will be updated as new information becomes available.

**Timeline Summary 2020**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1 Students 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Coordinate your Clinical Science study with First Aid (using the study links provided) and Boards and Beyond videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assess your progress with scattered questions from USMLE Rx</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consolidate Year 1 learning during observership</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2 Students 2020</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Month</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Beginning Semester 2
- USMLE Step 1 Preparation course (MEDI7282) begins
- UWWorld Subscriptions are distributed as part of USMLE Prep course; also purchase the UWWorld self-assessments
- Attempt to pass the required NBME CBSSA

### Before September
- Register with ECFMG through IWA (allow a minimum of 5 business days to process your request)
- Generate your Form 186 and submit via NotaryCam
- Take the required mid-semester CBSSA

### Mid - September
- Register for USMLE via IWA
- The Faculty of Medicine will receive a request from ECFMG to verify your eligibility to sit the exam.

### Early -- October
- Reach out to your Society Head about progress

### October
- Third NBME CBSE administered as final exam for prep course.

### November
- Sit the USMLE Step 1 before starting Phase 2

## The Final Push

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 weeks before exam date</td>
<td>Take a practice NBME exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 weeks before exam date</td>
<td>Take a practice NBME exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 weeks before exam date</td>
<td>Take an 8-hour simulated exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks before exam date</td>
<td>Take a practice NBME exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks before exam date</td>
<td>Take an 8-hour simulated exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 weeks before exam date</td>
<td>Take a practice NBME exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week before exam date</td>
<td>Take an 8-hour simulated exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 days before exam date</td>
<td>Take the 120 question USMLE tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider going to your Prometrics site for a practice exam</td>
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We gratefully acknowledge the input of prior UQ/OCS students in crafting and revising this document, including the following students in the class of 2020:

**Collin Carroll**  
**Nrusheel Kattar**  
**Elise LeCam**  
**Adam Lowe**