

HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS TO MEDICAL SCHOOLS

2011-2012

1. HOW TO APPROACH THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Before beginning your application please read this guide thoroughly so you will understand how the entire application process works. Unfortunately, in the Health Professions and Prelaw Center we have observed that many excellent applicants are not accepted every year due to a simple failure to read instructions and follow them in a timely manner. Don't let this be you!

Your initial contact with the medical school admissions committee will be through your written application. Submitting complete, polished documents that you have spent some time preparing will reflect well on your potential as a medical student and future physician. Your application should reflect all of the thoughtful preparation you have made for a career in medicine so far.

Medical schools are seeking students with good judgment and decision-making skills. They will assess your judgment and decision-making skills by how you go about the application process. If you submit materials late or in a disorganized manner, sometimes admissions committees conclude that you are indecisive about your career intentions.

As medical schools begin to receive applications, they start reviewing them and inviting students for interviews. Many start offering acceptances to students long before the deadline to apply. You will give yourself the best chances for admission if your completed application is one of the first that they consider, rather than one of the last.

The first question to ask before you start your application is whether you are ready to apply to medical school. You should apply as the strongest applicant you can be. If you have recognizable weaknesses in your application, you should consider delaying application to medical school until you can address these weaknesses. You can earn a lot of respect from an admissions committee by having the maturity to recognize weaknesses and do the hard work to address them *before* you apply.

Do not think in terms of just meeting the final deadlines. If a school has a published application deadline of December 1, it does not mean that it's the first date the school will begin to look at applications. It basically means, "December 1 is the last date we will look at an application from any applicant who has superior qualifications." Do not wait until the deadline to submit materials. Remember that just as applicants are competing to be admitted, schools are competing for the best students and do not wait on late applications to fill their classes.

If you have applied previously to medical school and were not admitted, please make sure to read the section "For Reapplicants."

2. OVERVIEW OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

To apply to most medical schools in the United States, the applicant initiates the process through the submission of one, centralized "primary" application that can be sent to multiple medical schools. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) provides a centralized primary application called AMCAS that can be used to apply to allopathic (MD) schools. The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM) provides a primary application called AACOMAS that can be used to

apply to osteopathic (DO) schools. Most schools participate in these online application services, although there are a few that do not.

Applying to medical school is a two-step process: you submit the primary application first, and secondary applications second. After you submit the primary, you should wait for instructions from each individual medical school on how to submit the secondary application materials.

3. THE PRIMARY APPLICATION

The 2012 AMCAS and AACOMAS online applications will be found at the following web addresses:

AMCAS: <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/start.htm>

AACOMAS: <http://www.aacom.org/InfoFor/applicants/Pages/default.aspx#aacomas>

The 2012 AMCAS application is scheduled to become available on May 5, 2011. The 2012 AACOMAS application is scheduled to become available on May 5, 2011. For the AMCAS and AACOMAS primary applications you will create your own User Name and Password that will allow you to create your online application. You can log in and out of your online application, and spend as long as you like entering information and making sure that everything is accurate and complete. The earliest date you can submit the AMCAS and AACOMAS applications is June 1, 2011. When you are satisfied with the application you submit it electronically and it is sent to AMCAS/AACOMAS for processing. We would recommend that you wait until you receive your MCAT scores before you submit the completed application.

On the AMCAS application, once you submit the application you cannot make changes on the main body of it (with the exception of sections pertaining to personal information, letters of recommendation, and MCAT exams).

Guides to the AMCAS application process can be found by going to the link at: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/>. A complete guide to the AMCAS application can be found by clicking on "2012 AMCAS Instruction Book" at the link above. The application is complicated but most questions can be answered by referring to the appropriate sections listed in the table of contents.

Before starting to fill out the AMCAS application, we recommend that you print out this Instruction Book and keep it in a file folder to use as a reference guide as you fill out the application. A complete instruction manual for the AACOMAS application will also be provided on the AACOMAS website.

You will be assigned a number by AMCAS/AACOMAS. Please provide your AMCAS/AACOMAS number to the HPPLC office when requesting that the HPPLC office send out letters of recommendation for you.

Please note: You can submit your AMCAS application without completing the "Letters of Recommendation" section and fill that section out later, even after you have submitted your AMCAS application. Do not delay submitting your primary application just because your recommendation file is not complete or you are not sure how to fill out that section, because you can complete it later if necessary.

Some Tips on the Various Sections of the Applications:

Institutional Action/Academic or Conduct Problems/Legal Disclosure (AMCAS AND AACOMAS)

The AMCAS application asks: "Were you ever the recipient of any institutional action by any college or medical school for unacceptable academic performance or conduct violation?" The AACOMAS application also asks whether you have been the recipient of any action for academic performance or personal conduct. If your answer is "yes," there is a space on the application for you to explain the circumstances. You must report any institutional action (warning or simple reprimand letters included). You are required to answer this question accurately and provide all relevant information.

Individual medical schools will ask you later on to submit a form or letter from your undergraduate school verifying that your report is accurate, often referred to as a “Dean of Student’s Letter.” If you are in doubt about whether you have a record of any violations please check first with the Office of Student Ethics (801 N. Jordan Avenue; 855-5419).

The AMCAS application also requires you to disclose if you have ever been convicted, pled guilty, or no contest to a felony or misdemeanor. The AACOMAS application requires you to disclose misdemeanor and felony convictions. IU School of Medicine also requires you to submit a Legal Disclosure form, as is the case with many other medical schools. AMCAS and many medical schools now conduct Criminal Background Checks (consult the AMCAS website for more information).

The bottom line is: disclose anything you are asked to disclose. Reporting and explaining problems is always the best approach. Most important may be to admit the mistake and explain what you learned from the experience. Not reporting or misreporting can be disastrous for your application and to your future in the profession.

Schools Attended (AMCAS AND AACOMAS)

List every school that you have attended and the dates of attendance.

Coursework (AMCAS AND AACOMAS)

You will need to have a transcript from every college you have attended before you can fill out this section. In this section you fill in information on every college course you have taken. Before filling out this section you should gather copies of all your transcripts from every school you have attended. If you completed coursework at another university and transferred credit to IU, make sure you enter the course information as it appears on the *original school’s transcript*, not as it appears on the IU transcript.

AMCAS and AACOMAS require each student to submit grade information in one standardized form so that the application system can then calculate each student’s GPA in a standardized form that can be used to compare all applicants, regardless of the grading system used at the university the applicant attended. For this reason your GPA as calculated by the application system may be slightly different than the GPA that appears on your IU transcript.

You will enter a course classification for each course according to the subject matter of the course. Please consult the resources in the AMCAS and AACOMAS Instruction Manuals for guidance on how to classify courses.

Some tips on how to fill in special course information:

- If the course is listed on your transcript then you should list it in this section, even if you withdrew and received a grade of W.
- If you completed college courses while in high school you list them as courses completed in high school on the AMCAS application. You do not list anything under “Course Type” but you do list a grade. Such courses would include courses taken through Indiana University’s Advance College Project.
- Your transcript may show that you have taken exams which either earned you college credit or exempted you from a requirement (for instance, English Composition). You need to distinguish between credit-by-examination and exemption-by-examination. How do you know the difference? Look at the number of credit hours shown on that line of your transcript.
 - If you were exempt from a requirement, the line on your transcript will show “0” credit hours. Select “Exempt” on the AMCAS application for any listing of a course exemption due to passing a departmental exam. Do not assign “Exempt” to any course for which credit was awarded. *Please be advised that an exemption from an undergraduate requirement is not generally considered to be equivalent to earning Advanced Placement credit or credit from coursework, and will not generally be accepted to meet medical school admissions requirements.*
 - If you received college credit-by-examination, the line on your transcript will show a certain number of credit hours. Select “Advanced Placement (AP)” under course type. Advanced Placement credits are entered on the AMCAS application with the freshman year. Only list AP credits that appear on your transcript. If you received credit from IU on

the basis of a departmental exam the credit also should be entered as Advanced Placement credit. *Please be advised that some medical schools prohibit or restrict the use of AP credit toward fulfillment of the admission requirements.*

- Please see the AMCAS Instruction Book for information on how to enter other types of special credit. If in doubt, please call AMCAS at 202-828-0600 or consult with Dr. Tolen on how to enter the information.
- List summer courses with the upcoming academic year.
- You should make note of any classes that were Intensive Writing courses. Some medical schools may be willing to count these courses towards their English course requirements, where applicable.
- Use deferred grade for research if no grade has been assigned yet.

Work and Activities (AMCAS AND AACOMAS)

In this section you provide information on work experiences, extracurricular experiences, volunteering, awards, honors and publications that you would like to bring to the attention of the admissions committee. Shadowing of physicians and medically-related volunteering should be listed here. The AMCAS application limits you to listing a maximum of 15 accomplishments in this section. Space is provided for you to write a few sentences or a paragraph on each activity. A recommended approach is to briefly describe in a few sentences what you did and then in one or two sentences reflect on what you got out of the experience.

New in 2011: You will be asked on the AMCAS application to identify up to three of your experiences that you consider the most meaningful experiences. For the three that you designate, you will be given additional space up to 1325 additional characters to write a brief essay. AMCAS advises that for these brief essays “you might want to consider the transformative nature of the experience, the impact you made while engaging in the activity and the personal growth you experienced as a result of your participation.”

It is as important to write something significant about your accomplishments as to list them. The space provided gives you another opportunity to communicate to the admissions committee, so it is to your advantage to spend some time crafting descriptions of your activities that reflect well on your preparation for a career in medicine. It is sometimes more impressive to an admissions committee to list a smaller number of significant achievements and activities in which you were deeply involved rather than a longer list of activities in which you were only superficially involved.

Personal Statement and MD/PhD Essays

Beyond knowing your GPA and your MCAT score, an admissions committee wants to know who you are as a person and why you are pursuing a career in medicine. Your personal statement provides the opportunity to communicate directly about these issues to the admissions committee. The AMCAS application suggests that you may wish to address the following questions in your personal statement:

Why have you selected the field of medicine? What motivates you to learn more about medicine? What do you want medical schools to know about you that has not been disclosed in another section of the application?

The personal statement essentially tells a story about you and how you have come to this stage in your life. Often, applicants employ narrative techniques in their statements, through which the writer recounts an experience or event that shaped the writer, sparked an interest in medicine, or an event that clarified that medicine was the right choice for him or her. Using concrete, descriptive language in writing about your personal experiences can be very effective and convincing to an admissions committee. Detailed descriptions of events and experiences tend to reveal more about the inner experience of the writer than generalizations.

A good personal statement demonstrates a healthy balance between self-awareness and reflection on the larger society. One should not come across as so self-absorbed in the personal statement that an admissions committee will be concerned about your ability to relate to your patients as human beings, but the statement should reflect a personal perspective. In addition, through the personal statement the

admissions committee can assess the complexity of your reasoning and analytical skills. An essay stating relatively simple reasons for why you are interested in a career in medicine (“I want to help people”) may not be as impressive as one that demonstrates an understanding of the complex realities that healthcare providers and their patients often face.

Keeping a journal can be very helpful for preparing for this stage in your journey to medical school. The journal can help you generate ideas so that then you can pick out the best ones to include in your personal statement. You may find that you have written some material in your journal that you can revise and incorporate into your personal statement. Your journal can be very helpful also when preparing additional essays for secondary applications and in preparing for your interviews.

If you are applying through AACOMAS to osteopathic schools, your essay also should reflect your knowledge of, and interest in, osteopathic medicine. If you are applying to both allopathic and osteopathic schools you will want to tailor your essays for each audience.

The AMCAS application asks additional essay questions of applicants to MD/PhD programs. The first of these prompts asks, “please state your reasons for wishing to pursue the combined MD/PhD degree.” The character limit for this essay is 3000 characters. The second one asks you to describe your significant research experience and includes the instructions, “please specify your research supervisor’s name and affiliation, the duration of the experience, the nature of the problem studied, and your contributions to the project.” The available space for this essay is 10,000 characters.

Your essays for these sections should focus on your research interests and reflect specific preparation for a career in research and medicine as a physician-scholar. You will need to be able to articulate specific and convincing reasons about why a combined degree would serve your career purposes in a way that either the MD or PhD alone would not. Many programs will want to see a specific concern with translational research: the process of applying scientific discoveries from the bench at the patient’s bedside.

Some additional tips:

- Your personal statement should not simply recount things that are included in the work and activities section. In fact, in deciding where to include information, the Work and Activities section should generally be focused on “what” you’ve accomplished, whereas in the personal statement the focus should stay on “why” go to medical school. You can write about your activities in your personal statement inasmuch as they illuminate the answer about why you are going to medical school, but your personal statement should not come across simply as an essay about your accomplishments.
- You want to demonstrate your best features to an admissions committee without coming across as conceited. It may take some revision to strike the right balance.
- Make an appointment with Dr. Tolen in the HPPLC office if you would like her to read your essay and provide comments. Also, remember that the essay reflects your unique personal experiences. There is no strict formula for a good personal statement.
- It is okay to use the word “I” with some discretion, but beginning every sentence this way creates an impression that you are egocentric. Try to vary the structure of your sentences.
- Start early and prepare many drafts over time. Re-read your essay each time with fresh eyes.
- Even if you have a 4.0 GPA and a 40 MCAT score you should spend some time crafting a thoughtful essay that reflects the intellectual skills indicated by your numbers.
- Proofread, proofread, and proofread some more. Do not rely on a spell checker alone.
- You may choose to address a personal, judicial, or academic problem (such as a bad semester or a bad grade) in the personal statement. You may also decide to address these problems in some other way, through a letter to the admissions committee, or in the interview. If you choose to address a sensitive problem in your essay do not allow the whole essay to become focused on it, to the extent that you fail to communicate about all the positive ways that you have prepared for medical school.

4. CHOOSING WHERE TO APPLY

You will select the medical schools that you would like to receive a copy of your application when you submit your primary application. You also can send your application to additional schools later for additional fees.

There are many sources for help in deciding where to apply:

- Admissions directors or representatives (many conduct meetings through HPPLC and attend our annual Health Programs Fair)
- Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) (official AAMC publication)
- Osteopathic Medical College Information Book (official AACOM publication)
- Individual medical school websites and publications
- Medical School Admissions Data (handout available from the HPPLC office)
- Friends and colleagues in medical school (realize they probably know their own school quite well, but not other schools)
- Physicians who are recent graduates or who remain involved with medical education

Before you apply try to take a realistic assessment of your MCAT score. Please see the HPPLC document, "Some Guidelines on MCAT Scores." Another document, "Medical School Admissions Data," available from the HPPLC office, lists the average MCAT scores and average GPA's of students accepted at each allopathic school. Please consult with Dr. Tolen for advice on how to use this document to identify schools where you will have the best statistical chance for admission. A general rule is to use the MCAT column (looking for schools with 29, 30, or 31 averages), the out-of state column (looking for those with a big proportion of out-of-state applicants admitted) and then checking the class size column also. By consistently identifying those schools with moderate admission standards that admit a high number of out-of-state students and have larger class sizes, you can actually compete for more seats nationwide by identifying some extra schools to add that can increase your chances of at least one acceptance at the end of the year. Our office has a chart available for the osteopathic medical schools that you can use in the same way.

Please remember that averages are just that; there are many students above and below the average numbers. The numbers represent a simple statistical outcome of a very complex process of evaluation. However, if your MCAT score or GPA is far, far below the average of the school's accepted students, it is statistically likely that the process of evaluation that the school uses will not favor your acceptance.

It is recommended that you check the admissions requirements for each school where you plan to apply, to see if there are additional requirements you need to fulfill. A good source for researching admission requirements is Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR), a book available in the HPPLC office. For instance, some schools have specific requirements for English, Math, Genetics, Biochemistry, or Organic Lab II. However, you should be aware that schools are likely to interview and offer admission to an applicant with strong credentials even if the applicant lacks a particular course requirement, with the stipulation that the applicant must complete the requirement before beginning medical school. Students often can take such courses during the spring or summer term, once they have made a decision to attend a particular school in the fall. You may wish to see how far you get in the application process with a particular school and then decide if you want to add courses to your schedule to meet its requirements.

Do not make the mistake of taking too narrow of an approach initially by applying to only a very small number of schools. Too many applicants do this and regret it when they get further into the application process, and they can only apply to more schools as a late applicant. Many applicants do not do as well in the application process because they initially take an approach that is too narrow or unrealistic. Please consider applying to a range of between 10 to 15 schools. Including schools that give preference to you as an in-state resident and schools that accept large numbers of out-of-state residents but have moderate admission standards is strongly advised.

You also need to remember that you will need to complete secondary applications and pay fees to the individual schools. It is a good idea to create a budget and make sure that you allocate enough funds for completion of the entire application process. AMCAS and AACOMAS have sliding fee scales depending on the number of schools you select. See the application websites for full information on the fee schedules. In addition the secondary application fees for individual schools can range from \$35.00 to \$100.00. Remember you also will have to cover the cost of transportation to interviews, hotel accommodations, and meals. Unfortunately, sometimes applicants are not accepted because they do not complete secondary applications and do not attend interviews after expending a large proportion of their funds on the primary application. You will have the best chance for admission if you apply to a balanced list of schools on the primary application, complete all the secondary applications, and attend all interviews to which you are invited.

Some additional points to consider:

- Your state school(s) will afford some of the best chances for admission.
- Reputation of the school (remember that the rankings by US News and World Reports may not be the most meaningful measure of a school's reputation)
- Teaching/learning style (traditional lecture, practice-based learning, or a combination?). Block scheduling? How do you learn best? Which system would fit you?
- Strength of programs of interest
- Residency placement: Where do grads go? What are the Residency Match Rates?
- Goals of the school for the next decades: to be a great research university, to train tomorrow's leaders in medicine, or to train tomorrow's excellent clinicians in primary care?
- Class size; student-faculty ratio; consistent, significant evidence of faculty interaction and availability beyond the class room.
- Early patient contact; some schools seem to foster much earlier patient contact.
- Grading system
- Teaching hospitals: How many and how convenient?
- Student colleague reputation: competitive or collegial?
- From where does the school attract students? Are students drawn from a broad range of schools or a limited range of schools and geographical regions?
- Programs for underrepresented students
- Student organizations: How active are they in areas that interest you and how much are they supported by the school?
- Combined programs (MD/PhD, MD/MBA, MD/Masters in Public Health, MD/JD). Could you add a program after starting school?
- What about rotations of special interest? If you have a strong interest in international medicine, will it be actively supported by established programs? Will these be available to all interested students or just a few very top performers?

5. **AMCAS EARLY DECISION PROGRAM**

The AMCAS Early Decision program allows a student to be reviewed first for admission at one school if the student meets certain criteria and is willing to make a firm commitment to attend that school. With Early Decision, a student is allowed to apply only to one medical school, and the student must apply by August 1. Early Decision applicants are reviewed first, invited to interview first, and they are notified by October 1. If you wish to apply Early Decision you must indicate it on the AMCAS primary application at the time of submission.

If you apply Early Decision and you are rejected by the school you can then apply to other schools, but since you will not receive notification of your rejection until October 1, this means that you will only be able to apply to other schools in October.

Early Decision may be a good choice for an applicant with reasons for wanting to attend a particular school and when the applicant is assured he/she meets the appropriate standards of the school. It can be risky to apply Early Decision to a school that does not publish explicit eligibility criteria, but is much less risky if the school has set explicit criteria for Early Decision admission and you meet the criteria.

For 2011 Early Decision applicants to the IU School of Medicine the requirements were a 3.6 cumulative and 3.6 science GPA, a 30 MCAT with no score lower than an "8." Check the Indiana University School of Medicine website before applying to be sure that these criteria have not changed.

Check with other medical schools to learn their criteria, how many apply for Early Decision in a cycle, and how many are accepted. Information is available in the book Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR) (available in the HPPLC office) on which schools offer Early Decision programs.

6. MCAT

MCAT scores will be released to you approximately 30 days after you take the test. You can go to the online MCAT Testing History (THx) system and check for your scores once they become available (see the MCAT website).

MCAT scores are automatically released to AMCAS when they become available, so they are officially reported to the schools you select to receive your AMCAS application. If you are planning to re-take the test later in the summer, there is a box you can check on the AMCAS application in order to inform the medical schools. If you take the MCAT exam after your AMCAS application has been processed, AMCAS will automatically send updated score information to the schools you have selected on your AMCAS application.

If you plan to re-take the MCAT and your initial score has already been sent to the medical schools where you applied, you should go to the application website and enter information to let the schools know when you plan to re-take the exam.

MCAT scores are not automatically reported to AACOMAS or to the osteopathic schools where you wish to apply. Therefore, if you are applying to osteopathic schools through AACOMAS you will need to go into the THx system on the MCAT website and release your scores to AACOMAS.

You should also release your MCAT scores to the Indiana University Health Professions Advisor (Dr. Tolen) through the THx system. Please release your MCAT scores to Indiana University so that we can advise you appropriately on the best strategy to take. The data we receive is critical to our ability to give the most beneficial and up-to-date advice to premed students on our campus.

We generally recommend that students take the MCAT by May or June of the year when you are applying; this allows many students extra time in the summer after finals to prepare intensively before taking the exam, without making them late in the application process. A suggested plan would be to devote as much of your free time as possible early in the summer to preparing for the MCAT and take it in May or June (don't worry about filling out the application before the MCAT). You can then use the thirty days after the exam before you receive your scores to fill out your primary application. Try to have your application completed by the time you receive your score. Once you receive your score, assuming the score is strong enough to proceed, you can then submit your primary application. This plan allows you to submit your primary application by early to mid-July, which is what we generally recommend.

If you are unsure about how to interpret your score, please consult with Dr. Tolen in the HPPLC office for advice on whether to re-take the exam. Medical schools have different policies on how they evaluate multiple MCAT scores. Few schools average the scores; more commonly schools may have a policy of taking the highest or most recent score. Nevertheless, as a general rule you should remember that they will see all scores, and the admissions committee members are likely to draw conclusions about them based on what they indicate about your abilities. If one score is mediocre and the other score is fantastic, at the very least they will recognize that you were capable of getting the high score. If you take the test several times and your scores remain low, they are likely to conclude that it is all you are capable of achieving. A decline in your score on a subsequent test can present a serious problem in some cases.

Please make an appointment to meet with Dr. Tolen in the HPPLC office if you would like to discuss the strategy you should take.

7. TRANSCRIPTS

Transcripts are required by AMCAS/AACOMAS before your application will be processed. **The HPPLC Office does not process transcripts.** Transcripts are ordered from the Office of the Registrar from the colleges and universities you have attended. Transcripts must be sent directly from the schools you attended to AMCAS and AACOMAS. These organizations match up your transcripts with your application, verify that you have entered all the information accurately, and then send your application to the medical schools you have selected.

You must submit a transcript from the original school where the coursework was completed, even if the coursework transferred to Indiana University. You do not need to submit high school transcripts.

On the AMCAS application you will print off an **AMCAS Transcript Request form** for each school you have attended, which has all the information needed to order your transcript from that school. This form should be submitted to the Registrar at each school you attended. The printed form includes your AMCAS ID number.

AACOMAS also gives you the option of printing off an **AACOMAS Transcript Request form** from your application and we recommend that you print this form and submit it to the Registrar at each school you attended.

All courses taken at IU campuses appear on one centralized transcript, with the only exception being Purdue courses completed at IUPUI or IU-Fort Wayne (if you completed a Purdue University course you will have to order a transcript from them, in addition to your IU transcript). This situation has caused some confusion and processing problems in the past. If the AMCAS/AACOMAS system appears to indicate a hold because they have not received a transcript from another IU campus, call and tell the AMCAS representative to look on the back of the IU transcript where there is an explanation that the IU transcript is a centralized transcript.

Your application will not be processed until AMCAS/AACOMAS receives transcripts from all schools you have attended. One of the most common causes of delays in processing your application is a problem with a transcript. Make sure that you do not have any holds on your account at IU that could prevent the Registrar's office from mailing out your transcript. If AMCAS/AACOMAS does not receive your transcript they will not process your application and send it to the medical schools.

Most schools request that you submit updated transcripts to them if you complete additional coursework after you have submitted your AMCAS application and your application is still under consideration by the school. Check the instructions in the secondary materials from each individual school. Updated transcripts can be submitted at the end of the summer and fall terms directly to each medical school. You should not send updated transcripts to AMCAS after your application has been processed. AACOMAS however has a process through which applicants can update their academic profile with additional coursework after the AACOMAS application has already been processed. Applicants should send updated transcripts to AACOMAS when updating their coursework so it may be verified. Please see the instructions on the AACOMAS application.

8. SECONDARY APPLICATIONS

Once you submit your primary application, the secondary application process begins. At this stage, each school follows its own process of reviewing applications, interviewing applicants, and making offers to them, within certain guidelines set by the national organizations of medical colleges. Many medical schools have individual applications that supplement the primary application, referred to as secondary applications.

Some schools contact all applicants automatically inviting them to submit secondary applications, while others do an initial review before selecting only their top candidates to invite to submit secondary applications. Some schools may contact you by email and have you fill out an online secondary application. Some schools will send you secondary forms by postal mail. If you have questions you should check the school's website for additional instructions on their procedures, or call or e-mail the admissions office at the school.

You should be aware that many schools will not review your file at all until all secondary application materials, including letters of recommendation, have been received. In essence what this means is that you have not actually applied to that school until you have completed your secondary application, even if you selected the school months earlier on your primary application.

Many great applicants do not do as well in the admissions process because they fail to follow-up in a timely manner. Applicants who submit their primary applications early in the summer often gain an advantage in the admissions process, but if you subsequently submit your secondary applications late, you have lost all the advantage you had in the beginning as an early applicant, as your application will now be reviewed after students who submitted their secondary applications before you. It can really be to

your advantage to follow-up in a timely manner and stay determined *throughout the entire application process*.

You should endeavor to complete the secondary applications as quickly as possible so that your application can be moved into the next stage of evaluation. Many schools will give you a deadline to return the secondary applications, but do not wait until the deadlines to submit materials. The sooner you return your secondary application the sooner you will move into the next stage of evaluation. Completing and returning the secondary application quickly signals your sincere interest in the school to the admissions committee.

Some of the schools may ask you to submit additional essays on topics related to your preparation for medical school and a career in medicine. Your journal may prove very valuable at this stage. You may find that you already have written material on relevant topics in your journal that can be expanded and incorporated into your essays for the secondary applications.

Many schools request what is sometimes referred to as a “**Dean of Student’s Letter,**” or send you a “**Dean’s Evaluation**” form requesting information from your university regarding any history of misconduct or disciplinary actions. These matters are handled by the Office of Student Ethics (801 N. Jordan Avenue; 855-5419) on our campus. These forms should be submitted to the Office of Student Ethics so they may check your records and send a report to the medical school.

Many medical schools also will ask about criminal history on their secondary applications and may run criminal background checks. Many schools participate in an AMCAS program for Criminal Background Checks (consult the AMCAS website for more information about this program). Our advice, based on the advice from medical schools, is that you should fully disclose any legal action you are requested to disclose, including pre-trial diversion. Although court records may be sealed, police records are not. Many times records that were to be expunged are not, and may turn up in a criminal background check later. Full disclosure is always the best course to take, because if you do not fully disclose and a problem is discovered, then you will be seen as not only having been guilty of misconduct but of dishonesty. Full disclosure will allow the school to work with you, if possible, to determine whether you might face any problems later on while in medical school or in licensing. You do not want to begin medical school while concealing a problem that might cause you difficulty later on. Many infractions that students fear will keep them out of medical school will not, but you must be willing to take responsibility and inform the school honestly. Please feel free to consult with Dr. Tolen in the HPPLC office about any concerns in this area.

It would be a good idea to set up a filing system once you reach the secondary application stage, with a file folder for each school so that you can track your correspondence and contacts with them. Check to be sure that every application, every transcript, and every letter gets to its appropriate destination. Some medical schools have web sites devoted to applicant status. Keep a specific record of dates on which materials were sent and notes from your phone calls with admissions offices. **Make sure to check that all secondary applications and letters of recommendation were received by each school.**

9. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are sent at the time that you are submitting your secondary applications to the medical schools. After you submit your primary application you should wait until medical schools request that you submit your letters to them. Letters of recommendation are part of your secondary applications and are not submitted with the primary.

The HPPLC office does not automatically send your letters of recommendation to medical schools. You must request that we send your letters to the individual schools where you are applying. Please refer to the HPPLC publication, “A Guide to the Recommendation Service for Medical and Health Profession School Applicants” for further instructions on how to use the recommendation service, and watch the HPPLC mailing list for updates on procedures.

You do **not** need to delay the submission of your primary application until your letters have been received by the HPPLC office. You should go ahead and submit your AMCAS/AACOMAS application whenever you are ready, and the letters can be submitted later. **Do not delay submitting your primary application just because your recommendation file is not complete.**

You have the option of sending individual letters of recommendation or the Premedical Composite. Many medical schools will request a premedical faculty committee or premedical advisors' letter. Indiana University Bloomington satisfies this requirement by creating the premedical faculty composite. The Premedical Composite consists of a compilation of all the letters written by your faculty recommenders into one document (please see the sample available in the HPPLC office). The letters are presented unedited and in entirety. You must have at least three recommendation letters written by faculty in order to have a composite made by our office. Only faculty recommendations are included in the composite; personal recommendation letters are not part of the faculty composite, but they can be sent to the schools in the same mailing with your composite.

Most allopathic medical schools are participating in the AMCAS Letters of Recommendation Service (see the AMCAS application for the list of participating schools). If you are applying to one of these schools you will be asked to provide information on the AMCAS application website regarding the letters of recommendation that will be submitted on your behalf. However, please note that you can fill this information in later, so if you do not have all the information ready for that section you can still go ahead and submit your AMCAS application, and update the Letters of Recommendation section later. **Do not delay submitting your primary just because your recommendation file is not complete.**

In the Letters of Recommendation section on the AMCAS website you will need to fill in information on your letters. If you are using the HPPLC recommendation service and sending a composite, please enter the name of Rachel Tolen and check the box for "Committee Letter." If you are using the HPPLC recommendation service and sending a packet of individual letters rather than a composite, please enter the name of Rachel Tolen and check the box for "Letter Packet." **When you are ready to request that HPPLC send your letters, please print the AMCAS Letter Request form from your AMCAS application and submit it to the HPPLC office, along with the HPPLC "Request for Recommendations to be Sent" form. Please make sure to watch the HPPLC mailing list for further instructions on recommendation procedures.**

Please note that recommendations are not sent to AACOMAS. If you are applying to osteopathic schools, the recommendations will be sent directly to each osteopathic school rather than through AACOMAS.

Most medical schools require a minimum of three letters of recommendation. The IU medical school requests at minimum one science faculty recommendation, one nonscience faculty recommendation, and one personal recommendation letter. However, many other medical schools require three faculty letters and specify that two must be from science faculty. A suggested plan would be to obtain a minimum of three faculty letters of recommendation (one nonscience and two science) and one personal letter of recommendation, plus any additional letters from faculty who know you well. It is often helpful to have additional science professors and non-science professors submit letters of recommendation, as they may reflect on knowledge of different aspects of your academic abilities.

Please ask professors well in advance and give them plenty of time to write letters of recommendation for you. Our office will send you an email when we receive a letter from one of your recommenders. Please monitor the status of your file and follow-up with any professors who have not submitted letters they said they would submit.

To request a composite you must submit a "Request to Create Faculty Composite Letter" form to the HPPLC office. There is a priority deadline of June 15 for submitting this form.

After you have requested that HPPLC send your letters please check with the medical schools to make sure they received them.

10. INTERVIEWS

Once you have submitted your secondary applications take some time over the summer to begin to prepare for your interviews. Why do medical schools hold interviews? The interview provides a chance for the admissions committee to assess factors they cannot see from your GPA and MCAT scores. The interview is used to assess your interpersonal and communication skills and how you would conduct yourself with patients. Medical schools are not concerned to admit only the students who appear to have the strongest credentials on paper, but students who they truly believe have the intellectual abilities, the

emotional stability, and the personal commitment needed to be successful in completing an extremely demanding program.

Keeping a journal that you can review in preparing for your interviews can be very helpful. If you have kept a journal all along about the process you have gone through in preparing for a career in medicine, you will have a valuable resource that you can review before walking into an interview. Reviewing this journal before going into your interview will help you be able to bring your experiences to life when speaking with your interviewer.

In preparation for your interviews, you should endeavor to read about current events and major issues related to healthcare. Imagine that at the end of the year you may have a number of medical schools that have offered you admission and you may have to choose between them. What would you want to know about each school to help you decide? This will help you identify good questions you will want to ask your interviewers in the interviews.

It also would be helpful to review the handout available from the HPPLC office, "Sample Medical School Interview Questions," and attend the HPPLC Interview Skills Workshops in the fall semester. You are also welcome to schedule an appointment for a mock interview at HPPLC to help you prepare.

11. ACCEPTANCES

Rules have been established that regulate the process by which schools make offers of admission and applicants accept offers. For MD schools, please read the section on guidelines for applicants available at the following weblink: <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/policies/start.htm>. For DO schools, please consult the guidelines in the *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book 2012* (pp. 19-20).

12. FOR REAPPLICANTS

If you have already applied to medical school and you were not admitted, you should take some time for self-assessment. The first question you need to answer is whether a career in medicine is the best fit for you. Have you fully explored the profession, so that you are clear about the special demands needed to be successful in medical school and as a physician? If after some self-reflection you decide that you want to pursue a career in medicine, and that you will work very hard to do what it takes to be successful, the next step is to thoroughly evaluate what went wrong in the application process the first time. You should carefully review all aspects of your candidacy to determine any weaknesses that resulted in denial of admission. Please feel free to set up an appointment with Dr. Tolen in the HPPLC office to discuss your candidacy.

After doing a thorough review, you need to endeavor to strengthen any aspects of your application that were weak **before** you reapply. Some students actually turn around and reapply with the same academic record, same MCAT scores, same application, even the same personal statement. If you do this, you should expect that the decision on your application will be the same as it was the first time and you will be rejected again. Do not make this mistake.

As a medical student you will need to be able to do continual self-assessment, recognize problems, and address them head on. If you reapply with obvious weaknesses in your application you may be communicating to the admissions committee that you lack these abilities. On the other hand, you can earn a lot of respect from an admissions committee by having the maturity to recognize weaknesses and do the hard work to address them **before** you reapply.

13. TIMELINE

APRIL

- Assemble materials in preparation for completing your application (spring transcript from IU, transcripts from all other universities attended, list of activities or resume).
- Work on writing personal statement. Keep a journal throughout the application process, and use it for ideas for your personal statement and secondary applications.
- Research medical schools. Consult the Medical School Admissions Statistics chart available from the HPPLC office, which shows in-state and out-of-state acceptance rates, and the average grade point averages and average MCAT scores of accepted students.

MAY

- We generally recommend taking the MCAT by May or June of the year you are applying.
- If you have already taken the MCAT and you do not need to re-take it, begin working on the AMCAS/AACOMAS application as soon as it becomes available.
- Order transcripts from every school attended to be sent to AMCAS/AACOMAS.

JUNE

- We generally recommend taking the MCAT by May or June of the year you are applying.
- Check on the recommendations in your file and adhere to the June 15 priority deadline for completing your recommendation file and requesting your composite. Submit a "Request to Create Faculty Composite Letter" form by June 15 if you would like HPPLC to prepare a composite for you.
- If you have already taken the MCAT, begin working on your AMCAS/AACOMAS application.
- Submit your primary AMCAS application as early as possible if you have obtained a sufficient MCAT score. Your letter of recommendation file does **not** have to be complete before you submit your primary application.
- After you submit your AMCAS/AACOMAS application you should periodically log in and monitor the status of your application. You should call and check with AMCAS/AACOMAS regarding any transcripts that are listed as not having been received and then check with the Registrar's office to see if there was a problem with the order.

JULY and AUGUST

- As you receive secondary application materials from each medical school, you should follow their instructions and submit the secondary applications as quickly as possible, in order to keep your application moving into the next stage of the admissions process. At most schools your application will not be reviewed until all materials are received; bottom line: if you have not submitted all secondary materials you have not applied.
- Send recommendations as requested by the medical schools and confirm that they have received them.
- Double check on everything. Be sure that secondary applications and recommendation packets have been received by each school. Admissions offices receive thousands of documents and it is easy for one to get misfiled. Check everything by phone or on the school website if there is one dedicated to applicants and application status.
- Prepare to re-take the MCAT exam, if appropriate in your case.
- Research the programs and characteristics of the schools to which you have applied.
- Prepare for interviews. Continue to keep your journal, and review it for ideas to emphasize to an admissions committee. Consult the medical school "Sample Medical School Interview Questions" handout from the HPPLC office and prepare for questions you may be asked. Review questions and information on the format of medical school interviews at the website <http://www.studentdoctor.net/interview-feedback/>.

SEPTEMBER – MARCH

- Attend one of the HPPLC Interview Skills Workshops to be held in the fall semester.
- Visit with the representative of any medical school to which you have applied who visits campus.
- Most schools will allow you to send additional recommendations in December or January from professors from your fall classes if you have not received an acceptance yet and would like to try to strengthen your application. Check with the schools about their policies.
- Many schools request that you submit updated transcripts at the end of the fall semester directly to them if your application is still under consideration. Check the instructions in the secondary application materials from each individual school. You should not send updated transcripts to AMCAS after your application has been processed. Update your coursework in AACOMAS with coursework completed after your AACOMAS application was processed.
- Attend the Health Programs Fair on March 6, 2012, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM in the Indiana Memorial Union Alumni Hall. Meet with representatives of any schools where your application is still under consideration, or where you may wish to apply if you end up reapplying. Explore other options available in healthcare at the fair.
- Remain in contact with schools if you have submitted applications and have not heard back. A polite email or phone call to inquire about your status is generally acceptable.
- Prepare alternate plans with Dr. Tolen if your admission to medical school is in doubt. Remember that there are many possibilities for a career in healthcare if that is what you desire.

14. SOME FINAL ADVICE

Make sure that your e-mail address is working and reachable at all times and that your Inbox never gets over capacity. Many students experience problems with their applications due to failure to respond quickly and appropriately to mailings from the schools.

The admissions cycle for medical schools takes place over a long period, allowing schools to thoroughly evaluate applicants and select the best candidates. The long admissions cycle also allows candidates to thoroughly investigate the schools so they can choose the best option for them. Schools are competing for the best applicants, just as applicants are competing to be admitted to schools. You will give yourself the best chance for admission if you apply early, follow-up swiftly, and pay attention to the details.

Please release your MCAT scores and information on AMCAS/AACOMAS to the Indiana University Health Professions Advisor (Rachel Tolen). Our office can help you better if information is released to us. The data we receive is crucial to our ability to advise students on our campus about how to prepare for admission. Our job here is to help you. Whether it is as a sounding board for choice of medical schools, feedback on your personal statement, or dealing with problems, that's why we are here. Please check in with Dr. Tolen later on as you proceed through the application process and seek advice on additional things you can do to enhance your chances of admission.

GOOD LUCK!

This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.

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