

# HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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## A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS TO MEDICAL SCHOOLS

2016-2017

### 1. HOW TO APPROACH THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

*If you would like to be admitted to medical school, read this guide.* It has been created by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center in order to help IU students avoid the common mistakes applicants sometimes make in the medical school application process. Inside you will find tips that will save you time and help make the process less confusing and stressful for you. Every year we see students who do not get admitted because they missed information they could have found here. We want you to succeed!

Everyone who applies to medical school has to develop their own strategy. This guide will help you navigate the complex process of applying to medical school. Please take the time to read it thoroughly and refer back to it frequently as you proceed through the application process.

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. If your approach to applying is error-prone or disorganized, you won't make the best impression on an admissions committee. Your application should reflect all of the thoughtful preparation you have made for a career in medicine so far.

Most schools operate on a rolling admissions basis, admitting many students long before the deadline to apply. 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.

In addition to reading this guide, please make sure to refer to the information available on the HPPLC website on the essential steps to take before you reach the admissions stage to prepare to be a competitive applicant. Before applying, you should assess your credentials and competitiveness for admission. Apply as the strongest applicant you can be in order to enhance your success!

### 2. OVERVIEW OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

You initiate the process of applying to medical school by submitting one, centralized "primary" application that can be sent to multiple medical schools. For allopathic (MD) schools you'll complete an "AMCAS" application; for osteopathic (DO) schools you'll complete the "AACOMAS" application. Most schools participate in these application services, although there are a few that do not. (State medical schools in Texas require application through the TMDSAS application; please see the TMDSAS website for more information at: <https://www.utsystem.edu/tmdsas/>).

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 2017 AMCAS and AACOMAS online applications will be found at the following web addresses:

AMCAS: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/applying-medical-school-amcas/> (Scheduled to open on May 3, 2016)

AACOMAS: <http://www.aacom.org/become-a-doctor/applying> (Scheduled to open on May 4, 2016)

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, saving your changes, and spend as long as you like entering information and making sure that everything is accurate and complete. You cannot submit the AMCAS application until June 7; the AACOMAS application can be submitted as early as May 4 (the date AACOMAS opens). When you are satisfied with the application you submit it electronically and it is sent to AMCAS/AACOMAS for processing.

Resources to help you navigate the AMCAS application can be found by going to the link at: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/applying-medical-school-amcas/amcas-tools-and-tutorials/>. A complete guide to the AMCAS application can be found by clicking on "AMCAS Instruction Manual" at the link above. You may wish to print out the AMCAS Instruction Manual and keep it in a file folder to use as a reference guide as you fill out the application. There is also a helpful "Quick Start Guide." A complete instruction manual for the AACOMAS application is also provided on the AACOMAS website.

The applications are complicated but most questions can be answered by referring to the instruction manuals. If you cannot find the answer to your question in the Instruction Book, you can call the following help lines:

**AMCAS:** 202-828-0600

**AACOMAS:** 301-968-4190

**Please note: You can submit your AMCAS/AACOMAS application without your recommendation letters. Do not delay submitting your primary application just because your recommendation letters are not ready to be sent.**

### **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 Evaluation." 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 best advice 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 college or university that you have attended and the dates of attendance even if you took only one course at the school.

## Coursework (AMCAS AND AACOMAS)

In this section you type in information on every college course you have taken at Indiana University, or at any other college or university. Before filling out this section you should gather copies of all your transcripts from every university you have attended to use in filling out the application.

**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 your IU transcript.**

Coursework from another IU campus should be listed under the section for that campus on the AMCAS/AACOMAS application.

AMCAS and AACOMAS require each student to submit this grade information so they can calculate each applicant's GPA's in a standardized form that can be used to compare all applicants. 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. AMCAS and AACOMAS provide charts that tell you how to classify courses. If in doubt about how to enter coursework, you may call the following help lines:

**AMCAS:** 202-828-0600

**AACOMAS:** 301-968-4190.

Some tips on how to fill in special course information:

- If you withdrew from a course after the drop deadline you are required to list it on the application. Courses listed on your transcript that appear with grades of W must be listed on the application.
- 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 (ACP).
- 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 exemptions. An exemption means that IU waived a requirement, but did not give you credit. 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 college transcripts. 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 restrict the use of AP credit toward fulfillment of the admission requirements.*
- List summer courses with the upcoming academic year.
- Some medical schools may be willing to count Intensive Writing courses towards their English course requirements, where applicable. If there is room in the course title field, you may want to include "Intensive Writing" after the course title to indicate these courses fulfilled intensive writing requirements. If there is not room, you can provide this information to schools with English course requirements when you submit secondary applications to the schools.

## **Work and Activities (AMCAS AND AACOMAS)**

This section of the application functions in part like a resume in that it provides information on relevant experiences. However, this section also provides an important opportunity for you to write and reflect on your experiences.

In this section, you will 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 activities in this section, but do not feel that you must list 15 in this section to have a strong application. AACOMAS also provides a section where you list experiences and write about them.

It is important that you include information in this section on any substantial time commitments you have had outside of school while you were taking courses. AMCAS provides a workload report to the allopathic medical schools that incorporates information on your credit hour load and the hours you devoted to working, volunteering and other extracurricular experiences while you were in school. On both the AMCAS and AACOMAS applications, it is important in this section to provide information on any work experiences or jobs that you have held during college, even if you believe they are not directly relevant to medicine. Work experiences often provide important learning opportunities for gaining transferable skills, and it's very important that medical schools take into account the hours you have devoted to working while in college. (Please note also that AMCAS and AACOMAS ask additional questions in other sections regarding parental income and education and other information about your background so that the medical schools may be able to gain an understanding of any socioeconomic disadvantages you may have faced, and so it can be important to provide such information.)

For each activity listed on the AMCAS application, you will be asked to write an "Experience Description" of up to a maximum of 700 characters with spaces. This equates to about four to five sentences, or one paragraph. A recommended approach is to briefly describe in a few sentences what you did and then in one or two sentences at the end reflect on what you got out of the experience. The AACOMAS application allows you to list and describe experiences, with a limit of 600 characters with spaces for you to write about each experience.

The AMCAS application also asks you 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. Concise but substantive entries will allow the admissions committee one more opportunity to "hear your voice" through your writing.

## **Personal Statement and MD/PhD Essays**

An important part of your primary application is your personal statement, an essay of about one page single-spaced, which should address why you would like to become a physician. 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?

While there are many ways to approach the personal statement, often an effective approach is to write about the series of events in your life that have led you to medicine. What started you on the path toward becoming a doctor, and what kept you on that path once you started?

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. Detailed descriptions of events and experiences tend to reveal more about the inner experience of the writer than generalizations.

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. Your personal statement should reflect your own personal point of view and your personal voice.

Keeping a journal can be very helpful for preparing for the application process. 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.

Your personal statement will be typed into a text box on the AMCAS/AACOMAS application. You can draft your personal statement ahead of time in a Word document and check the character count – including spaces – in the Word document to make sure that your statement will fit within the maximum space allowed. The personal statement on the AMCAS application has a character limit of 5300 characters with spaces. On the AACOMAS application, the personal statement has a character limit of 4500 characters with spaces. If you are applying to both allopathic and osteopathic schools you will want to tailor your essays for each audience. Your personal statement for your AACOMAS application will need to be shorter, and it should also reflect your knowledge of, and interest in, osteopathic medicine.

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. MD/PhD programs usually 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 summarize information that is already 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 extracurricular activities in your personal statement inasmuch as they illuminate the answer about why you want to go to medical school, but your personal statement should not come across simply as an essay summarizing your activities and accomplishments, or a resume in essay form.
- Ideally, you should strive to make the different parts of your application work together. You can do this by reinforcing similar themes in the different essays that you write without being repetitive. It can be really impressive when the “Work and Activities” section and the personal statement are complementary without being redundant.
- You want to demonstrate your best features to an admissions committee without coming across as conceited or arrogant. It may take some revision to strike the right balance.
- For some help getting started writing, check out the podcasts on the HPPLC website at <http://www.hpplc.indiana.edu/medicine/med-apply-ps.shtml>.

- Make an appointment in the HPPLC office if you would like feedback on your essay. Also, remember that the essay reflects your unique personal experiences.
- It is okay to use the word “I,” but not at the start of every sentence; try to vary your sentence structure.
- 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 520 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, legal, 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

When you submit your primary application, you’ll select the medical schools that you would like to receive it. You can also decide to send your application to additional schools later on 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) (an AAMC electronic publication available at <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/>. *You may want to purchase a one-year subscription for online access to this guide if you are applying to MD schools.*)
- Osteopathic Medical College Information Book (AACOM publication you can download for free at [http://www.aacom.org/docs/default-source/cib/2016\\_cib.pdf?sfvrsn=22](http://www.aacom.org/docs/default-source/cib/2016_cib.pdf?sfvrsn=22))
- 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) or physicians

In addition to considering where you would like to go if you could have your first choice of schools, you should try to develop a smart strategy. In developing your application strategy, you should take a realistic assessment of your MCAT, GPA, and other statistical data from the medical schools you are considering. It’s a fact that schools use GPA and MCAT to establish benchmarks for creating their pool of interviewees and admitted students, so the numbers drive a certain degree of the decision-making – although not all of it. Therefore you do want to take the numbers into account.

Also, it’s very important to take into account the in-state/out-of-state admission rates at each school. Private schools generally will accept students from across the country on an even playing field, while state schools often give preference to their state residents, so it’s important to consider these trends in developing your strategy (don’t just apply to all the Big Ten schools!).

HPPLC provides two documents listing the average MCAT scores, average GPA’s, and numbers of in-state/out-of-state accepted applicants for allopathic and osteopathic schools that you can use strategically in deciding where to apply. Although we do not have new complete data based on the new MCAT scores, this historical data can still be useful for developing your strategy.

You can use the admissions data documents to gain some idea of which schools give more preference to in-state residents and which schools are more competitive and less competitive. Although the admissions data documents will show MCAT scores on a different scale, you can use them to identify those schools that will likely have higher MCAT averages and those that will have lower MCAT averages. **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.** For allopathic schools, a good general guide 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.

For osteopathic schools also, make sure you take into account the rate of acceptance of out-of-state students when choosing schools.

Do not make the mistake of taking too narrow of an approach 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. Avoid an approach that is too narrow or unrealistic. **Please consider applying to a range of between 10 to 15 schools.** Many students did not last year and were disappointed. 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. **In addition, applying to both allopathic and osteopathic schools may greatly increase your chances of being in med school next year.**

It is a good idea to create a budget and make sure that you allocate enough funds for completion of the entire application process. You will need to pay fees on the AMCAS/AACOMAS application (fee assistance is available for those who qualify; see the information below). You also need to pay fees with your secondary applications to the individual schools where you are applying (these 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 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 (until you've gotten at least one acceptance).

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?
- Reputation of the student body: 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?

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. For the allopathic schools, a good source for researching admission requirements is Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR), an electronic resource available at <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/>. For osteopathic schools, The Osteopathic Medical College Information Book provides this information (you can download a copy for free at [http://www.aacom.org/docs/default-source/cib/2016\\_cib.pdf?sfvrsn=22](http://www.aacom.org/docs/default-source/cib/2016_cib.pdf?sfvrsn=22)). Some schools have specific requirements for English, Math, Genetics, or Biochemistry coursework. However, most schools will consider applicants who have not completed all their requirements and will offer interviews and conditional admission with the stipulation that the applicant must complete the requirement before beginning medical school. Students can often complete such additional courses during their final year of

college before beginning medical school. 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.

**Fee Assistance:** Fee assistance programs are available that can help with the cost of MCAT registration, MCAT preparation and application fees for those that qualify. Consult information from the AAMC at <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/> and from AACOM at <http://www.aacom.org/become-a-doctor/applying/aacom/fee-waiver>. *Apply early!*

## 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, 2016. Early Decision applicants are reviewed first, invited to interview first, and they are notified whether they are accepted by October 1. 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.

If you wish to apply Early Decision you must indicate it on your AMCAS application at the time you submit it. To meet the Early Decision deadline AMCAS must receive your AMCAS electronic application and all transcripts by August 1, 2016. (Recommendations and supplemental materials do not need to be received by August 1).

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 less risky if the school has set explicit criteria for Early Decision admission and you meet the criteria.

IU School of Medicine sets minimum GPA and MCAT eligibility requirements for Early Decision. For the 2015-2016 application cycle, the requirements were a 3.6 cumulative and 3.6 science GPA. In addition applicants were required to have an MCAT score of 509 or above with all individual scores (Confidence Band) no lower than 125-127. Check the Indiana University School of Medicine website before applying to check the criteria for the 2016-2017 application cycle.

Check with other medical schools to learn their criteria for Early Decision. *Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)* (<https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/>) provides information on which schools offer Early Decision programs. Please feel free to consult with a HPPLC advisor on considering whether to do Early Decision.

## 6. MCAT

When your MCAT scores become available you will be able to access them through the MCAT Score Reporting System online (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 take the MCAT exam after your AMCAS application has been processed, AMCAS will automatically send updated scores to the schools you selected on 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 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 apply. Therefore, if you are applying to osteopathic schools through AACOMAS you will need to go to the MCAT Score Reporting System and release your scores to AACOMAS. The osteopathic schools where you have applied will then receive your MCAT scores through AACOMAS.

Also, please release your MCAT scores to the Indiana University Health Professions Advisor (Rachel Tolen) through the MCAT Score Reporting System. If you release your scores we can better advise you

appropriately. Also, by releasing data to us, you can help us keep up with trends in admission and make sure that we provide up-to-date advice for IU premed students.

You should take the MCAT when you are prepared to earn your best score. We generally recommend you try to take the MCAT by May or June of the year when you are applying; this allows you extra time in the summer after finals to prepare intensively before taking the exam. However, it is true that each year we see many students earn strong scores from later test dates in the summer who are quite successful. 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. It is possible to submit your primary application before receiving your score, but in most circumstances it is recommended to wait until you receive your score so you can make conscious decisions before submitting your application.

If you are unsure about how to interpret your score, please consult with HPPLC for advice on whether to re-take the exam. Most medical schools do not 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 strong, at the very least they will recognize that you were capable of getting the high score.

If you are certain you must retake the exam, we recommend choosing the date on the basis of when you truly believe you will do the best. Sometimes applicants choose to retake the MCAT on a date that is not the best for them just because they are worried about delaying their applications, and it results in a second low MCAT score. It can be helpful to set aside worries about the timing of your application, and choose to retake the exam when you believe you will be at your peak mentally, emotionally, and physically, to achieve your very best score. Please make an appointment at HPPLC if you would like to discuss the strategy you should take.

## 7. TRANSCRIPTS

You will need to request that your transcripts be sent to AMCAS/AACOMAS from all colleges and universities you have attended (you do not need to order high school transcripts). AMCAS and AACOMAS match up your transcripts with your application, verify that you have entered all the information in the coursework section accurately (this is called “verification”), and then send your application to the schools you have selected. AMCAS/AACOMAS will not begin to process your application until all transcripts have been received. You must submit a transcript from the original school where the coursework was completed, even if the coursework transferred to Indiana University.

**The HPPLC Office does not process transcripts. Transcripts are handled by the registrar’s office.** You should not mail transcripts yourself to AMCAS/AACOMAS; all transcripts must be sent directly to AMCAS/AACOMAS by the universities you attended.

On the AMCAS application you will print off an **AMCAS Transcript Request form** for each school you have attended. 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 to submit with transcript orders.

**You should submit one copy of the AMCAS/AACOMAS Transcript Request form to the IUB registrar in Student Central on Union (408 N. Union Street).** Please refer to the IUB registrar’s office website at <http://studentcentral.indiana.edu/register/documents/transcript.shtml> for further instructions on their procedures for ordering transcripts.

**If you attended other colleges besides IU, submit one copy of the AMCAS/AACOMAS Transcript Request form to the registrar’s office of each college attended.** Find information on ordering transcripts at each college by going to the school’s website and finding information for the registrar’s office regarding procedures for ordering transcripts.

All *IU* courses taken at IU campuses appear on one centralized transcript; however, if you have actually taken a *Purdue* course at IUPUI or IPFW you will have to order a transcript from them, in addition to your IU transcript (check your IU transcript, which will indicate whether it was an IU or Purdue course).

Your application will not be processed until AMCAS/AACOMAS receives transcripts from all colleges/universities 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 after submitting your primary application there appears to be a hold on your application, please make sure to call AMCAS/AACOMAS to resolve the problem.

After your AMCAS application has been processed, you can submit updated transcripts that show any additional coursework to each medical school. Most medical schools request that you submit updated transcripts to them if you complete additional coursework after you have submitted your AMCAS application. 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 can be verified. Please see the instructions on the AACOMAS application about these procedures.

## 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."

Most schools contact all applicants automatically inviting them to submit secondary applications, but a few schools 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, while others 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.**

It is important to submit secondary applications as early as possible. 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. 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. Some schools will give you a deadline to return the secondary applications, but do not wait until the deadlines to submit materials. You should create your own internal deadline for completing secondary applications. The sooner you return your secondary application the sooner you may be granted an interview. Schools make note of the date when applicants submitted secondary applications and sometimes interpret late submission as indicating low interest in attending the school.

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 at IU are handled by the Office of Student Ethics (801

N. Jordan Avenue; 855-5419) on our campus. Submit these forms to the Office of Student Ethics so they can 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 could 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 an advisor 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 where you can check the status of your application. 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 your primary application is processed you will receive instructions from the individual medical schools on the recommendation letters that they would like you to submit.

We highly recommend that premed students establish an account with a service called Interfolio. With an Interfolio account, you can begin to accumulate letters well ahead of time so that your application will not be delayed. You can request that your recommenders send letters to your Interfolio account ahead of time, and then when you are ready to apply, you can request that Interfolio send them to AMCAS and medical schools. Please refer to the instructions on the HPPLC website on the use of Interfolio.

**Please note: you should submit your AMCAS/AACOMAS application whenever it is ready, and the letters can be submitted later. Do not delay submitting your primary application just because your recommendation letters are not yet ready to be sent.**

**Remember, requirements for recommendations vary from school to school.** Make sure to check the guidelines for the individual schools where you plan to apply early. You should plan ahead to try to obtain a set of letters that will allow you to meet the varying requirements of different medical schools.

*In order to be ready to be a competitive applicant, we recommend that you set the goal of obtaining the following recommendations by the beginning of the summer when you plan to apply:*

**1) Two science faculty recommendations.** At the very least one of these should be from an instructor who taught you in a biology, chemistry, or physics course.

**2) One nonscience faculty recommendation.** Ideally this will be a letter from a professor in an "A&H" or "S&H" course who knows you well and how you think because the professor has observed you discussing readings in class and reading the papers you have written.

**3) One personal recommendation.** This could be a letter from a supervisor at a volunteer agency, physician you have shadowed, or an employer. If the person taught you in a course it would not be considered a personal recommendation, but would be considered a faculty recommendation.

### **Specific requirements for Indiana University School of Medicine:**

- 1) one letter from an instructor who taught you in a biology, chemistry, or physics course
- 2) one letter from an instructor who taught you in a nonscience course (ideally an “A&H” or “S&H” course)
- 3) one personal recommendation (possibly from a supervisor at a volunteer agency, a physician you have worked with or shadowed, etc.) (The personal recommendation should be from someone who has not taught you in a course)

***Remember, requirements for recommendations vary from school to school so you should check the guidelines provided by the schools where you want to apply and plan ahead!***

**Information on the process for MD schools:** Allopathic medical schools participate 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 letters are not ready to be sent.** Refer to the instructions from HPPLC on “How to Send Letters from Interfolio to AMCAS.”

**Information on the process for DO schools:** Recommendation letters can either be sent to the individual osteopathic schools or via AACOMAS (sending to the individual osteopathic schools is often simpler). Refer to the instructions from HPPLC on “How to Send Letters from Interfolio to Osteopathic Schools.”

## **10. INTERVIEWS**

Once you have submitted your secondary applications take some time over the summer to begin to prepare for your 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. Many schools are also experimenting with ways to assess applicants’ skills in coping with conflict. 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 meet the demands of medical school and a career as a physician.

Prior to your interviews, take some time to thoroughly review your primary application, personal statement, extracurricular experiences, and secondary applications, and think about what you may wish to say about them in the interview. Practice answering potential interview questions. For many people, practicing answers aloud can allow them to make mistakes and correct them, and become smoother in their ability to respond. You should also endeavor to read about current events and major issues related to healthcare.

You should also prepare some questions to ask your interviewers. What would you truly want to know about the school before you show up on the first day of class? This will help you identify good questions to ask your interviewers. Do some research on the school to identify areas about which you’d like to know more. In fact, a good general way to phrase a question in an interview is along the lines of: “I saw that your curriculum offers [this type of program, course, etc.], could you tell me more about that?”

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. After your interviews, send a thank you letter that conveys a professional impression and expresses your interest in attending the school.

## 11. ACCEPTANCES

Rules have been established that regulate the process by which schools make offers of admission and applicants accept offers. For MD schools, consult the guidelines available at the following weblink: <https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas/policies/380672/trafficrulesforapplicants-2015amcas.html>. For DO schools, please consult the guidelines in the *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book 2015* (pp. 24).

## 12. FOR REAPPLICANTS

If you have already applied to medical school and you were not admitted, you should take some time for self-assessment. Have you fully explored the profession, so that you are clear about the special demands of medical school and a career 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. After doing a thorough review, you need to endeavor to strengthen any aspects of your application that were weak **before** you reapply. Some students turn around and reapply with the same academic record, same MCAT scores, same application, even the same personal statement. Do not make this mistake. 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. Please feel free to set up an appointment in the HPPLC office to discuss your strategy.

When you reapply you should not simply re-submit the same personal statement. You could incorporate some of the same themes from your previous statement, but you would also want your new personal statement to reflect the additional growth that you've experienced since the time when you first applied. See the instructions on the AMCAS and AACOMAS websites for re-applicants on rolling over some of the information from your previous application for the next application cycle.

## 13. GENERAL TIMELINE FOR YOUR APPLICATION YEAR – *your specific timeline could vary!*

### APRIL

- Attend a HPPLC Medical School Application Workshop (check the HPPLC events calendar for dates)
- Study for the MCAT!
- 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 charts available from the HPPLC office, which shows in-state and out-of-state acceptance rates and other statistics of accepted students.

### MAY

- Study for the MCAT and study some more!
- We generally recommend taking the MCAT by May or June of the year you are applying, but some students can be quite successful with later dates. Please feel free to discuss your strategy with a HPPLC advisor.
- If you have already taken the MCAT, begin working on the AMCAS/AACOMAS application when the applications open up in early May.
- 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, but some students can be quite successful with later dates. Please feel free to discuss your strategy with a HPPLC advisor.

- Follow up on the status of your recommendations. Check with any recommenders who have not submitted recommendations to your Interfolio account yet.
- If you have already taken the MCAT, begin working on your AMCAS/AACOMAS application.
- Submit your primary application as early as possible if you have obtained a sufficient MCAT score. Your recommendations do not have to be ready to be sent 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 begin to receive secondary application materials, follow their instructions and submit secondary applications as quickly as possible, to keep your application moving into the next stage of the 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.
- Follow the instructions in each school's secondary application on how to submit recommendations.
- Double check on everything. Be sure that secondary applications and recommendations have been received by each school. Check everything by phone or on the school website if there is one provided for you to check your 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 "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.
- If you would like help preparing for your interviews, please feel free to schedule a mock interview at HPPLC.
- After your interviews, send a thank you letter reinforcing your interest in attending the school.
- 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 any new coursework completed after your AACOMAS application was processed.
- Attend the Health Programs Fair on March 1, 2017, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM in the Indiana Memorial Union. 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.
- Consult with a HPPLC advisor on additional things you could do to enhance your admission.
- 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 and restate your genuine interest in attending the school is generally acceptable.
- Do some contingency planning and prepare alternate plans with a HPPLC advisor 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**

Always keep in mind that schools are assessing your professionalism through the manner in which you conduct yourself while applying. Make sure that your e-mail address is working and reachable at all times and respond in a timely manner and appropriately to mailings from the schools. Be mature, polite, and

professional at all times with the professors writing recommendation letters for you, the staff handling your application file, and any representatives of medical schools you contact.

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 HPPLC as you proceed through the application process and seek advice on additional things you can do to enhance your chances of admission. We want to help you in any way we can!

**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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