From a MSTP (M.D./ Ph.D.) student’s perspective on medical school:

Hey first years!

Congratulations on getting into med school and welcome to UAB and Volker Hall. This building will basically become your home over the next 2 years, so start getting to know it! They’ve done some extensive renovation of the first floor and the outside patio – all those nice chairs around the lecture halls and the nice benches/tables outside were not there 2 years ago, so please take advantage of them!

Medical school will be harder than undergrad. It’s not that it’s that hard conceptually really… but there’s a lot more material crammed into a much shorter time period. So time management will be important!

Key to remember: don’t stress! I would encourage you to go out and do other things. Volunteer with EAB, start or join an interest group, or use your talents for The Best Medicine Show. There are also things to do outside school – intramurals, concerts, museums, etc. I come from a completely different part of the country, and Birmingham/UAB took a lot of adjustment to get used to, but making friends is a big part of feeling more comfortable here.

Now, a word about MSTP’s. MD students, please don’t give your MSTP friends any flack! Their first few weeks/tests of Fund I may be easier in a sense, since they’re taking similar classes in grad school, and thus have less classes in med school. However, towards the end of Fund I/beginning of Fund II, things get pretty tough as they have to take almost the same amount of med school classes, much of which they have to make up since they miss 2 hours every day while in grad school classes. Same with 2nd semester of 2nd year, where they are taking all med school classes, but have grad school on top of that. Some grad school themes are easier than others, but MSTP’s are juggling a bit more in those two semesters!

Also, don’t think you can’t do research because you’re “only” and MD and not MSTP! Many students did research over the summer, and one of my friends recently got a paper published from her summer research work!

So at the end of the day, medical school is what you make of it. This will be true for most things in life. If you put a lot into it, you will learn/get a lot out of it. It can even be fun! Medical school is not meant to prevent you from living life, so do the things you love, whether it’s to stay sane or just because it’s part of you. When you’re in residency pulling the long hours, or even when you become a physician, those things will keep you going. So love, laugh, learn, and I wish you the best of luck in your journey!