HCEC Letters of Recommendation: Whom to Ask and How?

Rebecca M. Sparrow
(rms18@cornell.edu)

Cornell Career Services
November 21, 2013
Letters of Recommendation

• You will need a minimum of three letters of recommendation
• Admissions committees need to hear from established professionals about your personal qualities as they assess your intellectual and human potential
• These letters help them understand more about you to evaluate you fully
Medical Admissions Holistic Review

• Academic Factors
  – Cornell GPA
  – Standardized test scores

• Non-Academic Factors
  – Service to others
  – Exposure/experience in the world of clinical healthcare
  – Ability to communicate well interpersonally
Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students

aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/competencies
Core Competencies

• Interpersonal
  – Service Orientation
  – Social Skills
  – Cultural Competence
  – Teamwork
  – Oral Communication

• Intrapersonal
  – Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others
  – Reliability and Dependability
  – Resilience and Adaptability
  – Capacity for Improvement
Core Competencies

• Thinking and Reasoning
  – Critical Thinking
  – Quantitative Reasoning
  – Scientific Inquiry
  – Written Communication

• Science
  – Living Systems
  – Human Behavior
Whom to Ask for Letters of Recommendation

- People who know you well and have shown that they care about you, who can write a strong letter
- Individuals whose separate letters, when taken in context together, will build a balanced picture of you as a well prepared applicant for the study of medicine
Attributes of Effective Letter Writers

• They know you from different areas in addition to school, e.g., clinical experiences, research labs, employment, volunteer work
• They are knowledgeable and experienced in assessing pre-health professions students
• They know more about you than your academic performance in one course
• They can compare you to other Cornellians or other pre-med students
• They write well
General Guidelines for Selecting

- It is best to have at least one letter from an instructor from your college years: this demonstrates your university’s academic support.
- If you ask a TA to write a letter, try to get the faculty member in charge of the course or lab to co-sign or ratify the letter.
- If using the HCEC service, at least one letter must be from a Cornell source.
How to Ask for Letters: Four Questions

• Would you be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me?
• Do you think it can be a strong, supportive letter?
• May I make an appointment to come talk with you and review my qualifications and goals?
• I hope that you will mention (_______) in my letter. Are you comfortable doing that?
Assist Your Letter Writers with a Profile Package

- How you know each other
- How you think you have developed and grown during your experience interacting with the letter writer
- What you hope the writer will discuss in the letter
- Why you want to be a doctor and how you see a fit for yourself in that professional field
- Reasons that you asked the individual to write a letter for you
- Your personal statement for HCEC or medical school
Additional Details

• Confirm that the letter writer knows how to submit your letter (Cornell DropBox, Interfolio, etc.)

• Inform your letter writers of your decision about access to the letter (i.e., your FERPA decision)

• Be very clear about deadlines; confirm that the letter writer can meet your timelines

• Deliver any necessary forms, directions, etc.
HCEC and Letters of Recommendation

- Minimum of two; maximum of three (with exceptions for re-registrants)
- One must be from a Cornell faculty or staff member
- Details about managing submission will be available through your HCEC Checklist and in the HCEC Applicant Guide
Protocol: What If the Letter Is Late?
Protocol: After the Letter Is Submitted

- *Thank* the letter writer
- Inform the letter writer of your outcome
Protocol: Supplemental Letters

- A component of effective follow-up
- Review slides on the CCS Media Site from October 2 presentation on *Maintaining Relationships with Health Career Schools:*
  
  career.cornell.edu/resources/media/health.cfm)
Upcoming Programs

- *Increasing Your Chances of Admission With a Gap Year*, Tuesday, December 3, 4:45 p.m., 189 Rockefeller
- *Writing the Personal Statements and Themes for HCEC and for Applications*, Wednesday, December 4, 4:45 p.m., 162 Goldwin Smith
- *HCEC Background Information Form (BIF) Workshop*, Monday or Tuesday, December 9 or 10, 5:00 p.m., 219 Phillips
Questions?