HCEC Letters of Recommendation: Whom to Ask and How

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Letters of Recommendation

• Provide information and insight on personal qualities
  – Professionalism
  – Academic record

• Recommendations, not references
  – Highlight your strengths
  – Candid letters may comment on an applicant’s low points, unfortunate experiences, adversity, and obstacles
  – Supportive letter writers will frame these imperfections in terms of the positive attributes of the applicant
Letters of Recommendation

• You will need a **minimum of two** letters of recommendation for your HCEC record

• 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 and allow them 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
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
Interpreting the Core Competencies

• You need to show the fit between your strengths and a successful medical professional
  – Good personal character
  – Ability to work effectively under conditions of self-regulation
  – Willing to take personal responsibility
  – Ability to conduct absolutely confidential interpersonal communication
Whom to Ask for Letters of Recommendation

- People who
  - know you well,
  - have shown that they care about you, and
  - 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 areas in addition to school
  – 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 Cornell and/or other pre-med students

• They write well
General Guidelines

• 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

• A résumé or summary of the development of your interest in a health profession

• What you hope the writer will discuss in the letter
  – A list of the AAMC core competencies may be helpful

• Reasons that you asked the individual to write a letter for you

• Your personal statement for HCEC or medical school

• HCEC LoR Guidelines and FERPA Intent Form

  http://www.career.cornell.edu/paths/health/medschool/hcec/forms.cfm
Additional Details

• Confirm that the letter writer knows how to submit your letter
  – Cornell DropBox – *HCEC procedure will change after January 9, 2015*
  – Interfolio

• 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
  – 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
  – LoR due date – March 6, 2015
  – Remember – upload procedure will change after January 9, 2015
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 September 29th presentation on *Keeping Your Medical School Applications “Alive”*

  www.career.cornell.edu/resources/media/health.cfm
Upcoming Programs

• **Writing for 20Qs and the HCEC Application**
  - Thursday, November 13, 4:45 p.m., 122 Rockefeller

• **Increasing Your Chances of Admission With a Gap Year**
  - Wednesday, December 3, 4:45 p.m., 122 Rockefeller
Questions?