Writing Essays for HCEC and Admissions Applications

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Agenda

- Why will you write?
- What will you write?
- How will you write?
Why Will You Write?: The Holistic Review

• Academic credentials
  – Cornell GPA (overall and BCMP)
  – 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

• Commitment to this career path
Purpose of Your Essays

• Communicate to your audiences
  – Non-academic experiences
  – Dedication to and interest in a career in medicine
What Will You Write?: Types of Essays

- HCEC Personal Statement
- Application Service statements
  - AMCAS
  - AACOMAS
  - AADSAS
  - OPTOMCAS
  - Etc.
- “Secondaries”
HCEC Personal Statement

• Address this question:
  – What should the HCEC know about you to be able to produce a comprehensive letter of evaluation?

• No specific length constraints
  – Usually ~two pages, but can be one page or up to five pages

• HCEC LOE does not quote from your personal statement

• May serve as basis for eventual statement to medical schools
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 well written

• Generic in nature, because are sent to all of your designated schools

• Adhere to length and topical constraints
“Secondaries”

• Essays to provide additional information to schools that express interest in you
• Topical questions, again with length constraints
• Address your motivation for attending that specific school
What Is the Process?

• Self reflection
  – Consider your Core Competencies
  – Review your 20Qs

• Write and re-write

• Review
  – Ask for feedback
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
Required Elements of Your Essays

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

- Focus on a central theme that crosses different experiences and demonstrates your contribution to your community and 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
What to Avoid

- Mistaking perfection for authenticity
- Picking a “tired theme”
- Insufficient development of your theme
- Emphasis on quotes from others’ writing
Resources for Writing Personal Essays

- CCS Library: 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)
- Forthcoming Human Health Professions Admissions Guidance booklet
Your Questions?