From a current student in UAB’s MSTP (Medical Scientist Training Program, aka MD/PhD):

Dear Incoming Medical Student,

Congratulations on taking the first step on your journey to a rewarding career in medicine. It may sound cliché, but it is a journey that will change your life as much as—if not more than—those of your patients! That said, my own path is a little different than most, as I am a participant in the NIH-NIGMS’s Medical Scientist Training (MD/PhD) program here at UAB. The MD/PhD program is a seven-to-eight year adventure that balances both medical and graduate coursework, clinical practice, and laboratory research in pursuit of two doctoral degrees: one in medicine and another in your chosen field!

For all their codependence, the practice of medicine and the conduct of biomedical science are not the same thing. When I was weighing my options about what to do with my life after college, I realized that the joy I had derived from a science-heavy pre-medical curriculum would not resemble patient care. I was bitten by the research bug, a philosophic drive to procure new knowledge for humanity…but, at the same time, I didn’t want to separate myself from the rewarding, humane aspect of biomedical discovery applied to patient care. Trying to have my cake and eat it, too, I applied and won acceptance to the program here at UAB. The journey’s been crazy (though the MSTP program always has your back, and we are making many great changes for future students that include eliminating class overlap), but I wouldn’t change my decision for anything!

Whether or not you are here to become a physician-scientist, or if the sight of a pipette makes you cringe, one thing is certain: UAB will do a first-rate job in transforming you into a compassionate, competent clinician! By this time next year, you will have interviewed and taken histories from dozens of patients, practiced the ancient art of physical examination, and even caught yourself recognizing clinical patterns and making your own differential diagnoses! Medicine has a niche for everyone, so keep your eyes open, study hard (but not too hard), and enjoy your ride!

Good luck and best wishes! You’ve made a wonderful decision!