

# HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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## A GUIDE FOR APPLICANTS TO MEDICAL SCHOOLS

2008-2009

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### 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! You need to thoroughly read this guide, the HPPLC document "A Guide to the Recommendation Service," all instructions on the electronic application service websites, as well as every communication sent to you by the application services and medical schools that gives you instructions on your application.

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 attention to detail and your ability to communicate to the committee through the application will reflect on the abilities you will bring to the practice of medicine. If you make many mistakes in the application process, or your approach is disorganized, an admissions committee may conclude that your performance as a medical student and as a physician will be error-prone and disorganized. 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**

The process of applying to medical school has been centralized to a great extent by the two major organizations of medical colleges in the United States, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM). Each of these organizations runs an online application service that allows students to initiate the process of applying to many schools at once through one initial, primary application. Students apply to allopathic schools through the AAMC's "AMCAS" application, and apply to osteopathic schools through AACOM's "AACOMAS" application. Most schools participate in these online application services, although there are a few that do not.

The process of applying to most medical schools works like this: 1) you fill out one online, electronic primary application and choose the schools you would like to receive that application; 2) those schools receive your application and if they would like to consider you further for admission they send you secondary application materials to submit.

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. When you are satisfied with the application you submit it electronically and it is sent to AMCAS/AACOMAS for processing. Once you submit the application you cannot make changes on the main body of it (with the exception of sections pertaining to personal information and MCAT exams).

You can begin to work on the applications as soon as they become available. We would recommend that you wait until you receive your MCAT scores before you submit the completed application.

## **3. THE PRIMARY APPLICATION**

The 2009 AMCAS and AACOMAS online applications will be found at the following web addresses:

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

AACOMAS: <https://aacomas.aacom.org/>

The 2009 AMCAS application is scheduled to become available on May 14, 2008. The 2009 AACOMAS application is scheduled to become available in May also.

Guides to the AMCAS application process can be found by clicking on "Support for AMCAS" at <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/amcas2009.htm>. A complete guide to the AMCAS application can be found by clicking on "AMCAS 2009 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, print out this Instruction Book, the Application Worksheet, and the Application Tips. Keep all these documents in a file folder to use as a reference guide as you fill out the application. These are large files to print out, but it really will save you time if you have hardcopies of them to refer to as you fill out the application.

The instructions for the various sections of the AACOMAS application are available in a menu on the main 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.

### **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 with the secondary application materials a form or letter from your undergraduate school verifying that your report is accurate, often referred to as a "Dean'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 (705 East Seventh Street; 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 is also piloting a new program for Criminal Background Checks (consult the AMCAS website for more information about this program).

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. The coursework section should match your transcripts as exactly as possible. 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.

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 dropped early enough so that the course does not appear on your transcript then do not list it 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.
- 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 a requirement is not generally considered to be equivalent to earning Advanced Placement credit or credit from coursework.*
  - 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 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, awards, honors and publications that you would like to bring to the attention of the admissions committee. 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. It may be helpful to think about how each activity has helped you build skills that have prepared you for medical school and a career in medicine, and reflect that in your description.

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**

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. The AACOMAS application provides somewhat more space for the essay than the AMCAS application, so 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. Your additional 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.

### **Some additional tips:**

- Your personal statement should not simply recount things that are included in other parts of your application.
- 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.
- 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.
- Have someone else whose opinion you trust read your essay. 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.
- 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.
- 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.

#### 4. CHOOSING WHERE TO APPLY

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

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

- Admissions directors or representatives
- Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) (official AAMC 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 school. 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)
- The local environment where the school is located. Where do you want to live?
- Teaching/learning style (traditional-organ system, practice-based learning, or a combination?). How do you learn best? Which system would fit you?
- Proximity to support (family, friends, significant others)
- Strength of programs of interest
- Residency placement: Where do grads go? What are the Residency Match Rates?
- Costs and living expenses
- 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.
- Student resources (entertainment, library, computer) and support systems at school
- Early patient contact. Some schools seem to foster much earlier patient contact.
- Research/community opportunities
- Organization of clinical years
- Grading system
- Teaching hospitals: How many and how convenient?
- Housing and transportation
- 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? How might this impact your learning?
- Programs for underrepresented students
- Student organizations: How active are they in areas that interest you? Do they seem important to the school?
- Financial support. Is there a very helpful financial aid office? Are scholarships available?
- 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.

Early Decision may be a good choice for an applicant with strong personal ties (family, significant others) to a school in a particular region, or other reasons for wanting to attend a particular school. However, Early Decision can have some disadvantages. 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. Doing so puts you at a disadvantage with many schools that already may be far into the admissions process by October.

Because of these risks, Early Decision is a program that should be considered only by students who have a strong likelihood of acceptance. If you have a disciplinary problem on your record, for instance, it may be unlikely that you will be accepted for Early Decision. Early Decision applicants do have a very high rate of acceptance, and so it can be a good option for some students.

For 2008 Early Decision applicants to the IU School of Medicine the requirements were a 3.6 GPA, a 30 MCAT with no score lower than an "8" and at least an "O" in the writing sample. Check the Indiana University School of Medicine website later this summer 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 can 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.

Students have the best chance for admission within a given application cycle if they already have obtained an admissible MCAT score early in the admissions cycle. Students are often at a disadvantage if they do not obtain an admissible MCAT score until late in the application cycle. This means that if you have taken the MCAT early in the summer and obtained an admissible score you will have an advantage over students who do not take the MCAT and obtain an admissible score until late in the summer.

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. Admissions committees look at trends and view improvement over time in a positive manner.

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 ordered from the Office of the Registrar from the colleges and universities you have attended. The HPPLC Office does not process transcripts. 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 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.

For AACOMAS you will need to order transcripts from the Registrar at each school you attended and have them sent to the address given on the AACOMAS website. Follow the instructions on the AACOMAS website.

You must submit a transcript from the original college or university where the coursework was completed, even if the coursework transferred to Indiana University. 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 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/AACOMAS 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 or AACOMAS after your application has been processed.

## 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.

On their secondary applications many schools will ask for information on the letters of recommendation that will be submitted for your application. Most schools give you the option of submitting individual letters or a composite/committee letter (see the section below on "Letters of Recommendation"). If you plan to submit a composite, please check the appropriate box on the school's secondary form. This can speed processing of your application, because when the school receives your composite they will recognize that your file is complete and move it into the next stage of evaluation.

Many schools request what is sometimes referred to as a "**Dean's Letter**," or send you a form requesting information from your university regarding any history of misconduct or disciplinary actions. These matters are handled by the Office of Student Ethics (705 E. Seventh Street; 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. You should fully disclose any legal action that they request you to disclose on the application, including pre-trial diversion. Although court records may be sealed, police records are not. Full disclosure is always the best course to take, because if you do not fully disclose 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. AMCAS is piloting a new program for Criminal Background Checks (consult the AMCAS website for more information about this program), and many medical schools are moving toward making criminal background checks a routine part of the admissions process.

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.

## 9. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation are sent at the time that you are submitting your secondary applications to the schools. 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 complete instructions on how to use the recommendation service.

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.

You have the option of sending individual letters of recommendation or the Premedical Composite. The Premedical Composite is HPPLC's version of the committee letter which is often requested by medical school admission offices. 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, while personal recommendation letters are sent separately.

Letters are now sent electronically to most medical schools through a system called Virtual Evals. All allopathic schools will receive the same set of letters for your application. All osteopathic schools will receive the same set of letters for your application. Therefore, you will need to select a standard set of letters that you want all allopathic schools to receive, and a standard set of letters that you want all osteopathic schools to receive. Please see the information sheet on Virtual Evals for more information.

AMCAS has a new pilot program to process letters of recommendation for a list of twenty medical schools that are participating in the pilot project. You should consult the list of medical schools on the AMCAS website. If, and only if, you apply to one of these schools, then there will be some special procedures that you will need to follow. In this case, please read all instructions on the AMCAS website about their procedures. You will be asked to provide information on the AMCAS application regarding the letters of recommendation that will be submitted on your behalf. If you are using the HPPLC recommendation service, please enter the name of Rachel Tolen and check the box for "Committee Letter/Letter Packet" in this section of the AMCAS application. You will also need to submit a green "Request for Recommendations to be Sent" to the HPPLC office, asking that we send your letters to the school. You will also need to provide us with the Letter ID# that AMCAS will provide to you for the letter packet.

Most schools require a minimum of three letters of recommendation, and many specify that at least two of these letters be from science faculty. The IU medical school requests at minimum one science faculty recommendation, one nonscience faculty recommendation, and one personal recommendation letter. 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.

If you would like the HPPLC office to prepare a composite for you, you will need to submit a "Request to Create Faculty Composite Letter" form to the HPPLC office. Please note that there is a priority deadline of June 16 for submitting this form to our office (see section #15 of this publication for more information).

## 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? Medical schools make a considerable investment of time and resources to conduct interviews. Admissions interviews are not

required by many other professional schools and graduate programs. Medical schools would not go to the trouble of conducting interviews if they were not convinced that interviews are critical to identifying the best candidates for admission.

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.

The interview allows the admissions committee to find out – beyond your GPA and MCAT score - who you are and how you have prepared for a career in medicine. 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 recall information about your background, and will help you come across as someone who knows where they're coming from, where they want to go, and why they want to do it.

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, "Medical School Interview Questions," and attend the HPPLC Interview Skills Workshops in the fall semester.

## 11. ACCEPTANCES

Rules have been established by the AAMC that regulate the process by which schools make offers of admission and applicants accept offers. Please read the section on guidelines for applicants available at the following weblink: <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/policies/start.htm>.

## 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. Many medical schools also are willing to advise students on why their applications were rejected.

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**

- Begin working on the AMCAS application as soon as it becomes available.
- Order transcripts from every school attended to be sent to AMCAS/AACOMAS. Use the AMCAS Transcript Request form to order transcripts for AMCAS.

#### **JUNE**

- Check on the recommendations in your file and adhere to the June 16 priority deadline for completing your recommendation file and requesting your composite. Submit a "Request to Create Faculty Composite Letter" by June 16 at the latest if you would like HPPLC to prepare a composite for you.
- Submit your primary AMCAS application as early as possible. Your letter of recommendation file does not have to be complete before you submit your primary application.
- Begin working on the AACOMAS application as soon as it becomes available.
- 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 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://share.studentdoctor.net/interview/>.

## 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. Medical schools that usually visit our campus each year include: The University of Chicago, Washington University at Saint Louis, Medical College of Wisconsin, University of Cincinnati, and Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences.
- 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.
- Most 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 from each individual school. You should not send updated transcripts to AMCAS or AACOMAS after your application has been processed.
- Attend the Health Programs Fair on March 4, 2009, 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM in the Indiana Memorial Union Alumni Hall. Meet with any 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. Check your email often for communications from the schools and follow up with every request from them in a timely manner.

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, comments about the essays, or dealing with problems, that’s why we are here.

## 15. DEADLINE POLICY FOR COMPOSITE RECOMMENDATIONS

### **PRIORITY DEADLINE FOR COMPOSITE LETTERS: June 16, 2008**

All applicants to medical and dental schools for the 2008-2009 application period should have their letter of recommendation files complete by June 16, 2008 if they would like to request that HPPLC prepare a composite letter for them (composite letters are highly recommended for applicants to medical and dental schools).

In order to guarantee that your composite will be prepared and ready to be sent by July 31, 2008, applicants must have their letter of recommendation files complete by June 16, 2008. This means that **all** of your letters **must be received** by the HPPLC Recommendation Service on or before June 16, 2008. Applicants who meet this deadline and who submit a "Request for Composite" form to HPPLC by June 16, 2008, are guaranteed to have their composites sent by July 31, 2008.

Requests for composites to be sent will be processed in the order received.

It is highly recommended that **all applicants, including those who choose to send individual letters rather than a composite letter**, have their letter of recommendation files complete by June 16, 2008, and submit requests for their letters to be sent immediately upon receiving a request from a school for letters of recommendation.

Applicants whose files are not complete by June 16, 2008 or who submit a "Request for Composite" form after June 16 will have their composites processed **after** August 1, 2008.

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.