When asked one piece of advice to share with incoming students, this is what your Orientation Leaders said:

- Medical school can be and is a truly enjoyable experience. I never expected to gain the friendships and memories I have made during medical school. From late night study sessions to road trips to the beach, my medical school friends have made the past two years better than I ever anticipated. However, it is also important to maintain relationships with friends and family outside the medical field. Let them stop you from constantly thinking about the next test, or that terrible quiz question. Don’t forget to take a step back from medicine and enjoy life – because you are still living throughout medical school. You don’t want to wake up in 4 years thinking, “I could have been doing that during school.” You should choose to continue the things you enjoy doing in life, all the while being a medical student. Many students get married, have kids, travel the world, run marathons, and so much more during med school. So… Get ready for a wild, but really fun and rewarding, ride of a lifetime!

- Don’t compare yourselves to others, whether it be in grades, time spent studying, or extra-curricular activities. Everyone is unique and different. What works for someone will not necessarily work for another. It is important to discover what works for you personally and constantly evaluate your methods. While it is hard to not compare, medical school will be a much more pleasant experience if you don’t compare yourself to your classmates. Everyone who makes it past the admission board and into UAB School of Medicine is a stellar candidate. Learn to be proud of your classmates for what they have accomplished and what they strive to accomplish, and find it in yourself to follow your own path into the world of medicine. There are an innumerable number of different routes to take, and everyone has a place. Work hard and know that you are discovering your place.

- “Don’t freak out! There will be so much information give to you all at once, but you will acclimate very quickly to it.” I wish I had listened to this piece of advice, because it would have saved me a great deal of grief once Fundamentals I started.

- Everyone and their mother will try to give you advice about what medical school is like: they will scare you with tales of astronomical student debt, diets consisting of Ramen and tap water, and sleepless nights filled with loneliness and despair. They will try to tell you which specialties are better than others, how to study, what to participate in, and how it would’ve been better if you have just gone to pharmacy school or married wealthy… But no matter what anyone says, medical school isn’t something you will suffer through. It’s something you will live through. There will be struggles, but there will also be days of fun, relaxation, joy and serenity. There are so many people here who are on your side – people that will support you through these tough years, and rejoice at all you will accomplish.

- Get involved! Our class was reluctant in that aspect, and that has come to hurt ourselves and many organizations that now face a lack of participation.
We need to look past our concerns and look at how sometimes our apathy can affect the progress of our school and our education. Our learning goes beyond the classroom, and being involved with other activities helps us to become better-rounded people.

- Enjoy yourselves in medical school. For the rest of life, we will be busy, but it is important to have “me” time. While studying and grades are of utmost importance, we are all entering a field where it can be easy to become consumed. Don’t let it happen to you by talking to no one and studying all the time. Make friends, take breaks, and enjoy the time in medical school. This will be the last time you are in school, so enjoy it while you have the chance.

- Take time for reflection. Getting into medical school is often the crowning achievement of one’s life; I would hate for this grand achievement to go unnoticed by the worries of the next task: just getting through the next four years. Too often people find themselves caught up in the rush to get the next class finished, the next volunteer opportunity finalized, the next job completed and before you have time to think, what you have been striving to accomplish has come and gone. People move onto the next phase without savoring the moment of accomplishment for the mission they just conquered. I would like everyone to reflect on where you came from to get to this place, how proud you are to be here, and how lucky you are to be afforded this opportunity – I believe these things are what will get you through the next four years.

- I remember that during orientation I became extremely intimidated and nervous about medical school. The best advice I could offer any incoming medical student is to be confident. I would emphasize the fact that many people agreed you should be admitted to medical school, knowing what it takes to succeed. I think it is important for everyone to realize that YOU are more than capable to succeed in medical school – you were chosen for a reason. This was the best advice I, personally, was given. I remember one of my orientation leaders discussing this with me, and instilling a sense of confidence in myself. I am easily intimidated, and this advice made a lasting impact on me. I can now say with confidence, success in medical school is definitely possible!

- Before your life is consumed by overwhelming, never-ending, competitive learning, make a list of priorities that truly and will always mean the most to you. Stick to those priorities, and you will find that being happy in medical school is not only possible, it’s easy. Remember, depression gets in the way of learning. Stay happy and healthy! It will make you a better student and a better doctor.

- Take everyone’s advice with a grain of salt when it comes to study habits or which module is easy or hard. What works for someone else may not work for you. You just have to figure out what works best for you and not worry about what anyone else is doing.

- Accountability. Whether it’s a roommate, best friend, classmate, or Siri, everyone needs someone holding him or herself accountable. Going to class,
studying on pace, setting aside time for fun, and taking care of your body can easily fall by the wayside if you’re not careful. As soon as you can, find a friend or group of friends that’s willing to ask you tough questions, whether academic or personal.

- Do what works best for you and don’t try to do what everyone else is doing. Just because an older student told you the easiest module is X and the hardest is Y doesn’t mean you will find them easy or difficult. Just because a student told you to study a certain way doesn’t mean it will work best for you. The best piece of advice: Do what works for you and not someone else.
- Don’t worry about what your classmates are doing. Don’t worry about performing better or worse than anyone else. Spend your first semester of school figuring out and sticking to whatever works best for you, then focus on performing at YOUR best (which is not determined by the quartile of your grades or how your grades compare to your friends.)
- Find a balance – a balance between school, extracurricular involvement, and a personal/social life. Even though it may take time to learn to juggle these aspects of life, having all represented in life is crucial to finding happiness and fulfillment in medical school.
- Be sure to make time for the things you love to do, even if those things aren’t always “typical med student” or “résumé boosters”.
- Get to know your classmates! There will be lots of information thrown at you – enough to make your head spin. But I learned quickly that the students here are a community. UASOM is NOT made of students looking out for themselves (as I had heard from friends at other schools). Instead, I found a group of individuals with a common goal – to become competent, compassionate physicians. Students should know that you will lean on each other and help each other a lot – from sending out reminders of assignments that are due, to sharing notes, to relaxing when there is free time. The people you meet during orientation and beyond will become your family. And be sure to use the relatively stress-free time during orientation to get to know your new family!
- Be intentional. I came into medical school feeling uneasy. I was not valedictorian. I did not win pageants or get published for my research. I did not feel “brilliant.” Yet, medical school is for the dedicated and diligent, not simply for the innately genius. So, be intentional with everything you do: your studies, your pursuits, your free time, and your friends. Medical school is more than achievable if you are simply intentional about what is worth your commitment. Being well rounded and finding satisfaction with where you commit your time will help keep you from burning out and will maintain your sanity. Ultimately, it will cultivate a well-rounded physician that has the most to offer his or her patients.
- As we all know, medical school is very anxiety provoking, so first years need to have orientation leaders that will let them know that the next 4 years can be enjoyable. I feel strongly that people in medical school should be balanced. Personally, I make time to go to the gym, bible study, church, and try to have
fun on the weekends. I want incoming students to know that medical school is a large aspect of your life, but not your *entire* life. Having this understanding is critical to maintaining one’s sanity in medical school. Fortunately, I had a friend from undergrad who was an older medical student, and helped me learn this lesson early. So, basically: have fun and enjoy life.

- Don’t join organizations solely based on whether or not it will look good on a résumé. Find something (a club, volunteer activity, research program, leadership position, etc) that you are passionate about and go “all-in”. Be proud of the work you do and never settle. Leave the program better off than you found it. That type of commitment is an admirable attribute and won’t go unnoticed.

- Study hard, but be reasonable and have realistic expectations. It is numerically impossible for all 190 students to be in the top 10%. I believe the key to success in medical school is to maintain a healthy expectation.

- The next four years will be better than college if you make an effort to make new strong relationships, especially with your fellow classmates. I believe that we grow as individuals and are able to learn so much from one another by developing healthy relationships with one another. Get to know your classmates, because these are the people you will be working with for the rest of your life!