

## Six Admissions Factors for Medical School

As a student who is contemplating applying to medical school, you have probably wondered how your credentials compare with some ideal student conceived in your own mind or transmitted through the premed grapevine. Although you want a realistic appraisal of your chances for acceptance, a definitive answer is impossible; and a generalized answer is difficult, given that there are more than 120 medical schools in the United States, and each has its own admissions committee with its own standards. These variables make it difficult to define one set of standards that apply in all medical schools. However, almost all medical schools consider the following six factors when reviewing applicants:

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### 1. Academic Credentials

- What is the applicant's grade point average (GPA)?
- What is the science and math GPA?
- What are the grades in courses prerequisite for medical school?
- What are the grades in Organic Chemistry?
- What is the pattern of grades? Is there an upward or downward trend?
- How many courses been dropped? Why?
- How many "incompletes" are present?
- What proportion of courses was taken pass/fail?
- Did the student consistently choose an "easier" or more difficult sequence of courses?
- What is the academic quality of the institution where courses were taken?
- Was summer school attended? What school? What courses were taken? Why?
- Did the student undertake honors work?
- What is the student's major?

Grade point average is important, but as the preceding questions indicate, the GPA alone is not the only academic factor considered. It is difficult, if not impossible, to assign a percentage to each factor that is considered; and each bit of information contributes in much the same way that pieces of a jigsaw puzzle finally comprise a picture. Usually no one piece of information alone is sufficient to ruin your chances; instead, view the process as one where you want to contribute the best "pieces," as many positive "pieces" as possible, and enough of them so that the committee can come up with the best "picture" of your potential.

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### 2. Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

- What is the student's percentile ranking?
- What is the score for each section? Writing sample?
- Is there a low score on one section of the test? If so, which section?
- Are there any factors that might account for poor performance?
- How do these scores compare with those of other candidates from the same institution?

- Are the scores consistent with the GPA? How do they compare with the GPA?

In general medical schools seem to be looking for applicants with scores in the eightieth percentile or above. A low score on one section could be a problem, one extraordinary score, noteworthy; but committees are interested in the total profile of the MCAT and how that fits with the total picture of the candidate.

The MCAT is usually taken in the spring of the junior year. However, if you have finished the introductory courses in biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics by the end of your sophomore year, you may want to take the MCAT in the late summer before your junior year. This option enables you to review during the summer rather than during the school year.

While grades and MCAT are not everything, they are primary to the admissions picture. To illustrate, a medical school may have four thousand or more applicants for one hundred places. In order to determine whom to select for entrance, the members of the admissions committee may choose one thousand candidates to interview. They usually choose those with high "numbers" (grades and MCAT's). From this pool of one thousand, they are able to find applicants that have, in addition to high "numbers," the human traits that will enable them to become good doctors.

Other factors considered are:

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### 3. Life Experience

Of particular interest to committee members is the quality of the activities in which you have participated, and what you learned from them. Consider exploring some of the following:

#### **Health Care-Related** -- "the unwritten requirement for medical school"

- Has the applicant worked/volunteered in a clinical health care-related setting?
- Has the applicant gained a realistic picture of the career field they seek to enter?
- Has the applicant had contact with patients? Used interpersonal and communication skills?

#### **Work**

- Has the applicant worked while attending college? In the summer? How much?
- Has this affected time available to devote to studies and extracurricular activities?

#### **Service**

- What kind of service experience has the applicant had?
- What was the extent and quality of these experiences?
- Is there a demonstrated commitment to helping others?
- What has the applicant done to become aware of the needs of people unlike himself/herself?

### **Extracurricular**

- Is the student able to participate in activities and still maintain high grades?
- Did the student assume leadership roles? Work as part of a team?
- Is there a sustained commitment?
- What is the quality of these activities? What did the student get out of the activities?
- Are there a variety of activities?

### **Research**

- Has the applicant had research experience? Lab? Clinical? At what level? Independent? Collaborative? Publications? Presentations/Posters?

### **Teaching/Instructional/Counseling**

- Has the student been a teaching assistant? Counselor? Peer advisor?

You need not demonstrate competence in all of these areas; nor can you turn to a magical formula for combining activities to "look good." Most admissions committee members are experienced in their work, and may have an instinct for detecting the credentials that have been put together for the purpose of "getting into medical school." In general, they prefer a genuine person. So, pursue in some depth and breadth the activities that are of interest to you and that are congruent with your personality and life goals.

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## **4. Letter of Evaluation and Recommendations**

Up to this point, the committee will have been looking at a mostly "skeletal" outline. While your application essay will help to fill in the picture, the letters of recommendation help even more in that they contribute information on how recommenders who are experienced in working with students view you. A well-composed letter helps to answer three big questions: What are your personal traits? Intellectual traits? Social traits?

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## **5. The Application**

The completed application, which includes an essay, contributes to the total picture that is being formed.

- Was the application submitted in a timely manner?
  - What is the content of the essay?
  - Can the applicant write well? Spell? Organize information?
  - What is the applicant's state of residence? Age? Citizenship? Minority status?
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## **6. The Interview**

After an admissions committee finishes looking at the "paper credentials," it is ready to make some observations in person, in the form of an interview, to try to answer questions like the

following: What are the applicant's communication skills? Personality? Goals? Appearance? What aspects that are not clear in the application can be clarified?

After the interview, the medical school admissions committee has a fuller picture which it uses to compare the applicant with others in the pool of candidates from which it ultimately makes its choice. Naturally, this method is not perfect because it is administered by people who are not perfect, but at most medical schools it seems to be administered with a great deal of human concern.

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### **"Are my Credentials Competitive?"**

There are many variables in the six admission factors given above, and there are many variables in the opinions of the members of the various admissions committees, so the choice of candidates is not totally predictable. However, it is not totally unpredictable, either. Within wide parameters it is possible for you to look at your credentials, reviewing the six admission factors as an admissions committee would, and find at least a tentative answer to the question, "Are my credentials competitive enough to apply to medical school?" You can also further explore this question with a health careers advisor and plan steps to take to strengthen your credentials.

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### **Your Conduct and Credit Records**

"Were you ever the recipient of any action by any college or medical school for unacceptable academic performance or conduct violation, even though such action may not have interrupted your enrollment or required you to withdraw?"

The American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS), used by the majority of medical schools in the United States, includes the above question on its application. Trustworthiness and good judgment are essential qualities for someone who seeks to enter a health profession. As you go through your college career, be aware that actions that reflect negatively on your character, judgment, or honesty may seriously diminish your chances of admission to a health professions school.

You should expect to borrow to pay for medical school. In order to be able to get loans you will need to have a good credit rating. Medical schools have rescinded an acceptance when a student's credit rating was poor.

### **Pre-Med Timeline**

This is applicable to anyone interested in any health-related professional school.

#### ***Freshman Year***

Although some schools may require a couple of extra courses (look at the AMCAS publication, the MSAR, for the school you are applying to), in general the basic requirements are:

- Biology (1 year with lab)
- Physics (1 year with lab)
- Chemistry (2 years, General and Organic Chemistry with lab)
- English (1 year)
- Calculus (1 semester; some private schools require 1 year)

As you can see from the basic requirements, students may choose any major. At medical school, you'll find students who majored in literature, economics, computer engineering, biology, chemistry, and pharmacy. The most important factor is that you choose something that interests you and in which you excel (i.e., getting mostly A's and B's).

Complete **General Chemistry** and at least one other science premed requirement. Taking **General Chemistry** early allows you to take **Organic Chemistry** the following year. Why do you want to do this? This allows you to retake the course if you do poorly, and it also allows you to get it out of the way so that you can take interesting upper division courses in your major without being overworked. Admissions committees look at a student's performance in Organic Chemistry as an indication of that student's ability to handle the course work in medical school. So if you did poorly in Organic (i.e. less than a B-), you may consider retaking the course.

You should decide during your freshman year what extracurricular activities you would like to pursue during your undergraduate career. This includes both volunteering and being involved in organizations. Think about what you like to do. Pick a couple of activities and stay with them throughout your undergraduate program, but try to stay away from being too spread out and not being able to contribute significantly in **any** of your activities.

Some students may have to work to put themselves through school. Just pick at least one extracurricular activity that is important to you. Working and paying your way through college is admirable. It demonstrates your ability to assume responsibility and stay focused on your goals.

Towards the end of this year, begin thinking about what you want to do for the summer. Scholarly endeavors in research laboratories are a major bonus. Most of the competitive schools look to see if applicants have worked in labs.

### *Sophomore Year*

By now, you should have completed your **General Chemistry** requirement and one other premed science requirement. Plan to tackle **Organic Chemistry** this year and finish another science premed requirement. If you do poorly in any of these courses (less than a B-), you should consider re-taking them in the **summer** or during your junior year.

You also want to demonstrate that your educational interests go beyond science. Take literature, humanities, or foreign language courses. For those not majoring in science, you have an advantage here - your education interests are already diverse. Just keep in mind that the breadth of your education is just as important as the level of difficulty.

For the **summer**, plan on pursuing your research, volunteer, and extracurricular interests. You should also consider studying for the MCAT.

### ***Junior Year***

This is the big year. You are completing the remainder of your premed courses, taking the MCAT, and preparing your application to medical school, in addition to doing well in your course work. This may seem difficult. It should be. Don't worry, however, with some organization and a plan, you will be able to accomplish these goals.

It is time to seriously study for the MCAT by scheduling blocks of time for reviewing your completed science courses. During the last month prior to the April MCAT, take as many MCAT practice testes as you can (full-length ones if possible). If you are unable to structure the time to study effectively for the MCAT, consider taking a prep course.

Start writing your personal essay during the **winter**. Make sure you write, re-write...and then re-write some more. This is one of the most important elements in your application since it allows the admissions committee to get to know you better.

When the applications are available in the **spring**, review an application from AMCAS and the non-AMCAS schools. An electronic version of the AMCAS application is the only one now available.

Send in your application to AMCAS the **FIRST** day they will take them, usually in **June**, and after you have received your MCAT scores. Remember that the majority of US AMCAS applications are submitted by **June 30**; don't be late. Be sure to keep a copy for yourself. Send in your non-AMCAS applications as well. Letters of recommendation will be sent to your schools from your premed advisor, or individuals you have selected (see the page about recommendation letters to determine whom you should ask.) AFTER you receive secondary applications and request those letters from your pre-med advisor.

Aim to have our application materials (i.e. MCAT scores, secondary applications with fee, letters of recommendation, transcript, and your photographs) completed and submitted to the schools by **August**. This is important. The sooner you have your application completed, the better. This considerably increases your chances of becoming accepted.

### ***Senior Year***

Your hard work and preparation in the previous year will pay off. If you have submitted all your application materials by **August**, you just need to relax and wait for interviews.

Enjoy your final year in college and start preparing for the interview. Invitations for interviews will generally come in **October** and later. The invitation may also come sooner if you completed your application before **August**. At your interview, inquire about the notification process for the individual school

Search for sources of financial aid using the Internet, as well as the guides available through the medical schools that you are considering attending.

Acceptance, waiting lists, and rejections are sent out on different schedules, depending on the school. Some schools have rolling admissions, where offers for admission are sent out after each admissions committee meeting. At other programs, offers may not be sent out until after a set deadline.

If you are placed on the waiting list, there are several things you can do. First, update your application by sending in your first semester grades from your senior year, recent publications or awards, or even a letter stating your interest in attending that school.

In the circumstance you are not offered an acceptance, you should review your application with your pre-med advisor and determine your strengths and weaknesses. You may want to spend a year polishing your application for resubmission.

### **Pre-Health Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

*Q1: What should I major in if I am contemplating attending medical, dental, veterinary, podiatry, optometry or chiropractic school?*

A: Professional Associations, including the Association of American Medical Schools, do not recommend any particular major for professional school preparation. In addition, there are no specific majors which schools tend to prefer. Pre-health students can major in anything from engineering to history to vocal performance. The important thing to consider when contemplating majors is that you choose something you enjoy. Chances are, if you enjoy the subjects you are studying, you will do better than if you choose something just because you think it will get you into a professional school. So, while majors are not important, your grades and overall performance in your chosen major is. You should also seriously consider a back-up plan. Because acceptance to professional schools is extremely competitive, you may need a back-up plan to use temporarily or for a longer period of time. You should consider this and plan accordingly. If you never need a back-up plan, that will be excellent. If you do, you will be glad you have one. Need help choosing an alternative career?

*Q2: Should I double major or choose a minor? Will that increase my chances of acceptance?*

A: Similar to the answer above, professional schools are concerned with your overall performance. They also desire applicants who take courses in a variety of fields - both science and non-science. So, if deciding to double major or declaring a minor sounds like a good option for you, it is not a bad idea. It will help you explore other subject fields outside of your major and help you to become a well-rounded student. Of course, you can also take a variety of courses without declaring a double major or minor. In the end, just like major selection, double majors and minors will have very little impact on your acceptance.

*Q3: What courses should I take to prepare me for professional school?*

A: You will need a strong background in the sciences. These will include courses in biology, mathematics, chemistry, and physics. Professional schools also encourage students to take a variety of courses outside of the sciences to strengthen reading comprehension and writing skills.

*Q4: What does a professional school focus on for admission purposes?*

A: Your undergraduate grade point average (GPA) as well as your science GPA - composed of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics (BCPM) composite GPA. The next important factor to admission is your Admissions Test (MCAT, DAT, OAT, or GRE) score. These are extremely important parts of your application. Professional schools look very favorable on health care experience in your field. If you are interested in medicine, optometry or dentistry, you should try to get health care experience in a variety of settings and with a diverse group of practitioners. If you are interested in veterinary medicine, you should get experience in both small and large animal care. Other factors include; part-time work, extra curricular activities, diversity issues, maturity, well-rounded education, letters of recommendation, personal statements, and hopefully, an interview. Because professional schools look at all of these factors when considering admission, it is important to make them all as strong as possible. Grades and test scores are most important because professional schools want to make sure that you are ready for the work that lies ahead. From these applicants, you will want all of the other aspects of your application to stand out. There is no magical path to professional school acceptance besides hard work and dedication. No major and no particular school will gain you admission to medical school. You will be responsible for that.

*Q5: How important are extracurricular activities for medical school admissions?*

A: Although extracurricular activities are not viewed as an alternative to your GPA or admissions test score, professional schools do look for "well-rounded" applicants, and one way to demonstrate this is to get involved in campus and community activities. Choose organizations that interest you because those are the ones that will make your collegiate experience more meaningful. However, you need to keep in mind that your GPA is more important than campus involvement, so never sacrifice your grades by becoming over committed with extracurricular activities. If you are not enjoying a particular activity, choose another. The type of activity you choose is not as important as just getting involved.

*Q6: How should I go about obtaining letters of recommendation?*

A: You should plan to get at least three academic references from professors. Two of these letters should be from science professors and the third from a non-science professor. You can collect up to two additional letters, and these should be from an employer, a research supervisor, a physician, or someone you have worked with. You should avoid letters from congressmen, clergy, or friends of the family. You should ask them, "Would you be comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation?" Hopefully the answer is honest - if they say no, do not be offended but ask someone else. The actual content of the letter is much more important than the status of the letter-writer to the professional school admissions committee. Be sure to give your recommender a copy of your transcript, a resume, and your personal statement.

*Q7: How about more information on preparing for the MCAT, DAT, OAT, GRE?*

A: Private review companies have information about the MCAT and DAT preparation, including Kaplan and Princeton Review. There has been no statistical evidence that shows

students which take review courses do better than students who do not. These courses can be expensive (\$1000+), therefore, you may want to buy several preparation books first to evaluate whether or not you can improve your score by studying on your own. If you choose this option, make sure to spend the time necessary and do not let time get away from you. However, if it would make you feel better just knowing you took a review course then, by all means, take one.

The important thing is that you feel as prepared and confident as possible when exam day arrives. A good resource is the ability to order old exams with answers. You can do this off the MCAT, DAT, and GRE websites. A general rule of thumb is that you should begin studying for these exams about six months prior to the examination.

*Q8: When should I take the MCAT, DAT?*

A: Since professional schools have a rolling admission acceptance policy, it is to your benefit to get your application in as soon as schools start accepting them (June 1st). Therefore, taking the MCAT exam during the spring of your junior year (April) is preferred. Taking the exam by this day will allow your test scores to arrive at the application services soon after June 1st. You could take the August exam if necessary -either because you could not take the April exam or because you did not do as well as you liked on the April exam. However, because medical schools average MCAT scores, it is important to be as prepared as possible the first time you take the exam. The DAT and GRE is offered year around on the computer, and the same timelines exist for these exams. You should have them completed by the beginning of the summer in which you will apply. The OAT is offered in February and October, and you can take either test date.

*Q9: How can I find out which schools I am likely to be accepted by?*

A: There are many publications you may want to check out. You can purchase them at campus bookstores or online. They are *Medical School Admission Requirements (latest edition)*, *Admission Requirements of United States and Canadian Dental Schools*, *Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements*, and *Osteopathic Medical College Information Book*. In these books, you will find class profiles, acceptance rates, and tons of other information.

*Q10: How do I learn more about individual professional schools?*

A: One source to find links to home pages from professional schools is through the American Association of Medical, Dental, Optometry, etc. websites. You can learn more about each school and often request admission material online.

*Q11: Where should I go if I have additional questions about professional schools?*

A: If you have additional concerns or questions regarding medical, dental, etc. school after you have read the information provided on this web site, you may schedule an appointment with the pre-health advisor by calling (731) 989-6035. Be sure to read all the information on this web page, such as the handbook and personal statement information, before seeing the pre-health advisor in order to maximize the benefits of your appointment..

Q12: *What percentage of Freed-Hardeman students are accepted to medical, dental, osteopathic, and optometry school?*

A: The answer to this question is pretty meaningless. Freed-Hardeman University does not restrict any student from applying to professional school. In other words, even less than competitive students can apply to professional school. Clearly, the more of these students there are, the larger the denominator becomes and lower our percentage rate becomes. Conversely, some schools only consider those applicants who have a 3.5 or above as their applicants and base their acceptance rates from that number. Because there is no consistency about how undergraduate institutions arrive at their "percentage accepted," it is difficult to compare schools on the same criteria. In the end, it is not the school that obtains a medical school acceptance, it is the student. Following the advice of our pre-health professional advisor, our students are very successful at gaining acceptance to medical school.

Q13: *What do I do if I am not accepted to medical school this year?*

A: Medical school acceptance is very competitive. In any given year, an average of 22,000 students who apply are not admitted. Furthermore, medical schools have indicated that they can fill their admitted class 2.5 times with the same caliber of students as they accepted. This all means that very good students may not get admitted on their first attempt at applying to a medical school. What should you do in this case? Well, you should take a critical look at your application and try to figure out what part is the weakest. For instance, if your grades were weak in several of the pre-health prerequisites, then taking additional coursework might be necessary. Similarly, if your MCAT score was below average for those accepted, you might want to consider retaking the exam. However, it is important to know that not all students need to take additional coursework; only those who had weak grades to begin with will find additional coursework helpful in strengthening their application. The same is true for retaking the MCAT. Another consideration in the process is timing. Because there are so few spots for medical school each year, the earlier you apply, the better chance you have at securing one of these spots. That means if you applied late in the application cycle, you may have been denied admission for that reason alone! In the end, you should speak with a pre-health advisor about how to strengthen your application and reapply. One more word about this: You should never reapply year after year if you are unsuccessful. Take some time to strengthen your application before reapplying. Nothing is worse than resubmitting a substandard application. Medical school admissions committees will become desensitized to your application and reject it year after year without review. There are even some medical schools now that will not even consider third time applicants. Make sure that your application is as strong as possible before submitting it.

Q14: *What happens if I am earning a C in a course? Should I repeat the course? Should I drop it?*

A: You should consider your options carefully before withdrawing from a course. Medical schools will consider all attempts at a course, even withdraws and incompletes. Many medical schools consider a W a failing grade. They figure that if you had to drop one of your pre-health pre-requisites, you were probably failing the course. At the very least, they recognize that you

are attempting to "clean up" your transcript. This is the reason that W's are not always the solution. Yes, C's do affect your grade point average, and W's do not. However, one C in a course will never keep you out of medical school provided the rest of your grades in pre-health courses are better than C's. **If you develop a pattern of C's or W's, you are becoming increasingly un-competitive.** If you are earning a C in a course, you might choose to keep the course and commit yourself to working harder and more diligently with the remainder of your courses. That way your transcript will not reflect a W, and you will not need to repeat the course. If you do decide to keep the course and earn a C in it, recognize that you will need to work hard on this section of the MCAT preparation. Because you will be tested on this information later, you will likely have missed half of the information in the course if you earn a C. You will just need to work harder at bringing yourself up to speed in this section. In the end, it will be your choice. Neither decision will make you feel good. This is the proverbial "caught between a rock and hard place," and you will need to decide if a W or C is better for you at this point in your career.

### Selecting Schools

You should begin selecting schools to which you would like to apply at least six months beforehand. It is recommended you consult one of the following publications to help choose the schools to which you will apply. Make sure you get the most recent edition. Remember that even in the most recent editions, some information may be inaccurate. Most of these publications contain information on admission requirements for individual schools, in addition to statistical information on accepted students. Some of them also include information about the respective professions. Most schools are also located on the world-wide web, which is an excellent source of information. **Is important to verify information such as admission requirements and application procedures with each individual school.**

Note: **Having a GPA and test score higher than a school's average does not mean you will be accepted, or even invited for an interview.** Many other factors will be considered, including health care experience, motivation, letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, personal statement, etc.

When considering a school, find out whether they consider out-of-state residents (if it is in a state of which you are not a resident), the average GPA and test scores of recently accepted applicants, tuition, location (Do you want to live there for four years?), and special programs/initiatives. You should choose at least a couple of 'dream schools' – those that you may not have much of a chance of getting in to, but which you would love to attend. Then choose several schools which you would like to attend and for which you feel you are competitive. Finally, choose a few schools for which you feel you are very competitive as backup schools.

#### **\* *Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)***

Association of American Medical Colleges  
Membership and Publication Orders  
2450 N Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20037  
Tel: (202) 828-0416

Fax: (202) 828-1123

<http://www.aamc.org/findinfo/aamcpubs/reqpubs/ordforms/oform.htm>

(Note: Mrs. Willis has the most recent edition of MSAR in her office.)

***Admissions Requirements of United States and Canadian Dental Schools***

American Association of Dental Schools

1625 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20036-2212

Tel: (202) 667-9433

Fax: (202) 667-0642

[Publications@aads.jhu.edu](mailto:Publications@aads.jhu.edu)

***Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements in the United States and Canada***

Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges

Williams & Wilkins

Tel: (800) 638-0672

Fax: (800) 447-8438

***Osteopathic Medical College Information***

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine

Booklet comes with the AACOMAS application

**Standardized Tests**

Medical School: The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is required. It is given in April and August of each year. Information about test can be accessed at [www.aamc.org](http://www.aamc.org). Test should be taken in the spring of your junior year. If you need to retake it, you may do so in August. However, **do not use the April test as a practice!** If you are truly not prepared for the April test, wait until August, and study hard over the summer. If you take it for the first time in August, you will not have a second chance to take it for this application cycle. Also, your scores will not be received by the medical schools until late October.

Dental School: The Dental Admission Test (DAT) is required. Information about test can be accessed at [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org). Test should be taken in the spring of your junior year. Contact individual schools to determine whether or not they will accept October scores. The DAT may also be taken by computer throughout the year.

Veterinary School: Most veterinary schools require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Some also require the MCAT or the Veterinary College Admission Test (VCAT). Find out now what test(s) is (are) required by the schools to which you plan to apply. The GRE is also offered year-round on computer. Information can be accessed at [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org). You should take these tests the spring of your junior year.

## Letters of Recommendation

- \* Most schools require 3-5 letters.
- \* Many schools ask for 2-3 science professors and 1-2 non-science professors, though this varies from school to school. They do not necessarily have to be from professors, though you should have a couple from professors. If you are concerned about what letters to get, contact the individual schools to which you plan to apply.
- \* Get to know your professors.
- \* Give each recommender a profile of yourself, indicating your experiences, hobbies, and interests.
- \* You have the legal right to see your letters of recommendation. You will be asked whether or not you wish to waive this right. You are definitely allowed not to waive this right. However, if you waive your right of access to the letters, the admissions committees will assume the letter writers were most honest in their evaluations.
- \* FHU does a committee letter that is handled through Mrs. Willis. The student meets with Mrs. Willis and selects individuals that he or she wants to write letters for them. Letters are requested from FHU faculty designated by the student and are held until the student receives secondary applications from specific medical schools. At that point it is the student's responsibility to contact Mrs. Willis and give her the addresses of the schools where letters should be sent.
- \* Think of people other than professors who might write you a good evaluation. Have you worked closely with a professor doing research, or with a doctor that you have shadowed quite a bit? What about someone who supervised you closely with a special project on which you worked?
- \* Letter of recommendation should be:
  - \* from someone who knows you well
  - \* from someone who can speak well of your intelligence, personality, and motivation toward your chosen career
  - \* recent
  - \* from someone you have worked with in an academic/professional capacity (except for peer/character recommendations)

## Filling Out the Application

**It is strongly recommended that all applicants heed the following suggestions:**

- \* Follow all instructions carefully!!! This may seem obvious now, but the applications are quite detailed, and making the smallest of mistakes may delay the processing of your application, or cause incorrect information to be sent to the schools to which you are applying. It is much better take the time now to make sure you fill out the application correctly, than to wait to correct a mistake later!
- \* If using the paper application (as opposed to the electronic version which is becoming increasingly common and is now used exclusively by some services), **type it!!!** While

most application services will allow legibly hand-written applications, this is more likely to cause errors. Also, a typed application looks nicer, and it will be seen by the schools! Spelling **must** be correct.

- \* After submitting your preliminary application, you will receive a copy of your profile from the application service. Carefully review this information immediately, and follow the instructions for changing any incorrect information. Depending on the information that is incorrect, you may also want to contact the individual schools, since it may be a while until they receive the updated information.
- \* Request a copy of your transcripts from **all** schools you have attended **now**, so that you can refer to them because applications must match the information on your transcripts.
- \* Apply as early as possible after you have received scores from your standardized tests!
- \* Be aware of all schools' deadlines!!!
- \* Do not send your application before the earliest date listed, or it will be returned.
- \* Make sure you have an application for the appropriate entering class!
- \* Proofread the application carefully before sending it. Make sure all required information, including appropriate fee, is included.
- \* Answer all questions honestly, including any questions about academic performance, conduct violations, or criminal charges. Questions regarding suspension or conduct violations should be directed to Student Services. Most applications provide a place to explain such incidents. Explain them honestly and openly, without making excuses. If you have any questions about how to explain these incidents, consult with your advisor.
- \* Permanent address – list an address that you do not expect to change over the next year (such as your parents' address).
- \* Preferred mailing address – Correspondence will be sent here. If you move, contact the centralized application service and all schools to which you have applied immediately. **Do not miss that letter offering you an interview!!!**
- \* Photocopy or print all pages of your application before sending it. If it gets lost, you will want that information to fill out a new one!
- \* Remember to include an address and postage on any acknowledgement receipt cards that require them.
- \* Many schools only accept in-state residents, or strongly prefer them. You may only be a resident of one state. If you are not sure of which state you are a resident, contact the schools to which you plan to apply.

### **Centralized Application Services**

Most medical, dental, veterinary and podiatry schools utilize a centralized application service. The applicant sends one application to a central processing locating which verifies transcripts and calculates GPA's, forwarding the information to the schools designated. **Not all schools utilize such services**, so it is important to make sure you check with each school to which you apply to make sure you know how to initiate an application! Most schools, after receiving the preliminary application from the centralized application service, will require additional information, and an additional application fee.

### **Allopathic Medical School**

American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS)

2501 M Street, NW

Libby-26

Washington, DC 20037-1300

(202)828-0600

E-mail: [amcas@aamc.org](mailto:amcas@aamc.org)

<http://www.aamc.org/stuapps/admiss/amcas/start.htm>

Electronic version can be ordered from AMCAS or downloaded from the world-wide-web.

### **Osteopathic Medical School**

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS)

5550 Friendship Boulevard Suite 310

Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815

(301)968-4190, and press "1" at the prompt.

<http://www.aacom.org>

Electronic version is available and can be ordered from AACOMAS or downloaded from the world-wide web.

### **Veterinary School**

Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS)

P. O. Box 24700

Oakland, CA 94623-1700

E-mail: [Ljohnson@aavmc.org](mailto:Ljohnson@aavmc.org)

<http://www.aavmc.org/vmcas.htm>

### **Dental School**

American Association of Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS)

American Association of Dental Schools

1625 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20036-2212

(202)667-1887 or (800) 353-AADS (2237)

E-mail: [aadsas.appl@aads.jhu.edu](mailto:aadsas.appl@aads.jhu.edu)

## **Important Information for Each Application Service**

### **AMCAS**

- \* AMCAS will begin receiving applications June 1.
- \* Do not send letters of recommendation or other supplementary materials to AMCAS.
- \* If applying for a Fee Waiver, request it **now**. You must have a fee waiver approved **before** submitting your AMCAS application
- \* If you plan to take the August MCAT, make sure you indicate this in the appropriate section.
- \* If you answer "yes" to the question regarding academic performance or conduct violations,

explain fully in the “Personal Comments” section.

- \* Check yes to the Advisor Information Service Release – please! You are not required to release your information to your Pre-Health Professions Advisor. However, this information is helpful to your advisor in advising future students. Also, we like to hear how many of our students have been accepted! All information on individual applicants will remain confidential.

Extracurricular information: When listing clubs and organizations, note any offices held or special programs worked on. List all volunteer work and employment, not just health-related activities. When listing volunteer work, **briefly** describe what you did. Telling an admissions committee that you volunteered at a hospital does not tell them anything about what kind of experience you gained. However, do not ‘squeeze’ information into Page 1 of the application. **Remember, your application should be easy to read!** Page 1 is intended to be a brief listing. You may explain in more detail in the “Personal Comments” section. If you run out of room (because you’ve been very busy), continue in the “Personal Comments” section.

Transcripts: Transcripts must be sent to AMCAS directly from the Registrar’s Office. **Do not** send them yourself. Request transcripts from **all** U. S. or Canadian post-secondary schools attended, **even if transfer work appears on your Freed-Hardeman transcript.** AMCAS will begin accepting official transcripts June 1, so request transcripts as soon as possible from other schools. Have transcripts sent as soon as this semester is over (if applying before the summer semester is over). If you are enrolled in school during the summer or fall semester while/after you apply, send updated transcripts to all schools for which you are still in consideration immediately following the semester. Do not send additional transcripts to AMCAS after your initial application.

Academic Record: Fill out the Academic Record carefully, following all instructions precisely. All courses must be marked Biology (B), Chemistry (C), Physics (P), Math (M) or All other (A). If unsure which category a course is in, ask your professor. Your GPA will be calculated by AMCAS, and will be broken down into science (BCPM), non-science (A), and total. Each GPA will also be broken down into freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, post-bacc, cumulative undergraduate, and graduate.

## **AACOMAS**

- \* AACOMAS will begin receiving applications June 1.
- \* If applying for a Fee Waiver, apply now. The fee waiver must be approved before you may submit your AACOMAS application.
- \* Make sure you release your MCAT scores to AACOMAS!!!
- \* Do not send letters of recommendation or other supplementary materials to AACOMAS.
- \* Check yes to the Advisor Information Service Release – please! You are not required to release your information to your Pre-Health Professions Advisor. However, this information is helpful to your advisor in advising future students. Also, we like to hear how many of our students have been accepted! All information on individual applicant will remain confidential

- \* If you plan to take the August MCAT, indicate this in the appropriate section!

Transcripts: Transcripts must be sent directly from the Registrar's Office. Do not send them yourself. Submit transcripts from **all** U. S. institutions, **even if transferred coursework is on your FHU transcript**. You may have foreign coursework evaluated. For Canadian and other foreign schools, consult the AACOMAS directions. If you are enrolled in school during the summer or fall semester while/after you apply, send updated transcripts to all schools for which you are initially applying.

Extracurricular information: For "Prior Career/Experience," most of you will put "Student." There is little space for the "Volunteer, internships, honors, awards" section. Continue in the "Personal Comments" section if necessary.

Academic Record: The AACOMAS grading system does not include grades for .5 values. If you received any + grades, write in the numeric value. D+ = 1.3, C+ = 2.3, B+ = 3.3. Your (-) grades are D- = .7, C- = 1.7, and B- = 2.7. Your Science GPA consists of Biology/Zoology (B), Inorganic Chem. (I), Organic Chem. (O), Biochemistry (T), Other Science (S), and Physics (P). Your Non-science GPA consists of Math (M), English (E), Behavioral Science (H), and Other Non-Science (N). AACOMAS will calculate you science, non-science, and overall GPA, and break it down by academic year. For repeated courses, only the last grade will be used.

Academic Status – FHU uses the following scale:

- 0-29 hours Freshman
- 30-59 hours Sophomore
- 60-89 hours Junior
- 90-132 hours Senior

## AADSAS

- \* AADSAS will begin receiving applications June 1.
- \* AADSAS does not have a fee waiver program.
- \* Some schools require supplementary materials to be sent the school at the same time AADSAS application is sent, while some want you to wait until you hear from them. Make sure you **check the Supplemental Materials Table** in the AADSAS instruction booklet for each school to which you are applying!!! **Follow these instructions exactly!!!** Do not send supplemental materials to AADSAS.

Extracurricular activities – There is no room for writing in what you did. You are given a list of activities, and you mark off those in which ones you participated or were a leader. If you have significant experiences you would like to address, use the Applicant Essay.

Transcripts: AADSAS will accept transcripts sent by the applicant, if they are in a sealed envelope with the Registrar's signature over the seal. You may also have the Registrar send the transcripts directly. Submit transcripts from each and every college or university you have attended, **even if the transfer work appears on your current transcript**. All foreign transcripts must be translated into English before submitting them to AADSAS. Immediately following the fall semester, send the Academic Update Form to AADSAS to update your

application with grades you have earned since you applied. Do not send updated transcripts to AADSAS.

Course Work section: This section can get confusing. Follow directions exactly! AADSAS computes a separate GPA for Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, non-science coursework, and total coursework. These GPA's are also broken down into undergraduate, graduate, and combined GPA's. Repeated coursework is computed into the GPA.

### VMCAS

- \* VMCAS will begin receiving applications in August.
- \* Three evaluation forms go directly to VMCAS, not to the individual schools. You must give each of your evaluators a special envelope (which comes with the VMCAS application) and have him/her place the letter in the envelope, sign the seal, and return the envelope to you. Submit your evaluation forms with your VMCAS application.
- \* You must check the appropriate application procedure for each school to which you apply. Some schools participate in VMCAS, but will not accept VMCAS applications from certain applicants (e.g., in-state applicants). Follow these instructions carefully!!!
- \* The VMCAS deadline is October 1 (for the entering class). VMCAS will send your application to schools if it is received by February, even if after the deadline, but will note postmark and receipt date, and the school may not consider your application if it is late.
- \* The VMCAS "Applicant Data Phase" is August through February. From March 1 on, information may only be updated through the individual schools.
- \* Standardized test scores (GRE, VCAT, MCAT, TOEFL) must be released directly to VMCAS. If you did not release your scores to VMCAS the day of the test, contact the testing agency as soon as possible to have your scores released.

Extracurricular information: The question labeled "Veterinary Experience" refers to work you did with professionals. The "Animal Experience" section refers to contact you had directly with animals. "Employment History" refers to any other paid work you have done. **Do not list any experience more than once.** If something you have done fits into both "Veterinary" and "Animal" experience, choose the more appropriate category. For the sections marked "Honors and Awards" and "Extracurricular and Community Activities," list awards/activities most relevant first if you do not have enough room. If you still need more space, use the "Explanation Sheet."

Transcripts: You must submit transcripts from each and every college and university attended, **even if transfer credit appears on your current transcript.** Transcripts are to be **submitted with your application** in a sealed envelope, or directly from the Registrar, for all U. S. and Canadian schools. Ask for the Registrar's signature or stamp over the seal. VMCAS will accept transcripts directly from the Registrar, but they caution that this may delay processing. **For schools outside the U. S. and Canada,** you must have your transcripts evaluated by one of the organizations listed in the VMCAS instruction booklet. Have your fall transcripts sent to VMCAS **immediately** after the fall semester ends (within 10 working days). VMCAS will begin receiving transcripts **June 1.** **Do not** send them earlier. If you are attending summer school, send your transcripts from that school immediately after the semester.

Core Curriculum Section: Follow the directions precisely. Core curriculum includes only courses required by the schools to which you are applying, not all courses that fit into the specified categories. GPA's will be calculated for your core curriculum, your last 45 hours, and for your overall coursework. Grades are entered exactly as they appear on the transcript; VMCAS does not have a grade conversion chart.

### **Personal Statement**

Each application service has room for a personal statement, and each has its own instructions. The following are excerpts from the application instructions for each application service.

AMCAS – “This is your opportunity to provide personal information that is otherwise not included on your application. Consider and construct your comments carefully; many admissions committees place significant weight on this section.”

AACOMAS – “We encourage you to provide your motivation for applying to the field of osteopathic medicine in this section.”

AADSAS – “Your *Applicant Essay* provides an opportunity to explain why you desire to pursue a dental education.”

VMCAS – “Your personal statement should help the admission committee(s) learn something about you as a person, about the development of your interest in veterinary medicine, and about your career goals.”

This is your opportunity to expound upon experiences that you have had that did not go anywhere else on the application, or which you did not get a chance to describe in enough detail. You volunteered a lot of hours, but what kind of experiences did you gain from it? How did your experiences motivate you even further to pursue this career? What unique qualities/experiences do you/have you had that you would like the committee to know about? The following suggestions will be helpful:

- \* Proofread your essay before typing it onto the application!
- \* Quality, not quantity!!!
- \* Make sure the essay is legible. Do not squeeze the lines together to make a long essay fit – shorten the essay!
- \* Have others read your essay. Ask them to comment not only on grammatical errors, but on what kind of person the essay makes you sound like. Do you sound sincere?
- \* If explaining anything negative on your application (such as a bad semester, conduct probation, etc.) be open and honest. Mention the facts and move on. Explain your side of the story, but do not make excuses.
- \* Creativity and quality are important, but you are not expected to write a masterpiece. It should be apparent that you can express yourself well, but do not try to “woo” the admissions committee with big words and elaborate descriptions. You should sound like a real person!!!
- \* If you are reapplying, write a new personal statement! Show that you are willing to put some effort into your new application.

### **Secondary Applications**

After the schools receive your preliminary applications from the centralized application services, you will (hopefully) receive secondary applications. Some schools do not request secondary applications, but base their decisions on the information contained in your preliminary application and letters of recommendation. Some schools send secondaries to all applicants, and some to all in-state applicants. Some schools conduct a review of the preliminary applications to determine whether or not to send each applicant a secondary. You should hear from the school either way. If you do not hear from the school within 3-4 weeks after you receive your applicant profile, you should contact the school to find out the status of your application.

The secondary application usually asks additional questions, and may require more essays. You will probably wind up repeating some of the information contained in your personal statement. This is OK (it means you chose to write about information they were interested in!). However, **do not repeat your personal statement.** The schools already have this and are looking for new essays. It may also request other supplementary materials such as letters of recommendation or resumes. **Do not send any supplementary materials, including letters of recommendation, to the schools until you are instructed to do so** (exception – some schools instruct you to send supplemental materials before you hear from them, such as with some dental schools). Follow all instructions carefully. Send all materials in as soon as possible, and **be aware of any deadlines for the secondaries.** Make sure your letters of recommendation are received before the deadline. Some people take much longer than they claim to write the letters. **It is not their responsibility to make sure the letters are in on time. It is your responsibility!** Most schools will inform you when your application is complete. If you do not hear from the school within two weeks after you feel all materials should have arrived, contact the school to make sure your file is complete.

After all information is received by the school, your application will be reviewed to determine whether or not you will be granted an interview. This decision may take quite a while to make.

Be patient. You should review the handout on interviewing tips (see Mrs. Willis for this) or read the interviewing section of the *Health Professions Handbook* at: [http://www.advising.ufl.edu/ohlp/ohlp/tocHealthProfessions.html](http://www.advising.ufl.edu/ohlp/ohlp/ohlp/tocHealthProfessions.html) . See also the web page section that gives sample interview questions asked of some Tennessee students.

Procedures for processing and reviewing applications and notifying applicants of interviews and acceptances vary from school to school. The secondary application should explain some of this; if not, contact the schools and familiarize yourself with each school's procedure so you will know what to expect. However, do not bombard the schools with too many questions. They need time to review your application!

### **Some Final Notes**

The application process is long, frustrating, and expensive. It can be extremely stressful. Approach it with confidence (not cockiness). Be aware of your strengths and your weaknesses. Know that you may not be accepted (even if you have excellent grades and test scores), and prepare yourself mentally for this possibility, especially if your GPA and test scores are below the national averages. Come up with a backup plan. What will you do if you are not accepted by next summer? Reapply? Go to graduate school? Consider another health profession? You should begin answering these questions now as a precautionary measure. You do not want to think about this reality, but if you do find yourself in this situation, you will be glad you will have put some thought into it. Also, do not get discouraged as you hear of your friends getting interviews and even acceptances before you. Many people are accepted late in the process. Congratulate your friends and share in their happiness.

You should be available at all times during the application process. You may not be given much notice for an interview. Make sure the schools have your correct address and phone number, and that you have a way to get to the schools quickly if you are offered an interview.

In January, complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and release the information to all schools at which you are still in consideration. Check with each school to find out about its financial aid. Some will use different applications, and many will require additional information if you are admitted.

Make sure you send your fall transcripts to the schools (and/or to the application services, per their instructions) as soon as the semester is over, and make sure you continue your strong academic performance. Schools will take into consideration courses you complete during the application process, not just the ones you completed before you applied. Also, if you have any significant experiences (published a paper, participated in a new activity, etc.), send a letter to the schools at which you are still in consideration to let them know what you have done. Your application might not be seen as competitive as someone else's until the committee learns that you have just become coordinator of the new homeless project in town. However, do not send a weekly letter letting them know of every little thing you are doing. You do not want to annoy the committees. They have a lot to read!

Finally, relax. This whole process will be much easier if you take it seriously, yet do not let yourself get too stressed out over it. If you begin to freak out, talk to your friends who are applying – you'll find they are just as nervous as you. Also, enjoy yourself! This will hopefully be your last year before entering a rigorous curriculum (and you thought all those organic and physics courses were rough!).

And last, but not least...

**GOOD LUCK!!!**