Writing Personal Statements for Applications

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Agenda

• Why must you write?
• What will you write?
• How will you write?
The Holistic Review

• Academic credentials
  – Cornell GPA (overall and BCPM)
  – Standardized test scores (MCAT or DAT)

• Non-academic experiences
  – Service to others
  – Exposure/experience in the world of clinical healthcare
  – Ability to communicate well interpersonally
  – Interactions with others different from yourself

• Passion for this career path
Why must you write?

- Communicate to your audiences
  - Who are you?
  - Non-academic experiences
  - Your personal dedication to and interest in a career in medicine
  - Your ability to work with others
What Will You Write?

- Application Service Statements
  - AMCAS
  - AACOMAS
  - AADSAS
  - OPTOMCAS
  - TMDSAS

- Secondary Applications
Application Service Statements

• Medical Personal Statement
  – “Personal Comments Essay”
    • AMCAS: 5300 characters (including spaces), ~1 page
    • TMDSAS: 5000 characters
    • If you plan to copy/paste your statement from Microsoft Word, be sure to remove all formatting
    • There is no “spellchecker” in the AMCAS application

• Optional Essay(s)
  – TMDSAS (2500 characters)
    • Unique experiences or life circumstances
    • Personal characteristics and/or important or challenging experiences you have had that will contribute to diversity of or provide educational benefits to the student body

• Dual Degree Program Essay
  – AMCAS: MD/PhD Essay and Significant Research Experience Essay
Application Service Statements

- Answer such questions as:
  - What is your motivation for a healthcare career?
  - What are your personal strengths relative to the medical field?
  - What are your competencies?

- Must be **personal**

- Must be well written

- Sent to all of your designated schools
  - Avoid specifics about schools or programs in primary applications

- Adhere to length and topical constraints
Secondary Applications

• Essays to provide additional information to schools
  – Some schools send secondary applications to all applicants
  – Some schools screen applications prior to sending secondary applications
    • See “Data Reports” in MSAR

• Topical questions, again with length constraints

• Address your motivation for attending that school
What Is the Process?

- Self reflection
  - Consider your core competencies
  - Review your 20Qs
- Write and re-write
- Review
  - Ask for feedback
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

An observable behavior that combines knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes related to a specific activity.

AAMC, Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students, https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/competencies/
Core Competencies

- **Thinking and Reasoning**
  - Critical Thinking
  - Quantitative Reasoning
  - Scientific Inquiry
  - Written Communication

- **Science**
  - Living Systems
  - Human Behavior

An observable behavior that combines knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes related to a specific activity.

AAMC, Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students, https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/competencies/
Required Elements of Your Essays

- Demonstration of your motivation for a career in healthcare
- Demonstration that you comprehend and can articulate relevant personal strengths
- Emphasis on your core competencies
Approaches to Start Writing

• Focus on a central theme that crosses experiences and demonstrates your contribution to your community and the world

• Develop a few of your responses in the 20Q exercise into a narrative that presents information about you as a unique candidate

• Pick a single response in your 20Q exercise and develop it into a narrative essay, deepening the focus and expanding the breadth of your response
Some Ideas

• A life-changing personal experience with medicine that led to your interest

• A relationship that has inspired your passion for medicine

• A challenging personal experience that has changed your life

• A story about your educational journey that will help the admissions committee know you better
Tips for Success

• Write your personal story, not what you think a committee wants to hear
• Get familiar and comfortable with application sites
• Pay attention to significant dates
• Remember, quality matters
• Understand and explain yourself
• Set yourself apart
• Allow plenty of time: write and re-write
• Write succinctly to meet character limits
What to Avoid

• Mistaking perfection for authenticity
• Picking a “tired theme”
  – “I have wanted to be a doctor since…”
• Developing your theme insufficiently
• Emphasizing quotes from others’ writing
• Writing “what they want to hear”
  – All fluff, no stuff
Resources for Writing Personal Essays

• CCS Library: [career.cornell.edu/career/resources/](https://career.cornell.edu/career/resources/)
  – “Personal essay” key-word search returns 16 resources (books, websites, etc.) across Career Services offices, mostly in 103 Barnes or G55 Goldwin Smith

• Health Careers Advisors

• Walk-in Service of the Writing Workshop

• Writing tutor hired by Cornell Career Services (late spring into summer)
Questions?

Workshop

Outside opinions can provide useful feedback on your personal statement. If you are comfortable allowing another attendee read your statement, please feel free to stay to receive peer feedback. We will work in pairs and provide either written or verbal feedback.