

Frequently Asked Questions

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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.
- 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
- 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 Citizens

The Latin American Medical School (ELAM) is a six-year, full-scholarship program, with the first two years spent at the ELAM campus, located 22 miles (35km) west of Havana. The remaining four years, including a one-year internship, are spent at one of 21 medical schools around the country. All courses and materials are in Spanish; a pre-medical course and intensive Spanish language instruction are offered to those needing them (determined by a placement exam). This additional coursework can add up to a year to the six-year program.

Students interested in applying must be:

1. A US citizen (with a US passport)
2. From a low-income or underserved community
3. Between 18 and 25 years of age when on application
4. High school graduates with a minimum of one year of college-level coursework in biology, physics, and organic and inorganic chemistry (all with lab)
5. Without a criminal record and free from substance abuse or addiction
6. Willing to abide by ELAM rules and regulations
7. Committed to practicing medicine in poor and underserved communities after graduation

MCAT standardized test scores are not required.

Students accepted into the program are asked to return to work in underserved communities upon graduation.

Contact IFCO for application or additional information:

418 West 145th Street, New York, NY 10031

Tel: 212-926-5757, Fax: 212-926-5842

Email: iasm@igc.org, ifco@igc.org

Website: www.ifconews.org

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 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 shared spaces and lack of privacy. Students may be housed in dorms with their classmates from the same country of origin or with mixed nationalities by year of admission.
- **Meals:** Hot meals at the dorm dining hall. A small snack bar is also available. 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 dedicated to each country. Students are also encouraged to participate in major Havana-based events such as the Latin American Film Festival and International Book Fair.

The following four clinical years are spent at provincial medical schools where students are integrated with Cubans in dormitories.

What 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 expected to make a commitment to practice in underserved areas upon graduation.

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 healthcare 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 integrates basic sciences into a single systems- based subject called Human Morphophysiology. Additional courses include History of Medicine I, Medical Informatics, English, Physical Education, Medical Psychology, and Introduction to Clinical Medicine.

These courses take place at ELAM's Havana campus during the first two years. After finishing the second year, students do clinical clerkships at provincial medical schools throughout the country with significant time spent in primary care settings.

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 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, administered by Cuba's national examination board. This is the Cuban equivalent of a licensing exam for general practice

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.

Those who are not sufficiently proficient in the language, enroll in Spanish as a Second Language, a 20-week immersion course. A placement exam determines the entry level for the course. 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.

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 Cuba's health system and includes work in problem-solving and practical issues such as handling laboratory equipment.

The 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.

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 of Medicine and Medical 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 students' home communities and local health sector personnel.

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](#). In addition, individual states have requirements for licensing a physician to practice.