

2018/2019



# Human Health Professionals

## Guide for Advanced Pre-Medical Students

*This guide helps students assess their preparedness for medical or dental school and prepare to navigate the lengthy application process.*

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Cornell University

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## Table of Contents

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<b>Chapter 1 - Overview</b> .....	1
Introduction.....	3
Ethical Conduct.....	4
Developing a Successful Application.....	4
Are You Competitive? / When Should You Apply?.....	5
Readiness Self-Assessment and Preparedness Exercise .....	7
Applicant Timetable and Checklist.....	9
Health Careers Advisors.....	10
<b>Chapter 2 - Medical College Admission Test</b> .....	11
Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) Basics.....	13
Taking the MCAT.....	16
<b>Chapter 3 - Health Careers Evaluation Committee</b> .....	17
Overview .....	19
HCEC Basics .....	20
Information Resources .....	23
<b>Chapter 4 - Letters of Recommendation</b> .....	25
Letters of Recommendation: Whom to Ask and How.....	27
Waiving or Not Waiving Access to Letters .....	30
<b>Chapter 5 - Personal Statements and Essays</b> .....	33
Writing the Personal Statements and Essays for HCEC and for Application .....	35
<b>Chapter 6 - Selecting Schools and Applying</b> .....	39
How to Choose Where to Apply .....	41
Filing Applications.....	44
<b>Chapter 7 - Interviews</b> .....	47
Interviews: Overview, Techniques, and Tips.....	49
Sample Interview Questions.....	51
<b>Chapter 8 - After You Apply</b> .....	53
Enhancing Your Chances: Follow-up Actions.....	55
Medical School Acceptance Protocol .....	57
How to Select the School You'll Attend.....	57
Financial Planning for Medical School .....	60
If You're Not Accepted .....	62



# Chapter 1

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Introduction

Ethical Conduct

Are You Competitive? When Should You Apply?

Applicant Timetable and Checklist

Health Careers Advisors



## Introduction

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There are several Cornell University health career guides for students.

The *Guide for First- and Second-Year Pre-Medical Students* provides information to help students be aware of the academic and personal components involved in preparing for medical or dental school and the resources available to help in this preparation. Much of this information is also applicable for preparing to apply to other health professions schools; prerequisite classes will vary, however.

The *Guide for Advanced Pre-Medical Students* is designed to help students realize their preparedness for medical school and begin the application process. It focuses on medical school; however much of the information is also applicable to applying to other health professions schools, as many of the steps (taking standardized tests, obtaining letters of recommendation/evaluation, filing an application, and post-application activities) are similar.

The *HCEC Registrant Guide*, available to those who have registered with the Health Careers Evaluation Committee (HCEC), provides detailed information about the timeline of the process, the required materials, and the policies of the committee.

The *Pre-Vet Guide* provides information to help students prepare to apply to schools of veterinary medicine. The guide covers academic and experiential preparation, as well as information necessary during the application process.

The guides are intended to serve as a reference and as a supplement to informational programs, advising, and other resources referred to within the guides. They are only one of the sources that Cornell students can use to gather the information needed to plan their health career programs at Cornell and to present their applications effectively to medical, dental, and other schools. Students should also seek advice from health careers advisors in their college and/or major and also from the University health careers advisor.

Additional informational resources can be found in:

- Career Library, 103 Barnes Hall. Open Monday–Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
- Health Careers Web Page:  
[career.cornell.edu/paths/health/index.cfm](http://career.cornell.edu/paths/health/index.cfm)
  - Sample of information pieces
    - Jobs, Summer Jobs, and Internships
    - Research Opportunities
    - Volunteer Opportunities
    - Study Away Procedures
    - Transfer Students' Guidelines
    - Gap Year/Bridge Year
    - Audio Programs (links to standard and guest speaker programs)

## Ethical Conduct

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Ethical conduct is essential in a health care professional and is expected of all applicants to the health professions. The use of the services of Cornell's Health Careers Program is a privilege that, at the discretion of the Health Careers Program, may be withdrawn at any time from a student or alumnus who has misused the services, property, or resources of the program or upon some other breach of professional ethics.

As a student applying to health professions schools, you naturally want to present your credentials in the best possible light. This presentation must be made with the highest ethical standards, that is, with absolute honesty and integrity. Information must be complete and accurate. For example, if you are elected to Phi Beta Kappa, you may say "elected," but do not say "inducted" or "a member" unless you have been inducted and are a member. If not yet elected, you may say "expect to be elected" or "have grades that make me eligible for election," or better yet, do not say anything until you are elected and then send a supplementary letter to update the schools where you applied.

Procedures for dealing with potential irregularities such as falsification, omission, or discrepancy exist for the Cornell Health Careers Evaluation Committee; companies or programs that administer standardized tests, e.g., Medical College Admission Test (MCAT); the application assembly services e.g., American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS); and the professional associations e.g., Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM); and also for medical and dental schools themselves.

AAMC and AACOMAS have approved conducting criminal background checks on all accepted applicants. Some schools have their own requirement for submission of a dean's letter certifying there is no previous or pending disciplinary action on a student's record. If even a minor irregularity, which may not involve an official procedure, comes to light, it can cast doubt on the entire application and on the integrity of the individual involved. Any question of a breach of ethics is serious and better to avoid than to have to explain.

## Developing a Successful Application

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The AAMC has defined the "15 Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students" to aid students in understanding the skills necessary to be a successful medical school applicant/matriculated student ([students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/core-competencies/](http://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/core-competencies/)). Continual development of these skills is of utmost importance.

### Interpersonal

Service Orientation  
Social Skills  
Cultural Competence  
Teamwork  
Oral Communication

### Thinking and Reasoning

Critical Thinking  
Quantitative Reasoning  
Scientific Inquiry  
Written Communication

### Intrapersonal

Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others  
Reliability and Dependability  
Resilience and Adaptability  
Capacity for Improvement

### Science

Living Systems  
Human Behavior

Students are encouraged to stay informed about issues surrounding health care, both in medical education and practice, while also presenting strong credentials in the six factors that medical schools consider when evaluating applicants.

- Academic record
- MCAT (DAT, etc.)
- Letter of evaluation and recommendations
- The application
- The interview
- Life experiences

Only two of these are quantifiable—the MCAT and the GPA—while the other skills are developed through academics and experience.



## Are you competitive? When should you apply?

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There are a number of resources available to help you determine the likelihood of your acceptance at a specific school based on your GPA and MCAT. You should use national information in Medical School Admission Requirements (*MSAR*): ([aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/](http://aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/)) to get some idea of the median GPA of accepted candidates from the previous year, as well as Cornell-specific data. It is extremely important to be confident that you are ready to apply, as applications are most successful on the first try. Successive applications require significant improvements to any deficient areas and, even with these improvements, are less successful on average.

You should speak to one of the Health Careers Advisors to get some idea of your chances of being admitted and to self-assess your readiness. One way to do this is to complete the Health Careers Reflection Journal in which you will write about preparation, the strength of your background, and the readiness for further study (see pages 7-8). If the probability is low, you may feel that you have nothing to lose by “giving it a shot” and seeing what happens. However, students who apply before their credentials are competitive take several risks, because medical schools question an applicant’s judgment when they have filed a premature application.

Students who have borderline credentials can talk with a health careers advisor to obtain specific data for their individual case before proceeding with the Health Careers Evaluation Committee process. The role of the advisor is to provide information on how to strengthen your application and how to determine the best time to apply for a successful outcome.

When it is getting close to the time to apply to medical school there are many factors to consider in where to apply. One of these factors is cost – both of the application and tuition. The estimated costs may give you some idea of the cost of applying. MCAT registration fees are about \$315 each. Applying to 22 schools (the average number of schools which Cornell applicants designated in 2018) via AMCAS would cost around \$990 and secondary applications could add \$500-1000+. Travel to four interviews could cost \$1,500 or more, depending on transportation mode. Therefore, estimated costs may range from \$3,500 to \$5,000. The cost of attending medical school is also a significant consideration. Before deciding against applying to a medical school on the basis of cost only, be sure to get full information on costs of attending medical school. See “Financial Planning for Medical School” in Chapter 7 of this guide for more information. Also see AAMC’s financial information link at: [aamc.org/services/first/](http://aamc.org/services/first/).

**Admission Acceptance rates for Cornell University Applicants to Schools of  
Allopathic (M.D.) Medicine, 2017 AMCAS Year  
(2016 applicants for 2017 Matriculation)**

	Acceptances/Applications	Acceptance Rate
All	192/269	71%
GPA ≥ 3.4	156/203	77%
GPA ≥ 3.6	128/148	85%
MCAT ≥ 510	147/184	80%
GPA/MCAT ≥ 3.4/510	127/156	81%
GPA/MCAT ≥ 3.6/510	108/123	88%
GPA < 3.4	36/66	55%
MCAT < 510	40/82	49%

Note: Applicants in the 2017 cycle were able to apply with “new” and/or “old” MCAT scores. The data presented here does not reflect the entire applicant population. Scores from the “new” and “old” MCAT examinations are not comparable as there are differing numbers of sections and a different standardization. Therefore, students are urged to use this data with caution and to speak with an advisor with questions about their individual case.

**National Applicants and Matriculants  
U.S. Schools of Allopathic Medicine**

AMCAS Year	Matriculants	Applicants	% of Matriculated Applicants
2017	21,338	51,680 <sup>1</sup>	41%
2016	21,030	53,042	39%
2015	20,631	52,549	39%
2014	20,343	49,480	41%
2013	20,055	48,014	42%
2012	19,517	45,266	43%
2011	19,230	43,919	44%
2010	18,665	42,742	44%
2009	18,390	42,269	44%
2008	18,036	42,231	43%
2007	18,858	42,315	45%

<sup>1</sup> 816,153 is the number of applications from 51,680 applicants, an average of 16 applications per applicant

## Health Careers Reflection Journal

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The Health Careers Reflection Journal is a private, personal working document that should help you reflect on your experiences and academics, assess your readiness for applications to professional schools, and prepare for the application process. You should continually update and revise your journal entries, particularly when preparing to complete a subsequent section (e.g., when you are ready to complete the “prior to the HCEC interview section,” you should review and revise the “prior to HCEC registration” section). Be thorough, honest, and thoughtful when responding to these questions and prompts. You will not send this document to the HCEC.

If you have difficulty addressing these questions, it may be wise to delay application to medical or other health profession school. To discuss your reflection journal, contact a health careers advisor. Contact information for health careers advisors is available at: [career.cornell.edu/paths/health/advisors.cfm](http://career.cornell.edu/paths/health/advisors.cfm).

### **To be completed prior to HCEC registration** (*1<sup>st</sup> year, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Alumni*)

1. Why do you want to be a physician/dentist/health care professional?
2. How do you stay informed about the medical field?
3. What experience have you had in a healthcare setting? How have these experiences helped you in your decision to pursue a health profession? Explain how you are making an informed choice about a life in medicine. What do you know about being a physician?

[Note: The answers to these first three questions will be helpful to you in completing the first question in Section 1 of the HCEC Background Information Form (BIF).]

4. Outside of a healthcare setting, what have you done to be of service to others? How have these experiences helped you in your decision to pursue a health profession?
5. Describe your academic achievements to date. What is particularly noteworthy about your accomplishments and your challenges? How do you compare yourself with other students or alumni? Explain any circumstances that had an impact on your performance. [Note: This question is also included in the HCEC Background Information Form (BIF). You may wish to copy your response here and paste it into the BIF.]
6. What three words would you use to describe yourself? Ask five close friends or family members what three words they would use to describe you. Are these the same words that you used? If there was disagreement between the words you used and those provided by others, comment on the differences and why you think they exist.
7. How have you developed cultural competence? Describe any experiences or situations in which you interacted with people who were different from you. [Note: This question will help you answer question 5 in Section 1 of the HCEC Background Information Form (BIF).]
8. What experience have you had leading large or small groups of people? Think about leadership in broad terms that include not only offices you have held, but experiences such as tutoring and mentoring others, and examples of situational leadership. [Note: This question is also included in the HCEC Background Information Form (BIF). You may wish to copy your response here and paste it into the BIF.]

### **To be completed prior to the HCEC interview** (*Junior, Senior, Alumni*)

9. Describe your strengths. How did you develop these skills?
10. Describe your weaknesses. How do you try to overcome your weaknesses or faults?
11. When you have been faced with multiple demands (e.g., academics, extracurricular involvement,

personal situations) how have you managed your priorities? How have you become better at this during your college years?

12. How do you handle your mistakes or errors? How would you handle them in medical practice?
13. What life events or activities have changed you the most in the past 3-4 years, and what have you learned from them?
14. Describe situations in which you have been out of your “comfort zone,” especially where you have worked with those who are unlike yourself.

**To be completed prior to AMCAS/AACOMAS/AADSAS, etc. (*Junior, Senior, Alumni*)**

15. What is “holistic review,” and why is it important to medical school admissions committees? Describe how you think admissions committees will view your application through holistic review.
16. Describe allopathic and osteopathic medicine and the differences between the two philosophies.
17. Which health professions schools best align with your personal goals for practicing in the health professions? How many of these schools are in your state of residence?
18. What does it mean to develop a strategy for applying to health professions schools?
19. Have you ever been the subject of an institutional action (i.e., a disciplinary action resulting from an unacceptable academic performance, a conduct violation, or a criminal act)? Describe what happened and what you learned from the experience.

Note: Discuss any affirmative response to this question with your Health Careers Advisor before proceeding with your application.

## Applicant Timetable and Checklist

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### Fall 2018

- Undergraduates ONLY: Complete the HCEC Pre-Registration Process.
- Apply for the AAMC (MCAT and AMCAS) Fee Assistance Program (FAP).**

### Spring 2019:

- Complete the HCEC Registration, Part 1, and adhere to all HCEC deadlines.
- Write the HCEC personal statement.
- Complete the HCEC Registration, Part 2.
- Register for the MCAT, if not already taken. Registration is online.**
- Check HCEC website online to see that the requested letters of recommendation have arrived at Barnes Hall.
- Check an unofficial transcript(s) to ensure the grades are accurate.
- Do a web search on yourself and review to ensure only appropriate information appears.
- Interview with the HCEC.
- Make arrangements with Registrar(s) to send transcript(s) to AMCAS, etc., and/or individual schools.**
- Draft AMCAS etc. and personal statements. The Writing Workshop closes when finals begin. To use its services, have a draft complete by the end of April.
- Make a tentative list of schools for application.
- Begin web-based AMCAS, AADSAS, AACOMAS, etc., applications in April or May.**

### Summer 2019:

- Finish AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, etc., personal statement.
- Complete and submit AMCAS etc. and applications, in June or July. This is done even if a later MCAT is planned.** See page 9 for timing of MCAT.
- Follow HCEC instructions for how and when to request that the HCEC letter of evaluation be distributed.
- Finish secondary applications.**

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### Fall 2019:

- Provide updates to medical schools, as necessary.
- Search for sources of financial aid. (See “Financial Planning for Medical School” in this *Guide*.)

### Spring 2020:

- Follow up with schools.
  - If you haven't received interview invitations
  - If you are waitlisted
- If accepted at multiple schools begin to narrow options.
- Familiarize yourself with AAMC traffic rules.

## Health Careers Advisors

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### Manager, Health Careers Advising Program:

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# Chapter 2

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Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) Basics

Taking the MCAT





## Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) Basics

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### What is the MCAT?

The MCAT, a standardized test, is required or strongly recommended for admission to almost every medical school, allopathic, osteopathic, and podiatric, in the United States. There are separate standardized exams for dentistry and optometry: Dental Admission Test (DAT) and Optometry Admission Test (OAT). The exam is one of the main screening devices used by admissions committees; however, the importance attached to the scores varies, depending upon the professional school and on the candidate's other credentials. The *Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)* database, provided by the AAMC, gives some insight into policies at each allopathic school.

### What science coursework is required for the MCAT?

The test may be taken any time after the student has finished (or is within a few weeks of finishing) one year of:

- Biology
- General or Inorganic Chemistry
- Organic Chemistry
- Introductory Physics (not tested on the DAT)

As well as one semester each of:

- Biochemistry
- Introductory Sociology (not tested on the DAT)
- Introductory Psychology (not tested on the DAT)

### What month should I take the MCAT?

It is to the student's advantage to take the MCAT early enough to use the results in developing an effective strategy for selecting medical schools.

In determining when to take the test, a student should consider all of the following:

- Taking the MCAT when course material is fresher is advantageous.
- A test taken by June of the application year has the advantage of producing scores in time to use them to make a timely (June/July) submission of the AMCAS application. Knowing the MCAT score before making the final decision to apply is helpful, though scores on practice tests can also be informative. The MCAT scores are also useful in selecting which schools to apply to.
- If you take the MCAT after you have submitted your AMCAS application, AMCAS will send the scores to schools when they become available. Do not delay submitting the AMCAS application solely because the MCAT scores will be available later in the summer. The AMCAS application can be submitted when you know one medical school you want to apply to. Additional schools can be designated later.
- Medical schools generally do not review an application until they receive the MCAT scores. September is the latest the MCAT is offered each year. Since scores are available 30 days after the test is taken, September test scores of the year of application will delay the date when the application will be reviewed. Most medical schools will accept the September test scores (a few do not), but September scores may put you at a disadvantage at schools with rolling admissions.
- If you take the test in September of the application year, and, for whatever reason, do not do as well as expected, the next opportunity to repeat the test is in January of the following year. Very few schools say they will consider January scores to be considered for those currently applying.

### What are the registration dates?

Registration opens about twelve weeks prior to each test. Early registration will increase the likelihood of getting the preferred test date and site. Registration for the exam 60 or more days before the test date guarantees a seat at a site within 100 miles of the requested site.

### **Where is the MCAT given?**

The MCAT is given on computers at designated sites around the country and abroad. A choice of sites is available at registration.

See: [services.aamc.org/20/mcat/sitelisting](http://services.aamc.org/20/mcat/sitelisting) for the most current list of test sites.

### **How do I register to take the test?**

Candidates must register electronically through the AAMC's website at: [aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/register/](http://aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/register/).

### **What is the fee?**

The examination fee is \$305. See online for information regarding the fee reduction through the Fee Assistance Program (FAP). Make an early request if you will be applying for fee reduction.

### **What is the format?**

Questions are multiple-choice for all sections. The sections of the MCAT are: Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; Chemical and Physical Foundations of Living Systems; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills.

### **How is the MCAT scored?**

Each of the four sections is scored individually, ranging from 118 (low) to 132 (high). The total score is the sum of the scores of the four sections and ranges from 472 (low) to 528 (high). MCAT score reports will provide percentile ranks for both the total score and section scores, allowing comparisons to other test-takers. The score report will also report confidence bands, which reflect the accuracy of the section scores and the total score. To read more about the MCAT score report and to view a sample report, see:

[aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/mcat2015/mcat2015scores/](http://aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/mcat2015/mcat2015scores/).

### **How are the scores reported?**

All medical schools that are members of AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service) receive **released** MCAT scores automatically. Students may use the online MCAT Thx System to request to have their scores sent to non-AMCAS schools.

In addition, students have the option of allowing scores to be released to the official institutional advisor in the Health Careers Program, 103 Barnes Hall. For statistical purposes, it is very helpful to the advising service to have scores released to the program. Individual scores are kept confidential and are not placed in the Health Careers Evaluation Committee (HCEC) file.

### **How often can one take the MCAT?**

Medical schools have access to candidates' complete MCAT testing history. Usually admissions officers report that if they have more than one set of scores they look at all scores. Therefore, it is not advisable to take the MCAT for practice in the way that high school students take the PSAT before the SAT. Be fully prepared, with a goal to take the test only once. An individual may take the exam three times per testing year, four times per two-consecutive testing year period, and up to seven times in a lifetime. Individuals may only be registered for one test at a time.

### **Should I retake the MCAT?**

If you take the test a second time, test designers and admissions officers expect improvement because you now have "test familiarity." In order to impress them, scores must improve substantially. Also, some schools average the scores from multiple test administrations and evaluate candidates based on the one, average score. The national and Cornell-specific data on MCAT repeats is available in the Career library in *MCAT Scores*. The national data is also online. By looking at these materials, you can draw conclusions about the probability of improving scores. A health careers advisor can help further explore the specific situation.

**What are the oldest scores considered?**

The oldest MCAT score that each school is willing to consider is listed in *Medical School Admission Requirements* in the entry for each school. Usually it is up to two or three years, but this varies.

**Why is state of legal residence important?**

State residence often determines the chance of being accepted to medical schools, particularly those that are state-supported institutions. Some medical schools consider the state of residence to be the one stated on the MCAT registration. Therefore, questions about residence should be discussed with a health careers advisor before registering for the MCAT.

**What materials are available for test prep?**

The Association of American Medical Colleges MCAT section of their website is an excellent resource. Practice tests for the MCAT are an electronic resource only and must be ordered on an individual basis.

*The Official Guide to the MCAT* will help to assess your level of knowledge and how to review.

**Should I take a commercial prep course?**

Many students report good results studying on their own or with a study group using their textbooks, class notes, and an MCAT review manual. Several commercial firms offer MCAT review courses. The value of these courses varies depending on one's learning style and how well the course is taught, among other factors.

In addition, there are electronic resources available to prepare for the MCAT examination. These materials, provided by MedEdPortal and Khan Academy, can be found at: [aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/mcat2015/preparing/](http://aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/mcat2015/preparing/).

## Taking the MCAT

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### Guessing

Guessing is not penalized. The score is achieved by summing the number of questions answered correctly.

### Timing

The MCAT is a timed test; therefore, practice in pacing on sample tests may be helpful in learning to handle the timing. Each question carries equal weight, so it is not wise to spend too much time on one question.

### Cautions

Questions are not tricky, but discriminating among answers requires careful analysis. You are expected to make deductions from complex information. The answers often include examples of preconceptions, assumptions, inferences, and examples of incomplete reasoning, which are decoys from the correct answer. In other words, the test measures not only knowledge but also the ability to use your knowledge and any information given.

### Techniques

Multiple choice questions will sometimes yield to the trick of eliminating the answers that are clearly wrong and then choosing the least objectionable of the remaining answers.

There probably will not be time to calculate every answer precisely, so you need to rely on inspection, on rounding off numbers for quick calculations (thus eliminating answers of the wrong order of magnitude), and on using intuition to speed up the process of arriving at an answer.

### Computer format

There is a vertical split screen with the reading passage on the left and the questions on the right. Each side is independently scrollable. You are able to highlight text within the passages and scratch paper is provided.

### Energy crisis

The test takes seven-and-a-half hours, including breaks. Test takers have three, ten-minute optional breaks. Plan to have a snack during the break time. Including full test simulations within exam review and practice schedules will give insight into the energy needed and enable pacing during the actual test.

### Other items

- Dress in layers and plan to bring a sweater or sweatshirt, as temperatures in rooms will vary.
- Photos taken the day of the MCAT are transmitted to medical schools.
- Some students suggest having a headache remedy available.

### Dealing with test anxiety and test confidence

- EARS (Empathy, Assistance, and Referral Service): 255-3277, 213 Willard Straight Hall.
- Learning Strategies Center, Individual counseling: 255-6310
- Computing and Communications Center, 4th floor. 8:30-4:30, Mon-Fri.

# Chapter 3

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HCEC Overview

HCEC Basics

Information Resources



## Overview

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This section gives a broad overview of the Health Careers Evaluation Committee (HCEC) and guidance on whether to use its services and the timeline of the process. Extensive details on how to complete the process are given in the *HCEC Registrant Guide*.

The HCEC serves Cornell undergraduates and alumni applying to health professional schools which request a university letter of evaluation. The letter of evaluation is not a letter of recommendation. It is a comprehensive, written review of your candidacy for the health career of your choice. The HCEC office processes and distributes the letter of evaluation *along with the registrant's recommendation letters*, which together comprise the "HCEC Letter."

The application process begins more than a year before matriculation. Registering with the HCEC involves your active participation in a time-sensitive process – a series of planned steps. The materials for application, including the letter of evaluation, should be completed during the spring or early summer months. A letter of evaluation that will not reach the medical schools until October may be considered late and, especially at schools with rolling admissions, this could decrease your chances of acceptance. Before registering, be sure that you have read the *HCEC Basics*, reviewed the HCEC deadlines, and understand the implications of registering.

## HCEC Basics

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This section is intended to introduce the HCEC and provide detailed information, including timelines, due dates, and specific procedures which are included in the *HCEC Registrant Guide*, available after registration with the HCEC.

### What is the letter of evaluation?

The Cornell letter of evaluation is an overview of the many facets of a registrant's candidacy for the health career of his or her choice, not an additional letter of recommendation. The letter, generally two pages in length and positive in tone, covers personal qualities and background; activities, volunteer and paid; and the academic record. The health professions school receives the "HCEC Letter" containing the cover letter, the letter of evaluation, and the two to three letters of recommendation requested by the applicant.

### How important is the letter of evaluation?

Most admissions committees place great emphasis on this letter. Individual letters of recommendation are useful but carry more weight when taken together with the context provided by the letter of evaluation. Some schools will request that students who do not present the HCEC letter explain this decision.

### Who are the members of the HCEC?

Faculty and professional staff at Cornell serve on the committee. Through orientation and experience, they are familiar with the requirements of health professions schools and are able to evaluate Cornell applicants.

### When should I register with the HCEC?

Registration opens on December 1<sup>st</sup>. It is recommended that alumni applicants prepare HCEC materials by mid-January and undergraduates by early February. Applicants must register for the HCEC prior to the published deadlines in the cycle year in which they plan to apply. For example:

- Those who wish to matriculate in the fall after graduation should register in the spring of their junior year.
- Those who are planning to take one gap year following graduation should register in the spring semester of their senior year.
- Those who are planning to take more than one gap year following graduation should register as alumni and may do so in the spring or early summer of the year in which they intend to apply.

Students who plan to register with the HCEC as an undergraduate must complete the Pre-Registration process in the fall semester prior to registration. The deadline for completing the HCEC registration (all sections of the online checklist through "delivery authorization") is midnight on June 30<sup>th</sup> (Undergraduate Registrants) or July 31<sup>st</sup> (Alumni registrants). The deadline for submission of the completed primary application to the application services (AMCAS, TMDSAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, etc.) depends on the deadlines of individual schools of human medicine.

There are many factors in the decision of when to apply. If you have already registered with the HCEC and subsequently decide not to complete your application you should put your HCEC registration on "hold" *prior* to the interview process.

### What is HCEC Pre-Registration?

The pre-registration process is designed to provide preparation for the medical school application process and to help students to assess their readiness for application prior to beginning the HCEC registration. The program is administrated by advising staff only and none of the information gathered will be shared with the HCEC unless a student wishes to have it carry over to the registration process. Students will be required to attend workshop sessions and turn in assigned materials. Pre-Registration begins in October.



### What is the purpose of the interview?

- Once you have met the HCEC requirements and completed the required portions of your HCEC online checklist, you will be eligible for a match with an HCEC interviewer.
- This interviewer is someone with whom you are not familiar but who does have access to your HCEC record.
- It is the interviewer's responsibility to evaluate your readiness for medical education based upon your academic record, service activities, clinical exposure, research experience, extracurricular activities, and responses given during the interview.
- You should also consider this as a practice medical school interview.

### What are my responsibilities as a registrant?

- Meet all deadlines. Failure to meet deadlines may result in a delayed or forfeited interview match, and a delayed letter release.
- Read all the information provided in the HCEC Online Checklist in the Required Readings, FAQs and News & Bulletins section.
- Choose your three recommenders wisely (see Chapter 4). **No letter substitutions or replacements are allowed once submitted to the HCEC.**
- Monitor the status of your file through your Online File Checklist until it is marked as complete.
- Generate a letter request through each application service through which you are applying (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, TMDSAS) using the hcec@cornell.edu email address.
- Enter the Letter ID# into your checklist. (Do not send the Letter Request Form to the HCEC).
- At least two weeks after the HCEC releases your "HCEC Letter" to AMCAS AACOMAS, and/or AADSAS, check the status of your file at each admissions office to confirm receipt.

### Is the process different for early-decision applications?

Yes. If you wish to apply early decision, you must notify the HCEC of this intent at least four weeks prior to the school's primary application deadline.

### Is the process different for transfer students?

Yes, if you are a first-year junior transfer. See *First-Year Junior Transfer Students' Guidelines* on the web at: [career.cornell.edu/paths/health/medschool/transfer.cfm](http://career.cornell.edu/paths/health/medschool/transfer.cfm). Students must complete at least 30 letter-graded credit hours at Cornell in order to be matched with an interviewer and receive an HCEC Letter.

### Is the process different for alumni?

Yes. Alumni registrants will fall into one of the following categories:

- New registrant.
- Second-time registrant. There are three options for those who have previously registered:
  - Resuming registrant – those who requested that their registration be placed on hold prior to the "HCEC Letter" being distributed to any external party.
  - Reactivating registrant – the registrant's original "HCEC Letter" is released again.
  - Updating registrant – those who wish to update the original "HCEC Letter" with information relevant to the time that has passed since the original letter was generated.

### When will my HCEC Letter be sent?

The HCEC endeavors to release the HCEC Letter for registrants who have met HCEC deadlines and completed application service applications in a timely manner. If deadlines are not met, this may result in a delayed interview match and/or delayed letter release. The HCEC prepares and releases letters in an order primarily determined by the date that registrants complete the HCEC Online File Checklist. Registrants with common complete dates are assigned a random number to determine letter order.

### **Why and how do I authorize HCEC to send my letter?**

Authorization is legally required before HCEC may release letters to the application services on a registrant's behalf. Authorization to release letters is done through the HCEC Online Checklist.

### **How is the HCEC Letter distributed?**

The HCEC Letter, which includes the Letter of Evaluation and 2-3 Letters of Recommendation, is uploaded directly to the application services.

### **How do I know when my HCEC letter will be released?**

The HCEC prepares letters of evaluation in an order determined by when registrants complete their HCEC Online Checklist. Applications are encouraged to adhere to published undergraduate and alumni timelines. Due to the high volume of letters, it can take six to ten weeks after an AMCAS or AACOMAS application has been submitted before release of the HCEC Letter.

### **May I use my HCEC letters to apply to graduate school or for employment?**

No. The HCEC does not send letters to graduate schools, post-baccalaureate programs, or potential employers. Most recommenders are willing to write a new letter for a change in career direction. The HCEC can provide the letter writer with a copy of his/her recommendation letter upon your written request.

HCEC letters are sent only to admissions committees of schools of allopathic, osteopathic, and podiatric medicine; schools of dentistry and optometry; combined programs (M.D./Ph.D., D.O./Ph.D., etc.); or to committees administering financial aid at health professional schools or foundations (both national and international). In all cases, the registrant must legally authorize distribution.

### **Policy on destroying old HCEC files**

The contents of HCEC registrant files, including but not limited to the HCEC letter of evaluation and letters of recommendation, are destroyed five years after the original letter of evaluation or most recent updated letter of evaluation is written.

When you register with HCEC, you must agree in writing to a date by which you are required to contact the HCEC if you *do not* wish your file to be destroyed. If you register later for an update, your entire file will be destroyed five years after the update is completed. You may request that your file be held indefinitely by contacting the HCEC at five-year intervals.

### **May I apply without using the HCEC process?**

Most schools strongly suggest using a committee or similar process if an applicant's university offers one, as Cornell does. Cornell does not require students or alumni to use the HCEC. Undergraduate applicants (as a group) who have applied independently in the past had less than half the acceptance rate of applicants who used the HCEC. The acceptance rate for non-registrants was also significantly lower than the national acceptance rate. Medical schools indicate that there is a negative impact on applicants who do not present a committee letter.

If an applicant elects not to use the services of the HCEC, admissions committees may want a letter of explanation. Upon request, the HCEC will provide the applicant with a "non-registrant letter" that simply states that the applicant elected not to participate with the HCEC. If sending individual letters of recommendation without using the HCEC, AMCAS requires that letters must be submitted to AMCAS, not to the schools for the medical schools using its letter service.

Individual medical schools may request that letters of recommendation for applicants applying without the HCEC be from specific recommenders. For example, a school may require that two recommenders be senior professors from the science faculty. If you question the best course of action, consult with the health careers advisor.

## Information Resources

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### How and where do I get HCEC forms and verify my HCEC information?

To download forms or check the contents of your file:  
[ccs.career.cornell.edu/HCEC/Intro.php](https://ccs.career.cornell.edu/HCEC/Intro.php).

### Additional information

*Questions regarding forms, procedures, distributions, and your file:*

Jeremy Richards  
Records Coordinator, 210 Barnes Hall  
Phone: 607.255.0546  
E-mail: [hcec@cornell.edu](mailto:hcec@cornell.edu)

*Non-routine HCEC procedural questions:*

Douglas Lockwood  
Manager, 210 Barnes Hall  
Phone: 607.255.5045  
E-mail: [dhl34@cornell.edu](mailto:dhl34@cornell.edu)

*Health careers advising:*

Kimberlee Swartz  
Manager Health Careers Advising Program, 103 Barnes Hall  
Phone: 607.255.5221 (to schedule appointments) or 607.255.0542 (direct line)  
E-mail: [kms273@cornell.edu](mailto:kms273@cornell.edu)



# Chapter 4

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Letters of Recommendation: Whom to Ask and How

Waiving or Retaining Access to Letters: FERPA



## Letters of Recommendation: Whom to Ask and How

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### Purpose of letters of recommendation

Letters of recommendation provide information and insight on personal qualities, such as professionalism, and the academic record. Academic officers want to hear from established professionals who will speak to your intellectual and human potential. The admissions office needs letters to evaluate your candidacy fully. Your ability to secure a useful letter signifies your capacity to initiate, build, and sustain meaningful professional relationships, qualities that are essential to the effective practice of medicine.

Recommendation letters provide an objective, authoritative, and supportive external viewpoint on an applicant. They are called “recommendations” because they are expected to appreciate the candidate’s strengths. A truly candid letter may comment on low points, unfortunate experiences, adversity, and obstacles. The supportive letter writer will point out these imperfections in the context of the positive qualities the applicant exhibits. When a letter writer is candid, the letter gains credibility. No one is perfect and the consummate letter writer acknowledges this while substantively supporting the applicant with anecdotes to back up generalizations.

Letter writers should refer to the fit between the applicant’s strengths and a medical career. The practice of medicine requires professionals of good character who can work effectively under conditions of self-regulation, who have incorporated impeccable character standards, know how to take personal responsibility, and have a record of conducting absolutely confidential interpersonal communication.

You will need letters of recommendation for the HCEC if you elect to use that service. If you elect not to use the HCEC, medical schools will rely on the individual letters of recommendation you submit through AMCAS.

### Whom to ask for a letter of recommendation

People who know you well and have shown that they care about you are the best candidates for recommenders. If in doubt about whom to ask, consult a health careers or faculty advisor. You can also get good information from on-campus briefings held during the academic year and posted on the Career Services website.

Letters matter greatly in admission decisions. If you cannot think of three people who will write strong letters of recommendation, it may be wise to consider taking a gap/bridge year during which you can find mentors and cultivate strong, supportive professional relationships.

Which set of referees can help you build a balanced profile of your credentials and relevant experiences? One person will not be able to discuss all of your qualities. Taken together, your three letters can cover many aspects of your personal character. Good sources of letters generally include a faculty member, from either a science or non-science discipline, your faculty advisor for more than a semester, a professor for whom you’ve worked, an employer, club advisor, supervisor of voluntary activity or research experience, camp director, chaplain, coach, or other mentor. The most useful and valuable letters comment substantively on the intellectual, interpersonal, and intrapersonal competencies set forth by the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC). To find these competencies and their definitions, see: [students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/core-competencies/](https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/core-competencies/).

In general, it is best to ask at least one instructor from the college years to write one of your letters. Most admissions offices prefer at least one letter from this source. This letter of recommendation will demonstrate that you have your university’s academic support. A letter from a teaching or laboratory assistant is sufficient, but not optimal. If a graduate student writes the letter, they can ask the faculty member in charge of the course or lab to ratify and co-sign it. Alternatively, if a professor does not know you well, you may ask a TA to submit notes to the professor upon which the letter can be based.

## Protocol: How to ask for a letter of recommendation

In general, ask for recommendations in a live conversation, in person. If necessary, ask by telephone or videoconference. Email is not the most effective method from a strategic perspective. Here are four questions to pose to potential recommenders:

- “Would you be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me?”
- “Do you feel it can be a strong, supportive letter?”
  - If the answer to these questions is not an enthusiastic “yes,” you may indicate that you want to do further thinking before proceeding; or you may simply say, “No thank you. I’ll try to find another recommender.”
- “May I make an appointment to come talk with you and review my qualifications?”
- “I’d like you to mention (fill in the blank) in my letter. Do you feel you could do that?” The decision rests with the writer.

If the answer to the first two questions is not an enthusiastic “yes,” be patient and hear the person out, even if it feels awkward. You will learn if the lack of enthusiasm relates to the writer’s own scarcity of time, or reflects an estimation of your candidacy. Both perspectives provide important information. At some point, you may indicate that you want to do further thinking before proceeding; or you may simply say, “No thank you. I’ll try to find another recommender.”

Discuss your decision to retain or waive FERPA access to the letter and make sure you have reached an understanding on this with the writer. Also make sure the recommender knows the due date for the letter and will be able to meet it and the procedure for transmitting the letter to the appropriate destination.

## Material to provide for recommenders

- A résumé or summary including in some detail the development of your interest in a health profession and your goals. (If you are undecided between two health professions or planning to apply to more than one, meet with a health careers advisor before asking a recommender to write a letter of recommendation for a specific profession.)
- A printed list of the AAMC’s core competencies. You should also express your hope that the writer will use that language in the letter. This will make it easier for an admissions committee to see your suitability when reading the letter under the holistic review process.

If you are asking for letters to be written for the HCEC process, you must also provide:

- The letter of recommendation cover sheet, which can be conveniently downloaded by the registrant from the HCEC website, along with the FERPA Intent Form, which guides letter writers on what information health careers schools seek in letters of recommendation.
- A letter of recommendation FERPA Intent Form.
  - Note that the registrant should complete both the cover sheet and Optional FERPA Waiver form before sending them to the letter writer. The letter writer should be aware of your decision to either waive or retain your FERPA right of access. Paper copies of the blank cover sheet and form are available in 210 Barnes.

## How many?

No more than three letters of recommendation will be used in the HCEC evaluation. Letters arriving after the first three will be retained in the file but will not be used or distributed by the HCEC. We recommend that you have three letters in your file before your HCEC interview. However, you are eligible for an interview once your file has two letters. Once a letter has been received by the HCEC, you may not withdraw it or substitute a new letter.

If you have elected not to use the HCEC, up to ten letters of recommendation may be uploaded directly to AMCAS. Please speak to a health careers advisor to develop an application strategy.



## **Deadline for HCEC letters of recommendation**

In order to be included with the information that is sent to the HCEC interviewer, letters of recommendation must be received by the stated deadline. The interviewer needs these letters for interviewing you and for writing the letter of evaluation. Therefore, you have two important responsibilities:

1. Check with the HCEC Online File Checklist to see that when your letters of recommendation have arrived and the FERPA status of each.
2. Remind letter writers, if necessary. A written note or an e-mail reminder to the letter writer is probably more effective than telephoning or seeing him/her in person. The frequency of such reminders should be carefully considered to avoid annoying the writer.

## **Transfer students**

Transfer students should read the Transfer Guidelines on the Health Careers web page and listen to the "Junior Transfer Orientation" in the Media Programs link of that webpage. They are encouraged to speak with a health careers advisor to get advice on their letter options.

## Waiving or Retaining Access to Letters: FERPA

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The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 requires that students be advised of their rights concerning educational records, such as letters of recommendation.

FERPA gives important rights, including:

1. The right of students to inspect their student records,
2. The right to challenge incorrect information in those records, and
3. The right to keep student records private.

Because FERPA gives students these rights, neither Cornell University nor other institutions or organizations can require you to waive these rights. University policy on access and release of student records is stated at the CU policy website.

When you establish a file for letters of recommendation (whether through a letter service or the Health Careers Evaluation Committee) you should consider your FERPA right to access the letter(s). If you decide to waive access, inform the letter writer (including the HCEC or letter service) in writing, that you have chosen to do so. If you do not provide this information, by default you have retained this right. You can discuss this choice with those writing your letters of recommendation, and the following factors may be useful in making your decision.

### Factors to consider in deciding to waive access

- If your recommender knows you well and has said they can write a letter in support of your candidacy, the chances are slight that inaccuracies or unfair statements will be presented in the letter.
- An employer or a member of an admissions committee might tentatively draw one or more of the following conclusions:
  - The evaluation may be more candid if the writer knew that the candidate would not see it. As a result, more weight may be assigned to such letters.
  - The candidate has nothing to conceal.
  - The candidate did not feel it was necessary to view the letter before it was sent.
  - The candidate does not wish to exercise their civil rights in this way.

### Factors to consider in deciding to retain access

- A potential recommender may choose not to write a letter for you unless you waive FERPA.
- You need to be prepared to explain your reasons for your choice during interview(s).
- An employer or a member of an admissions committee at a graduate or professional school receiving the letter might tentatively draw one or more of the following conclusions:
  - The evaluation may be less candid, as the writer knew that the candidate might see it. As a result, these letters may carry less weight in the decision-making process.
  - The candidate retained access in order to determine that recipients received full information.
  - The candidate wanted to discuss the letter with the recommender/evaluator before it was put in final draft.
  - The candidate feels a moral obligation to exercise their civil rights.
- You will have an idea of the information schools/employers have and, therefore, can prepare for interviews accordingly.
- By reading a letter, you have a chance of learning from any feedback it provides.
- It may relieve stress and anxiety to know exactly what has been said.
- Factual mistakes in the letter may be corrected.
- If you conclude that the letter is unfavorable, you can choose not to use the letter. **The HCEC is an exception. You may not withdraw a letter submitted to HCEC or substitute a new letter.**

### **Factors for HCEC registrants to consider**

- You may waive or retain the right of access to your Cornell HCEC letter of evaluation and /or the letter(s) of recommendation in your file in any combination you choose: all, none, some.
- If you view a letter and disagree with the subjective opinion expressed or believe the information is inaccurate, you may place a rebuttal in the HCEC file; it will be sent with the letters to the professional schools.
- The HCEC process includes substantial review and oversight. It is not likely that an inaccuracy will be stated in the letter.



# Chapter 5

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Writing the Personal Statements and Essays for the HCEC and for the Application



## Writing the Personal Statements and Essays for the HCEC and for the Application

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During the process of applying to professional school, you will write a number of themes to explain your motivation for attending medical or dental school and to answer key questions. You want these essays written during application to distinguish you from other applicants with similar grades and scores. This is especially the case with your AMCAS/AADSAS, etc., application essay where the quality of the essay may be the determining factor in whether or not you get an interview.

In your application essay, you want to come alive to the admissions committee as a distinct individual. The essay should convey what is unique about you: your background, experience, motivation, and preparation for becoming a doctor or dentist. To accomplish this, focus on one to three carefully selected topics and develop them, using concrete examples from important experiences or events in your life. Reflect on what you have learned from an experience; do not concentrate on a feeling of satisfaction you gained from being able to “help.” Also, a one-time or brief experience that is not illustrative of your continuing commitment should not be the focus of your essay. Rather than explicitly stating your strengths, let the reader draw inferences from descriptions of your actions and accomplishments. The focus of the essay is you; so don’t use the essay to philosophize about health care or your future profession, unless you are able to tell how you acted on these insights or observations.

The writing for the application process consists of the following, each done at different points.

- The Health Careers Reflection Journal – An exercise designed to allow you to determine your preparation, the strength of your background, and your readiness for further study in a health career.
- Health Careers Evaluation (HCEC) Background Information File (BIF) – A comprehensive summary of your preparation for medical school beyond your academic training provided in narrative responses to questions, some of which were addressed in the health careers reflection journal.
- HCEC personal statement – This is used by the HCEC interviewer and is not sent to medical schools. The HCEC *does not* quote from the essay in the letter of evaluation.
- Essays for application: AMCAS – American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), the common application used for most medical schools, sends the “Personal Comments” essay to the AMCAS schools that you apply to. Some schools do not belong to AMCAS. These non-AMCAS schools will ask you to write specific essay(s) as part of their application. AMCAS also requires MD/Ph.D applicants to write two additional essays about reasons for pursuing an MD/Ph.D and describing significant research experiences.
- Schools’ secondary or supplementary application essays – After schools have received your contact information or your verified application from AMCAS, many schools will request that you complete their supplementary application, which may include writing essays. Some will not have your complete essays until they invite you to interview.

### The Health Careers Reflection Journal

This self-assessment and preparedness exercise is a personal, working document and it is not sent to the HCEC or any other application service. The purpose of the exercise is to allow you to assess your readiness for further study in a health career. The questions should be answered fully in narrative form. HCEC registrants must attest that they have responded to the first six questions to continue with the HCEC process.

### Health Careers Evaluation Committee (HCEC) Background Information Form (BIF)

The BIF is divided into two parts:

- Narrative responses to questions that were addressed in the health careers reflection journal.

- A list and description of activities and events that have influenced your personal and professional development.

The BIF categorizes your activities by the major content areas of interest to admissions committees:

- Clinical exposure
- Service to others
- Research experience
- Extracurricular activities
- Paid employment

Because your BIF plays a significant role in the HCEC's evaluation of how you have progressed along your pre-health pathway, it is important to be very thorough.

### **Health Careers Evaluation Committee (HCEC) personal statement**

The format is a short essay with no minimum or maximum lengths to which you must adhere. Usually students write about two pages, but the essay could be as short as one page or as long as five pages. There is no specific topic for the HCEC personal statement, but you want to write to answer the question, "What do you want the HCEC to know about you so that it can present you effectively and honestly to medical schools?" Think what you want your interviewer to know about you that will help you have a good interview and produce a good letter of evaluation.

Because you need to complete the HCEC essay before you do the application essay, you can use the HCEC essay to do your initial thinking and writing for the rest of the application process. It should help you begin organizing your thoughts about medical or dental school. Your thoughts will evolve as you proceed through the HCEC and application processes. Many students find that by the time they write the application essay, they have clarified and refined ideas and must either substantially revise or completely re-write the HCEC essay.

### **Essays for application: AMCAS and others**

Your application essay should be a polished piece of writing. The essay portion of the AMCAS application, called "Personal Comments," is limited to about one page (5300 characters including spaces). Use this space to make yourself come alive to your reader as you answer the question "Why do I want to be a doctor?" or "Why me, why medicine?" AMCAS will forward the essay to your designated AMCAS schools along with the rest of your AMCAS application; so, don't refer to a specific school in the AMCAS essay.

You request an application directly from any non-AMCAS school to which you want to apply or use its online application. These applications may require an essay or a number of statements; length requirements will vary. Unlike the AMCAS essay, these essays are usually responses to specific questions.

### **Secondary or supplementary application essays at AMCAS schools**

For AMCAS schools, there will be supplementary or secondary applications. Supplementary applications often have their own essays. Some secondary applications require much more time than others to complete but they should all be returned to the school within two weeks. You will submit the essay(s), if requested, directly to the AMCAS schools that requires it. Do not repeat the AMCAS essay, as they have those on file. One thing they frequently try to learn in the supplementary is why you applied to their school. You may find it useful to refer to your responses to the Reflection Exercise in completing the secondary applications.

### **Resources**

Several sources of help are available:

1. For an opinion on the theme's appropriateness, see a health careers advisor. Students are always welcome to make an appointment to review their personal statement with Kimberlee Swartz (send as an email attachment prior to your scheduled appointment; student's name MUST be in the document).



2. For writing help, go to the Walk-in Service of the Writing Workshop, 178 Rockefeller Hall, until the end of study week. Bring a draft of your statement. The tutors will read, suggest, and question in order to guide you in presenting the material.
3. For correct grammar and punctuation ask anyone skilled in these aspects of the English language: a friend who writes for the *Sun*, an English major, etc.
4. For picking up problems in the flow of words, ask someone to read the theme aloud. Pauses and hesitations by the reader indicate problems with the clarity of the idea presented or the writing.
5. For comment on the quality of the theme, ask an unbiased person, who will be candid.
6. The following resources are available in the Career Library, 103 Barnes.
  - *Medical School Essays that Made a Difference* H102
  - *Essays that Worked for Medical School* H101
  - *Essays that Will Get You into Medical School* H103



# Chapter 6

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How to Choose Where to Apply

Filing Applications



## How to Choose Where to Apply

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The resources listed, except for those on the web, are available in the Career Library, 103 Barnes Hall, open all year, including breaks and summer, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

### Goal

Your chance of acceptance to health professional schools varies from school to school so your goal is to determine where you will have the best chance of acceptance. Choosing the best schools to apply to will require time and study of guidelines and best practices.

### How to start

Start by learning about schools in the state where you are a resident, even if these are not your first choices. Your best chance of acceptance is at a state-supported school in that state. This will also give you some basis for comparison to schools outside your state and region.

Use the following resources to gain familiarity with medical, dental, and other health professions schools.

- *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools* H 090
- *Admission Requirements to Canadian Faculties of Medicine* H 999 1002
- *Osteopathy & Podiatry Notebook* H 999 1023
- Professional School Surveys: [career.cornell.edu/HealthCareers/applicationProcess.html](http://career.cornell.edu/HealthCareers/applicationProcess.html)
- *The Complete Guide to the MD/PhD Degree* H 085
- *Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)* at: [services.aamc.org/30/msar/home](http://services.aamc.org/30/msar/home)
- *2017 Osteopathic Medical College Information Book* at: [aacom.org/news-and-events/publications/cib](http://aacom.org/news-and-events/publications/cib)
- AAMC Curriculum Directory at: [services.aamc.org/currdir/start.cfm](http://services.aamc.org/currdir/start.cfm)
- Also:
  - Cornell Career Services health careers advisor
  - Faculty advisor/health careers advisor in your college
  - Students/recent graduates enrolled in medical school
  - Other pre-medical/pre-dental students
  - Doctors/dentists, etc.
  - Audio, videotapes, and files on specific schools
- More resources are available in the Link Library at: [career.cornell.edu](http://career.cornell.edu)

### The next step

Developing a strategy is one of the most important parts of a successful application. Medical school acceptance decisions depend upon multiple factors. Use the following key factors to select the schools to which you will apply.

- Your state of residence – Your best chance of acceptance is at state-supported institutions in your state of residence. (MD/PhD programs are an exception.)
- Your competitiveness – Schools consider a number of factors. The quantitative ones—GPA and MCAT scores—are the factors that you can use to determine objectively how well your profile fits that of Cornell candidates previously selected at a particular school.
- The school's competitiveness, reputation, and rank – Though all U.S. schools will give you a sound medical education, schools have varying reputations. Ranked lists are an attempt—however imperfect and questionable the methodology involved may be—to quantify a school's reputation. Rankings, if consulted, should be only one of a number of factors used to determine where to apply.
- The school's curriculum and program – Though medical school education is fairly standard, there are variations that are worth learning about and taking into consideration when fine-tuning your list of schools to apply to.

Each of these key factors is described in greater detail below. After you have taken them into consideration, narrow down the list of possible schools to no more than thirty. Consider an appointment with a health careers advisor to discuss your individual situation and choices.

### **Your state of residence**

Because state schools are supported by the taxpayers of the state with the goal of producing health-care providers to practice in the state, usually the greater percentage of places is reserved for their residents, with strict out-of-state quotas set by the legislature. (In addition, some state-supported schools have a preference for candidates from their region of the state.) The “School Entries...” section of *MSAR* gives actual numbers of in-state, out-of-state, and international applicants for each medical school in the country. From this, you can gauge the chances of acceptance based on state residency. Also, when out-of-state acceptances are limited, some medical schools place higher standards on students competing for those acceptances.

While many medical schools are state-supported, a number are privately supported. In general private schools accept more out-of-state residents than state-supported institutions do, but they also may have a preference for in-state students or students from their region of the country.

Some schools that may seem to take large numbers of out-of-state students give preference to residents of certain states. These are usually nearby states with which they have formal agreements. Even when they do not have formal agreements, many schools tend to favor candidates from their geographic region. For further information on specific schools see:

- *MSAR, “Citizenship and Residency” and “Special Regional Opportunities for Applicants”*
- *Medical School Applicants/Matriculants by State of Legal Residence Notebook H999 1020*

### **The school’s competitiveness, reputation, and rank**

Use *MSAR* (to note the number of applicants per matriculated student at specific schools and the median GPA and MCAT score), *Acceptance Data from Selected Medical Schools*, what others say, and what you read in a range of publications to gauge a school’s competitiveness and reputation. Also check rankings to see what quartile a school has fallen in over time. Try to compare different ranking sources. Consider the quartile a school’s ranked number falls in as a “ball park” figure; do not focus on numbers separated by a few digits and ascribe great meaning to that difference. A rank, which may vary depending on the ranking you’re looking at, is only one aspect of a number that you must take into consideration in determining where to apply.

### **The school’s curriculum and program**

Determine if the school is a good “fit” for you. Read its web page, catalogs, as well as the resources listed below, to determine a school’s philosophy and mission, its special features or programs, modes of instruction, and grading system, among other aspects. Consult:

- AAMC Curriculum Directory at: [aamc.org/initiatives/circ/curriculumreports/](http://aamc.org/initiatives/circ/curriculumreports/)
- *2017 Osteopathic Medical College Information Book* at: [acom.org/news-and-events/publications/cib](http://acom.org/news-and-events/publications/cib)
- Professional School Surveys at: [career.cornell.edu/resources/surveys/alumni-medical-admissions-survey.cfm](http://career.cornell.edu/resources/surveys/alumni-medical-admissions-survey.cfm)
- Attend Graduate School Day on Wednesday, September 26 in Barton Hall from 11:00 am-2:00 pm to speak with representatives from medical schools.

### **Number of applications**

Once you have explored the above factors to determine those schools where you have the best chance of being accepted, you need to determine the number of schools to apply to. Nationally, students tend to apply to an average of a dozen schools; Cornell undergraduates and alumni have tended to apply on average to around 22 schools.

It is reasonable to assume that probability of acceptance to some medical schools increases with the number of schools to which application is made. However, there are practical limitations on the number of applications that can be made. These include:

- Limited chances of acceptance at some medical schools, (some state-supported medical schools do not accept out-of-state students),
- Many apparently have minimum GPAs for admission that result in few, if any, acceptances below these limits,
- Time spent on secondary applications and travel, generally during the academic term, and
- Cost of the applications, secondary applications, and travel for interviews.

### Average number of acceptances

The number of acceptances students may see varies with the grade point average. Of those accepted, the pattern over the past couple of years has shown students with a 3.8 or higher GPA tend to see three to four acceptances. Those with GPAs between 3.4 and 3.8 see around one to two acceptances. Students with GPAs in the 3.2 to 3.39 range averaged fewer admissions. This information may be used to give you some idea of the acceptances you might see.

For 2017 matriculation, 42% of national first-time applicants to allopathic medical schools were admitted. For 2017 matriculation, 70.8% of the first-time Cornell applicants were admitted. Of the 70.8% of first-time Cornell applicants with a Bachelor's degree who were admitted to medical schools, 33.2% were accepted to one school, 25.1% were accepted to two schools, 11.8% were accepted to three schools, 12.3% were accepted to four schools, and 17.5% were accepted to five or more schools.

### Other considerations

- Family (and other) connections
  - Some medical schools grant courtesy interviews to children of their alumni. Whether or not any preference is given for acceptance usually is not known. A courtesy interview is sometimes offered to a candidate who has a friend or relative who can make a special request at a particular school.
- Women
  - The percentage of women enrolled, which varies by school, ranges from approximately 30% to approximately 60%. See the school's web pages for more information.
- Underrepresented
  - Students may obtain information and counseling on an individual basis from the health careers advisor and advisors in their colleges. Individual counseling enables consideration of national acceptance figures and Cornell figures, as well as the optimum time to apply. Also see:
    - *Minority Student Opportunities in United States Medical Schools* H 070
- International, including Canadian, students
  - Only a very few foreign applicants are successful in gaining admission to U.S. medical/dental schools. See *Medical School Admission Requirements* and the *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools* for numbers accepted at each school.
  - For more information, consult the first section of:
    - *Foreigners in U.S. Medical Schools and Foreign Schools for U.S. Citizens* H 999 1008.
  - Discuss with a health careers advisor any concerns you have about financing your professional education.
- Early Decision
  - MSAR contains details. The health careers advisor can help you determine the pros and cons and the suitability of Early Decision for you.
  - Generally, the requirements to apply for early decision are so much greater than for traditional admission that it is not a good strategy for most students.

## Filing Applications

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### AMCAS and other application services

Most health professional schools participate in centralized, electronic application services. Most U.S. allopathic medical schools are part of AMCAS (American Medical Colleges Application Service); most osteopathic schools are part of AACOMAS (American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service); and most U.S. dental schools are part of AADSAS (Associated American Dental Schools Application Service). This chapter will focus on AMCAS, but other electronic application services are similar. Information on them can be found at the end of this chapter and can be accessed through the Health Careers web page. The services themselves provide extensive information and support on their websites.

An applicant to any one of the AMCAS-participating schools completes the AMCAS application at [aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/](http://aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/). AMCAS then processes the application and sends the information to each school the candidate designates. Interested schools will contact the applicant directly to request more information. For those schools that do not participate in an application service you must go online and apply to each one separately.

AMCAS provides you with an AAMC identification number. To prevent your materials from being mismatched, give the AAMC number to the HCEC and use it on all materials and correspondence you send to medical schools.

### Timing

AMCAS usually becomes available online by early May. Submit the AMCAS application as early as AMCAS will accept it, or as soon thereafter as possible. Remember, though, that an error-free application, not just an early application, should be your goal.

Early submission allows time for you to complete the supplementary materials that will be sent by many schools. In addition, many schools use rolling admissions, admitting a certain number of students each month. Thus, students applying later in the process may be competing for fewer spaces. If MCAT timing is a concern, you should discuss your situation with a health careers advisor.

### Theme or essay

Almost every medical/dental school requires their applicants to write an essay or to answer additional questions. The chapter “Writing the Personal Statements and Themes for HCEC and for Application” has information on this part of the application process. This process is time consuming. The health careers reflection journal can be very helpful in this process. Be prepared to write more than you have probably written in some time.

### Transcripts

Each student is responsible for requesting that official transcripts for all college-level coursework be sent to AMCAS and to each non-AMCAS school. Transcripts may be sent to AMCAS before you submit your application. Cornell transcripts are available from Student Center (accessible via: [studentessentials.cornell.edu/](http://studentessentials.cornell.edu/)). You must indicate that you are sending your electronic transcripts to AMCAS (see instructions at: [transcript.cornell.edu/](http://transcript.cornell.edu/)).

AMCAS also provides information about transcript release online at: [aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/faqs/343432/howdoisendmytranscriptstoamcas.html](http://aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/faqs/343432/howdoisendmytranscriptstoamcas.html).

Transcripts for work completed at other post-secondary institutions are available from the registrars of those institutions.

Send additional transcripts (spring of the year before application and/or fall of the year of application) whenever requested by the schools. If these transcripts are not requested, you may send them at your discretion, depending on whether they enhance your application.



## AMCAS and Cornell courses, grades, and codes

Cornell gives a grade for Physical Education of S-U, but no credit for graduation. It is not included in the cumulative GPA. For AMCAS, use Pass-Fail instead of S-U. When calculating a GPA for AMCAS, use the number of credit hours without P.E.; for example, if the transcript shows 90 hours without P.E., 92 with P.E., divide by 90.

AMCAS has you classify all classes by their primary **content, not by department or course name**. Based on this classification, AMCAS calculates a BCPM (Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Math) GPA, and an AO (All Other) GPA besides the cumulative GPA. The following is a list of some Cornell courses that students commonly question how to classify. **Use these examples and your best judgment to classify all other courses.**

Astronomy	
1103	AO
2211, 2212, 2290, 3332, 4410, & 4432	P
Biology	
Biochemistry	B
Biomedical Ethics, Biology & Soc. 3010	AO
Computer Science	
All Computer Science	AO
Electrical Engineering	
2100, 3030, & 3150	P
Nutritional Sciences	
1150, 2220, 3310, & 3610	B
Psychology	
1101-1102 & 2223	AO
3220, 3610, & 4250	B
Statistics	
AEM 2100, Biometry 3010, ILR 2100,	M
PAM 2100, Psychology 3500,	M
Sociology 3010, & Engineering 2700	M

## English composition courses

If a medical school you are applying to requires that the courses you are using to complete the English requirement have English in the title or course prefix, ask the John S. Knight Institute for Writing to send their explanatory document about Cornell's FWS program to that medical school with the secondary application. Fill in all requested information: [knight.as.cornell.edu/fws-guidelines#medical/dental/grad-schools-letters](http://knight.as.cornell.edu/fws-guidelines#medical/dental/grad-schools-letters).

## Obtaining a statement of good standing, dean's certification form, etc.

If a school requires a statement of good standing, completion of a dean's certification form, or information on any disciplinary or institutional action or violations of the codes of behavior or academic integrity, contact your college's registrar or dean for undergraduate education, or the Barnes Hall health careers advisor for assistance. You must report any institutional action, including verbal warnings, even if Cornell's record of the action was or will be expunged upon graduation.

## Tips for completing the applications

- Obtain a copy of your transcript(s) to use when filling out AMCAS. You can check that the information on the application and on the transcript(s) is accurate.
- Schools often are not familiar with campus organizations or with a specific employment position; therefore, they are better able to interpret your work and extracurricular activities if you describe briefly what the organization is.
- A copy of the final application helps in filling out future applications or in duplicating any materials if needed.

- Previous applicants report that the common application may take from 2-10 hours to complete online. The essay may take from 10-40 hours. Supplemental essays may take from 1-5 hours each.

### **Responsibilities of the student**

You are responsible for assuring that your application is complete at all schools to which you applied. To ensure accuracy use your name, Cornell ID, and AAMC ID, in phone and written communication. You should check online to be sure that all other materials have arrived and that your file is in order. Some schools will post information concerning the status of the file; however, not all schools do so.

### **Combined degree programs**

Students interested in MD/PhD or other combined degree programs should consult the Health Careers web pages and the following resources in the Career Library, 103 Barnes Hall.

- AAMC MD/PhD web site (GREAT) at: [aamc.org/members/49336/great/](http://aamc.org/members/49336/great/)
- *Combined Degree Programs Notebook* H 999 1006
- *The Complete Guide to the MD/PhD Degree* H 085

### **Simultaneous applications**

Explore with a health careers advisor options for applying to graduate and/or to two or more health professional schools simultaneously.

### **Canadian schools**

Students applying to Canadian schools may need to interpret their transcripts at these schools. For further information see in the Career Library:

- *Admission Requirements to Canadian Faculties of Medicine and Their Selection Policies* H 999 1002
- MSAR online

### **Weill Cornell Medicine (WCM)**

Weill Cornell Medicine welcomes applications from highly qualified medical school applicants who are either current undergraduates at Cornell or Cornell alumni. All Cornell applicants are given careful attention and consideration.

### **Addenda**

After submitting the original application, you may supply information about important changes or new accomplishments by sending a letter at a later date to each medical school to which you applied. Such information may enhance chances for admission. Also, additional letters of recommendation may be submitted. See "Follow up Actions" in Chapter 8 of this *Guide*.

# Chapter 7

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Interviews: Basic Pattern, Techniques, and Tips

Sample Interview Questions



## Interviews: Overview, Techniques, and Tips

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Interviews are an important part of the medical/dental school application process. Your first “real” interview in the process may be your HCEC interview. Later, medical or dental schools that are interested in you will want to interview you. These interviews may be in one of two formats: traditional or multiple mini interviews (MMI). Look upon interviewing as a skill you need to develop, and use the following information to become a good interviewee.

### Overview

In order to be successful in a medical school interview, you need to articulate convincingly:

- Why you want to be a doctor,
- How you are qualified to study medicine, and
- Why you want to study at the school at which you are interviewing.

You need to demonstrate enthusiasm and confidence. It is not enough to have written about your desire to study medicine in your personal statement. You must convince the medical school that *you* are the right candidate, as medical schools have far too many qualified applicants to choose from. The interview is where medical school admissions officers distinguish between these students and create a balanced, diverse incoming class. Most Cornell students get just one or two medical school admissions offers (see Chapter 6 for detailed data), so it is extremely important to prepare fully so you convert your interview into an offer.

### Interview techniques

- Develop a firm handshake.
- Maintain eye contact.
- If asked a complex or long question, restate it before answering.
- Take time to think before you answer; don't be afraid of short pauses.
- Learn to generate answers that are neither too long (over two minutes) nor too short (under twenty seconds).
- Help your interviewer. Signal with a gesture or a phrase when coming to the end of an answer.
- Frame your answer; for example, start with, “I see three main points....”
- Use “bridging” techniques to introduce and to expand on information. Answer the question asked, then “bridge” to introduce information you want to highlight. For example, if asked about your research experience, you might respond, “Yes, I did research for two summers.... (Then bridging) Additionally, I was a peer drug and alcohol educator....”

### Interview tips

- Arrive early, but no more than ten minutes before your appointment.
- Treat everyone you meet on the day of the interview with the utmost respect. Every interaction is a part of your interview and is subject to analysis.
- Expect to be nervous at the outset. Nervousness is a natural function that helps you perform at your best.
- Emphasize the positive.
- Ask for explanations if you don't understand questions, and remember it is okay to say, “I don't know.”
- Don't belittle yourself or your experiences with comments like, “I was just a volunteer....”
- Let your enthusiasm and self-confidence show; be yourself, relax, and smile.
- **Do not fail to respond to all interview invitations.** If you are unable or decide not to go to an interview, you need to cancel it by contacting the HCEC interviewer and HCEC staff and/or the medical/dental school admissions office as soon as possible.

## Resources

The following are available in the Career Library, 103 Barnes.

- *Health and Medical Ethics Notebook* H/999/1012
- *Code of Medical Ethics (AMA)* H230
- *Ethics and Code of Conduct (ADA) Notebook* H/999/1027a
- *Health Current Events Notebook* H/999/1011
- *Interview for Success* JS 055
- *Sweaty Palms – The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed* JS 060
- *Interview Report Forms Notebook* – Contains student comments submitted after interviews at medical/dental schools and gives questions they recall being asked, “usual” and “unusual.”
- Medical/dental school publications and videos available on the web
- Professional School Surveys –A searchable database of what Cornell alumni think of their medical and dental schools at: [career.cornell.edu/resources/surveys/alumni-medical-admissions-survey.cfm](http://career.cornell.edu/resources/surveys/alumni-medical-admissions-survey.cfm).

Also, *Career Guide*—pick up at Cornell Career Services, 103 Barnes Hall or your college career office, or access online at [career.cornell.edu](http://career.cornell.edu). See the chapter on “Interviewing.” Students are also encouraged to utilize *Optimal Interview* and the mock interviews provided by Career Services.

## Sample Interview Questions

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Interviewers try to assess the applicant in three broad areas: 1) personal characteristics, 2) academic achievement and intellectual ability, and 3) experiences important to being a medical/dental student (preparedness, knowledge of the field and its ethical issues). Any one interview question could cover two or three of these areas or address only one of them. All questions will help the interviewer assess intellectual abilities, such as analytical thinking and logical thought. Generally, all of these questions could be appropriate for both the HCEC and medical/dental school interviews. This sample is given to help prepare students for the interview process. It is essential for you to engage in post-interview assessment to develop interviewing skills. Students should also take advantage of mock interviews provided by Career Services and *Optimal Interview*.

- I. The following questions can be used to explore an applicant's personal characteristics. These can also help "warm up" the interviewee.
  1. Tell me about yourself.
  2. What do you do to relax?
  3. Describe a difficult problem you have encountered, how you resolved it, and what you would do if faced with it again?
  4. What prevents people from becoming ideal doctors?
  5. What else do you want to accomplish in life besides attending medical/dental school and being a doctor/dentist?
  6. What would you do if you were independently wealthy? Why?
  7. What special qualities do you bring to a career in medicine/dentistry?
  8. If you were going to give yourself an interview question, what would it be?
  9. What are your key strengths as a leader? As a team member?
  10. What has been your most interesting summer experience since graduating from high school, and what did you gain from it?
  
- II. These questions can be used to explore an applicant's academic achievements.
  1. If you could live your college years over again, what would you change?
  2. Why did you choose the college and major you chose?
  3. How did you choose your elective courses?
  4. What circumstances enabled you in/prevented you from achieving the grades you desired?
  5. How would you describe your accomplishments in comparison to other Cornell undergraduates and alumni?
  6. What has been the most interesting learning experience so far in your college career? Why?
  7. If you were on a committee to revise education for premeds/pre-dents at Cornell, what would you propose? Why?
  
- III. These questions can be used to explore an applicant's preparation for medicine/dentistry and knowledge of the field and its ethical issues.
  1. When health care costs are exorbitant, who should receive this care? Who should decide?
  2. What changes would you make in the present health care system? Why? What might be the possible consequences of these changes?
  3. What do you see as the reason for the uneven distribution of doctors between urban and rural areas? Propose some means of correcting this problem.
  4. As a doctor/dentist, what would you do if a child/adult patient refused to be treated?
  5. Is it harder to practice as a specialist or a general practitioner? Why?
  6. In what ways has your experience in health care (student organization, research, volunteer, or employment) prepared you for medical school or being a doctor/dentist?
  7. As a doctor, you must amputate a child's arm. How would you explain this to the child?

Also, a question often asked at medical/dental school interviews: Why do you want to attend our school?





# Chapter 8

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Enhancing Your Chances: Follow-up Actions

Medical School Acceptance Protocol

How to Select the School You'll Attend

Financial Planning for Medical School

If You're Not Accepted



## Enhancing Your Chances: Follow-up Actions

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### **Purpose**

After you submit an application, you may take steps to enhance your credentials and to call them to the attention of admissions committees. Follow-up action may be used in any situation where you hope to change the status of your application, for example, from “not interviewed” to “interviewed,” from “not accepted” to “accepted,” and from “waitlist” to “accepted.”

### **Timing**

It is difficult to give general guidelines on when to follow up and to what extent because this varies depending on the date of application, action taken to date, the school, your background and your feelings. For help in developing plans, seek assistance from a health careers advisor. See also: AAMC acceptance recommendations at: [www.aamc.org/students/applying/recommendations/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/recommendations/).

### **Verify you are complete**

First of all, don't assume your file is complete. If the school does not provide this information, e-mail each school where you applied asking for verification that the file is complete.

### **Send transcripts**

Have summer school and/or January transcripts forwarded from the Registrar's Office of the institution attended. Medical schools may request transcripts after the fall semester grades are reported; their web page or admissions material will indicate if this is the case. If the admission office does not request it, you have the option of sending it, based on the grades you received and whether they enhance your application. A letter from you to the admissions committee calling attention to courses and grades on the transcript may be useful.

### **Relay new information**

Information you provide on any new health-related experience acquired during the summer or school year, a progress report on an honors thesis, a publication or pending publication, a prize or honor, research, and/or courses in progress can be added to your application file at a number of points.

### **Send additional letters of recommendation**

Have letters from professors, employers, research advisors, activity advisors, alumni, etc., sent when they add some information or insight not available when you were completing the required HCEC materials or the application. In order to avoid confusion, you will want to inform the admissions committee which letters to expect and let them know they are in addition to the HCEC file. Some medical schools have online sites where materials can be submitted. You may create a file with Interfolio to manage these letters or use the AMCAS letter writer link (prior to the submission deadline of the school). If using AMCAS; do not direct letters to your school until after the HCEC letter has been received by AMCAS. Letters can also be sent by mail. The school's website may tell you what they prefer.

### **Telephone or e-mail**

You may call or e-mail the Office of Admissions (identify yourself using name and AMCAS ID) to check the status of the application, especially if you have received no word from the school by January and the application has been verified as complete. Read the application materials to determine a given school's policy on telephone calls and e-mails before you proceed.

You may also ask someone to call on your behalf to encourage the school to offer an interview or acceptance. Such a call would be most effective coming from someone who knows you well, such as a teacher or mentor who would be able to answer questions about you and your candidacy if asked by the admissions officer. Note that the health careers advisor in 103 Barnes Hall does not conduct outreach to medical schools on behalf of individual students (see the last item in this chapter).

**Request an interview**

A well-timed request to be interviewed in the latter part of the interview season is a *possible* action. It should be used with great discretion, depending, in part, on the application instructions.

**Contact Cornell alumni**

Contact Cornell alumni enrolled at a particular medical school. Use LinkedIn or build a profile and participate in Cornell's CUeLINKS ([cuelinks.cornell.edu](http://cuelinks.cornell.edu)). CUeLINKS is a new platform for connecting with Cornell Alumni.

**Visit the school**

Visit the school during the summer before desired matriculation in order to talk with the admissions officer; however, this must be handled with care.

**Offer to postpone**

Some candidates who are on a waiting list very late in the acceptance cycle (i.e., until just before classes begin) may want to try to negotiate an acceptance for the following year. Some schools may give an acceptance for the current year with the agreement that the candidate will defer until the *following* year. Some schools may ask the candidate to apply Early Decision with the understanding, implicit or explicit, that the candidate will be accepted prior to October 1 for matriculation the next fall.

**Last available date**

Medical schools do not have a uniform opening date; School A may start earlier than School B. If you are accepted at School A and are on the waiting list at School B, it may be good strategy to let School B know that you will not be available after a certain date (opening day for School A).

**Role of the HCEC Chairperson and the Health Careers Advisor, Barnes Hall**

The role of the HCEC chairperson and the Barnes Hall health careers advisor precludes interceding with the health professional schools to obtain acceptance, or interviews, or favored consideration for individual students. The health careers advisor may contact the schools in the case of a misunderstanding of an administrative process. The health careers advisor is available to advise students on follow-up actions.

## Medical School Acceptance Protocol

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Congratulations! Celebrate and savor your first acceptance. But then what? When you get your first acceptance, accept that school, at least until hearing from another school. Acceptance is not a permanent commitment. You have until April 30 to choose the school in which you plan to enroll and to withdraw, in writing, from all others you have accepted. (See *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*, “Timetable for Entering Class” section, for each dental school for deadline and deposit information at dental schools.)

### The general rule

The AAMC traffic rules allow applicants to hold multiple offers until April 30, 2019. You may hold two places while waiting to hear what financial aid will be offered or until you can make a final decision on where you would like to attend. If adequate financial aid information is not available, that may necessitate holding multiple acceptances until you have the necessary information.

### The applicant’s responsibility

Whenever you receive an acceptance, withdraw as soon as possible other applications from any schools on your list that you would not attend in preference to the one that offered acceptance. You should not withdraw your application from any schools higher on your list of preferences than the school where a place has been offered.

### Help your classmates and yourself

The benefit to Cornell classmates of following this protocol is that as applicants release these spots, they may become available to other Cornell undergraduates and alumni. Future Cornell undergraduates and alumni also benefit when the professional schools sense responsible and considerate acceptance behavior from current Cornell applicants. Also benefiting are the schools; they then can offer the place to another applicant. This prompt withdrawal by applicants aids the entire process and thereby lessens the anxieties for others.

### AAMC recommendations: protocol and refunds

*Recommendations for Medical School Admissions Officers and Applicants* includes information on acceptance protocol and deposit refunds and can be found at: [students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/application-and-acceptance-protocols-admission-off/](http://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/application-and-acceptance-protocols-admission-off/).

## How to Select the School You’ll Attend

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If you are in the position of choosing among acceptances, give some thought to where you’d thrive; seek out information from a range of resources on a wide range of aspects. Just as you did not want the medical/dental schools to go only by your numbers, do not overly rely on a school’s ranking number. Consult the following:

- Advisors
- Other pre-medical/pre-dental students
- Students enrolled in the medical or dental school
- Doctors and/or alumni of various schools
- Professional School Surveys – completed by Cornell undergraduates and alumni
- Bulletins, catalogs, web pages, etc.
- Financial aid resources
- AAMC Curriculum Directory and *Directory of American Medical Education*.
- Review your notes from your interview day. Attending a “second-look day” or a visit to the school and its financial aid office can also be helpful.

## Obtain information on the following

Consider these factors in the context of your own personal values and what you are looking for in a medical school.

### Program

- What is the philosophy of medical education?
- Is the program research-oriented or clinically-oriented?
- Are there any special academic programs?
- What are the course and program offerings?
- What is the elective program?
- What types of exams are given?
- Does the school have a basic science or a systems approach?
- Does the school use problem-based learning or some other approach?
- How do its students perform on the United States Medical Licensing Examinations (USMLE)?
- Is there early opportunity for clinical exposure?
- What is the relationship to other schools (e.g., Public Health) and to other graduate programs?
- Does the school have program links to the community?

### Faculty

- What is the quality of the faculty?
- What is their academic training?
- What is their research activity and productivity?
- Is it largely full-time faculty or are large numbers of visiting faculty employed?
- Where did they obtain their degrees?
- Are they involved in advising students?
- Do they have other interaction with students?
- What do students say about their teaching effectiveness?
- What are the affiliated hospitals?
- Who are the house staff (residents) and what is their background and training?

### Students

- What is the nature of the student body and what are their accomplishments?
- What is the size of the class?
- What is the male-female ratio?
- Where did they do their undergraduate work?
- What states are they from?
- What is the mean MCAT? Mean GPA? Mean age?
- How is student morale?
- How much interaction is there among students, especially between classes (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year)?
- Are alumni loyal to the college and each other?

### Clinical Opportunities

- What are the clinical facilities (e.g., public/private hospitals in what kinds of neighborhoods)?
- What is the ratio of students to hospital beds?
- What is the nature of affiliated hospitals?
- What is the size of the outpatient department?
- What is the extent of patient contact?
- What is the patient population?
- What are the ambulatory sites?

### Reputation

- How selective is admission?
- What is the national reputation?
- Is it a state-supported (public) school or private?
- Is the school associated with a university?
- What are the accomplishments of its graduates?
- Where do its graduates receive residency placements? (See: [careermd.com](http://careermd.com) to research residencies by location and specialty.)
- Is its research well funded?
- Will graduating from this medical school enhance career options?

### Finances

- What are the tuition costs and total living expenses?
- Are there travel or commuting expenses?
- Is a car necessary?
- What financial aid is available?
- Is tuition going up?
- Is financial/budget management advice available?

### Environment

- What are the living conditions?
- Is the school friendly? Cold? High pressured?
- What provisions are made for personal safety?
- Is this a desirable area to establish a practice?

### Facilities, Housing

- What is the quality of the facilities, including the library, laboratories, equipment and facilities, self-instruction, computers, and informational technologies?
- Are housing facilities owned by the school?

### For the Whole Person

- What are the possibilities for cultural, social, religious, and group (gender, ethnic, interest-based, etc.) participation?
- Does the school own recreation facilities?
- Is counseling available?

# Financial Planning for Medical School

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## What will it cost?

Most medical schools' financial aid policies are based on the belief that the primary responsibility for meeting the cost of education rests with the student and the family. Students who need financial aid should be prepared to borrow heavily for their medical education. In 2017 the average total debt of those graduating from medical school was \$206,204 for private schools, and \$181,179 for public schools. If a school has grants and you qualify, this may reduce the amount you have to borrow. Currently, the annual average public tuition is \$30,958 and average private tuition is \$52,237.

The financial aid process can be complex, involving you, your family, the government, private organizations, and the school. All medical schools develop student budgets that reflect reasonable costs for that school for a given academic period. Schools, however, vary widely in the size and composition of the financial aid packages as well as scholarship availability.

## How does the financial aid process work?

The majority of financial aid programs determine eligibility on the basis of need, and a needs analysis application and/or school-specific forms must be filed. Some schools offer merit scholarships.

## When should I apply and what do I need to do?

To assure optimal consideration for all types of financial assistance, you should be aware that both your and your family's personal income tax returns for the most recent year should be completed and filed as early as possible. (Family includes your spouse and both natural parents, if they are divorced.) FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) applications for financial aid should be submitted as soon as possible after the first of the year.

The following documents are usually required in order to complete a financial aid application.

- FAFSA application. Form is available on FAFSA website at: [FAFSA.ed.gov](http://FAFSA.ed.gov). (Please note: The FAFSA application cannot be sent before January 1.)
- Copy of parents' and/or spouse's current federal income tax return filed or non-tax filer form.
- Copy of student's current federal income tax return filed or non-tax filer form.
- Institution's application.

## Determining financial aid eligibility

Financial aid is usually awarded only after an evaluation of your and your family's ability to meet the cost of education. The intent of the financial aid program is to help you in meeting any shortfall that exists after a maximum effort has been made by you and your family to meet the costs. Financial need is the calculated difference between a student's total available resources and the projected school budget for an academic period. (To be eligible or to participate in federal loan and scholarship programs, a student must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. Some institutions consider foreign nationals for institutional funds; however, most do not.)

## What can I do now?

- Discuss financing your medical education with your family.
- Estimate and list all resources available to you, including anticipated income and savings.
- Determine medical school expenses by reviewing web pages, cost of living in various geographical areas (use an online cost of living calculator to help determine this), your personal habits, marital status, etc.
- Prepare in writing an income and expense budget for a year.
- Learn as much as possible about the financial aid programs used in financing medical education. See library resources below and the Cornell Career Services web pages.

Debts, other than long-term education debts (i.e., credit card debt, car loans, and other outstanding bills), must be taken care of by the student prior to matriculation. Financial aid cannot be used to



resolve prior personal debt obligations. In addition, a negative credit rating may cause ineligibility for some student aid programs, which require a credit check before granting the loan.

Students who have any doubt about their credit rating should request a copy of their credit report and reconcile any problems before matriculating in medical school. In addition, students cannot be in default on prior educational loans. Medical schools have rescinded an acceptance when a student's credit rating was poor. The following national credit reporting organizations can give you information on your credit rating: TransUnion, Experian, and Equifax. Free credit reports are available from: [consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0155-free-credit-reports?utm\\_source=takeaction](http://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0155-free-credit-reports?utm_source=takeaction), [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com), and 877-322-8228.

### **Private loan/scholarship opportunities**

Numerous private organizations, foundations, and institutions offer loan or scholarship assistance to students based on specific selection criteria. Local community organizations and regional institutions may provide monetary assistance to those in their own geographic area. Many application deadlines occur in the early spring.

### **Service scholarships**

Service scholarships are available through branches of the military, the National Health Service Corps, and state governments. Most of these programs pay all or part of the educational and living expenses in return for a service commitment for a specified period of time. These programs allow students to incur little or no debt to finance their medical education, but there are service obligations to consider. The scholarship portion of the NHSC Scholarship is not taxable; however, the stipend for living expenses is.

### **Resources in the Career Library - 103 Barnes**

*ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*, Chapter 4, pp. 47-59

*Careers in Family Practice Notebook*

*Scholarships, Grants and Prizes*

H 090

H 999 1005

FS 055

### **Web links**

- Health Careers Program web page. See "Applying" section at [career.cornell.edu/paths/health/medschool/index.cfm](http://career.cornell.edu/paths/health/medschool/index.cfm)
- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC): [aamc.org/services/fao-first/445960/first-audience.html](http://aamc.org/services/fao-first/445960/first-audience.html)
- Scholarships/Fellowships: [FastWeb.com](http://FastWeb.com)
- Loans: [salliemae.com](http://salliemae.com); [ed.gov/finaid/landing.jhtml](http://ed.gov/finaid/landing.jhtml); [finaid.org](http://finaid.org)

## If You're Not Accepted

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In recent years, half of all applicants nationally, and over a quarter of Cornell applicants, have not been accepted to medical school. Each person's situation is unique. Rejection is a setback, but it need not be the end of your goal to attend a health professions school. With sound planning, many students go on to gain admission. Use the University's advising resources to review your individual situation. Make an appointment with the health careers advisor in 103 Barnes Hall or contact the health careers advisor or career counselor in your college. Also consult the Career Library and web resources listed below. This is the time to learn about all your options -- you do have a number of them. Then you can determine your next step and create a plan for achieving your goals. If getting into medical school did not work out for you on your first try, it is time for serious reassessment and decision-making? Should you re-apply or look into a different career? And what would be the best course of action for you to proceed with either decision?

To answer those and related questions, you need to assess your situation realistically. You'll want to discover any weak areas in your credentials and determine what you can do to improve your chances if you re-apply. You'll also want to revisit alternative options - a different career choice you could pursue within the health care professions or in an entirely different field unrelated to health care.

Two options students often think of are immediate re-application or attending a foreign medical school. Before re-applying, however, it is advisable to take the time to determine what went wrong and to address those issues. Medical school admission officers state that they look for substantial improvement in the credentials of a re-applicant. It is essential, therefore, that you determine what aspect of your application needs to be strengthened and focus on that. For example, if your science GPA is not competitive, additional science courses must be taken. Health career related employment, a degree in another health field, work in research, a high MCAT score, or strength in some other aspect of your credentials will not "compensate" for the primary problem with the science GPA.

Sometimes students (or their parents) do not want to wait to re-apply. However, rushing to re-apply before the problem in the previous application has been addressed is the surest way **not** to be successful. Before applying to foreign medical schools, investigate the ones you are considering using the resources listed below and the questions posed in "How to Select the School You'll Attend" in this *Guide*.

See the HCEC chapter in this *Guide* and the information provided in the *HCEC Registrant Guide* for procedures for updating or reactivating your HCEC registration for reapplication.

### Resources

- *Guide for First- and Second-Year Pre-Medical Students*. See "The Six Admission Factors." Copies are available on lobby racks in 103 Barnes, in college advising offices, and at [career.cornell.edu](http://career.cornell.edu).
- See college career office web pages for careers pursued in different majors.
- *Exploring Health Care Careers* H 137a & 137b
- *Foreigners in U.S. Schools/Foreign Schools for U.S. Citizens* H 999 1008



# **Cornell Career Services**

103 Barnes Hall • 255-5296 • [career.cornell.edu](http://career.cornell.edu)