

AMCAS[®] GPA Calculator Manual/FAQ

(Version 4 - Final)
By Johnny Eguizabal

1) What is the AMCAS[®] GPA Calculator and why did I make it?

The AMCAS[®] GPA Calculator will calculate a student's GPA for both semester and quarter based grading systems. In addition, the calculator will extrapolate GPAs designated to the BCPM (biology, chemistry, physics, and math) and AO (All Other) categories based on user input about their individual classes. All appropriate conversions and formulas are handled by the calculator itself, according to the guidelines set forth by AMCAS[®].

I began thinking about the project when I applied to the UCSF Post Baccalaureate program. All applicants were required to calculate an overall GPA and BCPM GPA as part of the application process. The process was not difficult, but time consuming and prone to error. Out of curiosity I did a quick internet search to find a good calculator that could convert my grades (from a quarter system institution) to a semester equivalent. I knew AMCAS[®] made these conversions on medical school applications so I figured a calculator had to exist. I could find no such thing. The few calculators that existed only calculated a GPA once you had calculated the semester equivalents on your own, saving some time but not much. Thus, when I found some free time, I decided to make this my own personal project. Eventually, I created version 1 – it was very basic but it did the job. I have since made it more visually appealing and I hope that it serves everyone who uses it well. The calculator isn't just about extrapolating three digit numbers based on grades, but rather, as a tool for students to use when trying to gauge their academic progress and helping them make appropriate changes when/if necessary.

2) PC/MAC System Requirements:

- Any MAC or PC computer with Microsoft Excel[®] installed.
- Enabling “macros” in Microsoft Excel[®]

3) What are “macros” and why must they be enabled?

Macros can be thought of as small programs that exist within the framework of Microsoft Excel[®] and automate a given process. The AMCAS[®] GPA Calculator requires macros to execute calculations based on responses by the user. For example, when checking the BCPM checkbox, the calculator will automatically include the grade point data into the BCPM GPA. Similarly, checking the quarter system boxes, will instruct the calculator to convert quarter system units into semester system equivalents, as required by AMCAS[®]. Macros are essentially what make the GPA calculator so easy to use.

Biology, Chemistry, Physics, or Math Class (BCPM) (Check Box if Yes)	Check Box if Class is Based on the Quarter System (Leave Unchecked if Semester System Based)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Microsoft Excel[®] does not automatically enable macros upon installation. Following the inclusion of macros into Microsoft Excel[®] in the 1990s, attacks to computer systems began to appear using macro commands. Hackers were using macros to exploit computers by executing malicious code; possibly leading to system failure similar to computer viruses we so often hear

about today. To counter such attacks, Microsoft began to incorporate a four (or three depending on the version) tiered security setting (low, medium, high, and very high) into their Microsoft Excel® platform. The “very high” setting prevents any and all macros from executing, but does not give the user the option to open files with macros embedded, even if they come from a trusted source. This is the default setting for Microsoft Excel®, and it must be adjusted to allow use of the GPA calculator.

4) If I enable “macros” will I be vulnerable to malicious attacks?

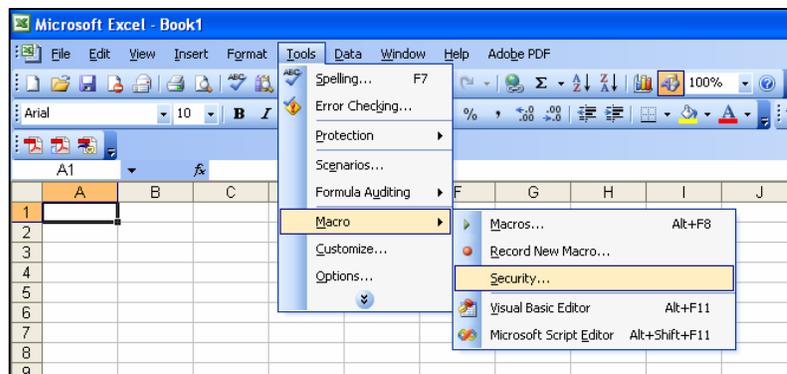
Absolutely not! Microsoft’s four tiered security system was created for this very reason. By changing the security setting from the default setting to the “medium” setting, your computer remains protected from malicious macros. The medium setting gives users the option whether to allow macros to execute or not. If, for example, an Excel® file comes from an untrusted source and it attempts to execute macros, the medium setting will give the users the option to open the file with all the macros disabled or enabled. Obviously, if you download an Excel® file from the internet and have no idea who authored the file, it may be best to click “disable macros.” On the other hand, when the Excel® file comes from a trusted source, the user can safely enable macros for a given file. As such, whenever opening the GPA Calculator, given a medium security setting, one must click “enable macros” to allow the calculator to operate properly.

5) How do I enable macros? (i.e. How to change Microsoft Excel to the medium security setting):

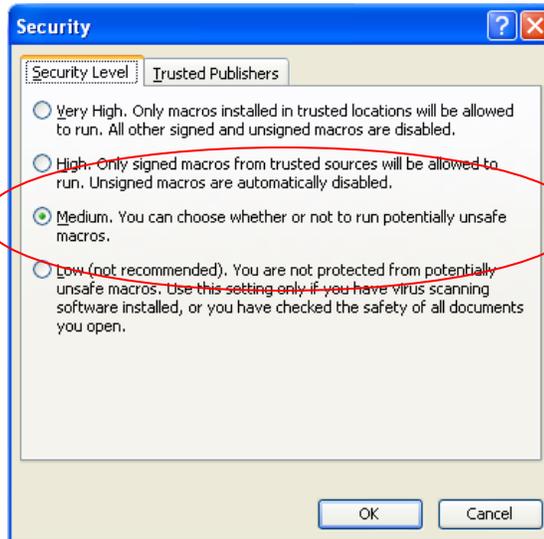
To date there are many versions of Microsoft Excel available on both the PC and MAC. The following instructions are listed by type of computer and version of Microsoft Excel®. However, these instructions are only for the more recent versions of Excel®. It may necessary to find instructions on enabling macros for versions of Excel® not included in this manual. Instructions are easily accessible by using an internet search engine (i.e. Google or Yahoo) and searching for “enabling macros in excel version (insert version number) for PC (or MAC).” Additionally, older versions of Excel® may not need macros enabled at all. Microsoft did not implement the tiered security settings for quite some time (not until after version 6.0).

i.) *PC Computer* – Versions - Excel 2000®, Excel XP® or Excel 2003®

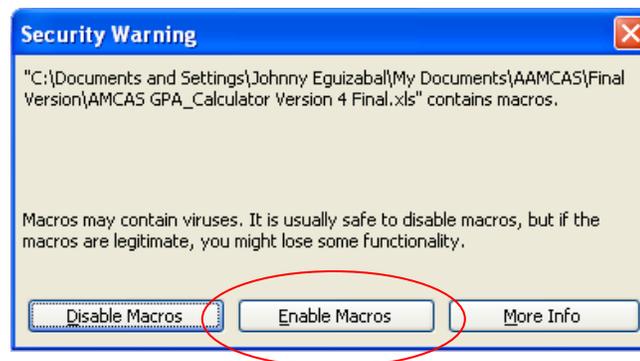
- 1) Click on “Tools” on the main toolbar and then select “Macro” followed by “Security” from the drop down menu. Click “Security.”



- 2) Ensure that the “Security Level” tab is selected. Set the security level to the “Medium” setting in the dialog box that appears and click “OK.”



- 3) Close Microsoft Excel®. Macros are now enabled. When opening the GPA Calculator in the future, a security warning will appear. Click “enable macros” and begin using the calculator. Note: Only files with macros will cause this warning to appear, all other files will not prompt for a response.



ii.) *MAC Computer* – Version - Excel 2001®

- 1) In Excel®, click “edit” and select “preferences”
- 2) Select the “general” tab and remove the check from the “macro virus protection” box.
- 3) Click the “save” tab and check the “prompt to save normal template” box.
- 4) Click “OK” and close Microsoft Excel®. Macros are now enabled. Attempt to open the GPA Calculator file and begin use.

iii.) *MAC Computer – Version - Excel X[®]*

- 1) In Excel[®], click on “Excel” and select “preferences.”
- 2) Single click the “general” category listed on the left-hand side of the window to highlight it.
- 3) Uncheck in the box next to “macro virus protection.”
- 4) Click OK and close Microsoft Excel[®]. Macros are now enabled. Attempt to open the GPA Calculator file and begin use.

6) *Am I affiliated with Microsoft[®] or AMCAS[®]?:*

Not at all, I’m just another student going through the medical school application process and this was a project I wanted to complete.

7) *Have suggestions, comments, or bugs you’ve noticed?*

Feel free to send me an email at johnnyfb@aol.com.