

Application process for medical, dental and veterinary school
College of the Holy Cross
May 2017

These are the steps you need to take when deciding to apply to medical, dental or veterinary school with committee support.

1. Are you ready?

- The most important but perhaps hardest part of the process is to decide if you are ready to apply. Graduate school in the health sciences is described as “drinking from a fire hydrant”: it can be overwhelming. The application process itself is time-consuming and expensive – it costs thousands of dollars just to apply. There is nothing to be learned from a failed application cycle, and it makes it that much more difficult to get in on reapplication, particularly for medical school.
- How do you decide if you are ready?
 - First, assess your competitiveness. Do you have strong enough grades? A strong enough exam score? Do you have enough clinical and other experiences? Are you ready to answer the question “why do you want to be a doctor/dentist/vet”? Do you have enough maturity and seasoning? **Use the handout from the January meeting and MSAR/ADEA data to help you assess.** Take into account your committee feedback and have an honest, open conversation with your advisor.
 - Second, think about what you want to do in the next couple of years. Do you want to make your application even stronger by spending some time doing research/clinical/volunteer/academic work? Do you need more time to consider this enormous decision? Are there things you would like to do before dedicating your life to caring for others in a medical environment?
 - You can wait until the last minute (after you receive your MCAT score) to decide, but you should think about the issues ahead of time. See also #4 below about the importance of applying early.
 - Note our final meeting is right before commencement; we will give you your final committee rating immediately after that. You will likely not get comments on this letter but you can ask your advisor for comments.

2. Where should you apply?

- There are many tools available to you to help you choose schools.
- Medical school
 - MSAR (AAMC, online): contains matriculated student data as well as detailed information about each MD school. The \$27 cost is well worth it.
 - This provides data on the range of GPA, MCAT, etc. for students who matriculated to each school. You can use this to help you select “reach,” “safety,” and “solid” schools. You do not want to apply to too many schools where you are the 10th percentile applicant in any statistic and expect to get in. You can add about 0.1 to your HC GPA to account for relative lack of grade inflation at Holy Cross (which is well-known by medical schools) when analyzing the data. You can feel more comfortable applying to schools where you are on the lower end of statistics if you have other offsetting qualities – for example, if you have a strong grade trajectory, post-bacc courses, have a particular background (underrepresented, first in family to go to college, disadvantaged, etc.). Each school decides for itself what groups are “underrepresented.” However, be careful not to be too aggressive in formulating your list. It is also important to not apply to too many schools where you are way at the high end of statistics, as they may not accept you assuming you will get in somewhere else. And, do not count on connections you have to people at any given medical school – they almost never work and may actually backfire. If you are not finding a lot of schools where you are competitive, it is time to think about whether you should do something to enhance your record before you apply, and whether you should at least think about osteopathic medical school.
 - DO Osteopathic College Information Book (CIB) (online from AACOM); does not contain full data on applicants but has useful descriptions of each school. And it’s free! Remember that application to DO schools requires a letter from a DO. (We can send it with your committee letter.)
 - Ranking lists: US News etc.
 - Past experience of Holy Cross students (from February meeting handout).

- However, you should research each school you are considering to determine if you are a good fit. Different schools have different emphases – some research, some primary care, some service... some serve a local area, some have a global health focus... some have public health or business school connections. Spend some time researching schools so you are applying to a list that fits you best.

- Dental School

- Use the ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools (Online from ADEA) to help select schools – it contains data on accepted applicants for each school.
- Past experience of Holy Cross students (from February meeting handout).

3. Fill out the application in advance.

- The application opens up in early May. Take your time filling it out, making sure everything is perfect. AACOMAS is going through technology transitions and may have issues – be prepared, as the process might be difficult.
- Admissions committees have low tolerance for typos, etc., so make sure your application is perfectly clean.
- Your personal statement is crucial. It is a chance to stand out as an individual from the many hundreds or thousands of other applications that otherwise look just like yours. Make sure you make the best possible use of this and your other writing opportunities. Use the writer’s workshop and other resources to help craft your personal statement. We have designed our committee personal statement guidelines and given you feedback to help you get ready to write a great personal statement. Follow the advice we have given at the workshops, etc.

4. Submit application to application service EARLY.

- There is a huge cost to applying later in the cycle. Applying in June is ideal, and applying in August may very well be too late. There is a risk to applying “blind” without knowing your exam score as well, so ideally you apply in June with your MCAT/DAT score in hand. (It is ok to apply with your preliminary DAT score you get when you sit for the exam.) If you plan to deviate from this, talk to Prof. Cahill or your advisor. **To get a committee letter, the deadline to get your application processed by AMCAS/AACOMAS/AADSAS is July 31.**

5. Request letters from the Health Professions Advising Office.

- Follow the instructions on the Health Professions Advising web page carefully, including carefully filling out the Google form. Failure to do this correctly will result in delays: (<http://www.holycross.edu/academics/programs/health-professions-advising/instructions-apply-medical-and-health-professional>)
- We will not start writing your letter until your application has been formally submitted to the application service. We will write and edit your letters in the order we receive requests. The committee letter is not useful for your application until all of your secondary applications have been returned and the admissions committees start to meet, usually in late August. Do not pester us about getting your letter in – if you get your materials in early, your letter will arrive in plenty of time.

6. Fill out secondaries quickly, but well.

- Medical, dental and veterinary schools send secondary applications out to nearly (and often all) applicants. They usually don’t consider applications until these secondaries are completed and returned to the schools. Make sure to do as careful a job on these applications as on your primary. This is your chance to say something (authentic) about yourself that you think the college will particularly like, or what specific aspects of the college you are attracted to. You may want to “triage” your secondaries so your most desirable schools arrive first.

7. Practice interviews

- There are many types of interviews: “Open file” interviews where the interviewer will ask you questions from your file; long-form interviews where you have a conversation (or a few) with school staff; multiple mini interviews (MMI) where you are given a series of very short interviews (5-10 minutes each); and other forms. MMIs may be standard questions or scenarios that you have to react to. Practice these with your friends, people you do not know well, and with the Center for Career Development. No matter

what the format, interviewers are all looking for one basic thing: engaging communication skills. Prepare for interviews by reading your personal statements, familiarizing yourself with the details of your record, and thinking about how you would answer difficult questions. Be authentic and don't over-reach. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and then try to work through the issues it openly. They may be trying to observe your thought process or see how you respond to pressure or uncomfortable situations. They are trying to answer the question "is this a thoughtful person I want to be my student, colleague, and ultimately my care giver?" This means that you are being interviewed the second you step foot on campus – even if it isn't a formal interview, always assume that you are being evaluated when you are on campus, e.g. at the tour. There are many web resources available to help you with interviewing, but practice is a must.

8. Miscellaneous final notes

- This is a long cycle. Interviews may start in August (or occasionally July), and get into full swing in September, and continue well into spring. MD schools observe "traffic rules day" on April 30 when applicants have to narrow down to one school. Wait list activity usually starts after this day. In the past, applicants have gotten in as late as the day before classes start.
- **Let us know of all of your interviews, acceptances, wait lists, and rejections by regularly e-mailing healthprofessions@holycross.edu.** We can't help you unless we know what is going on for you. We have no other way to get this information so it is crucial for you, and for the students that come after you, to keep us updated.
- Don't hold spots at schools you know you won't attend – you may be holding a fellow Holy Cross student's spot. Feel free to hold a spot for a place you might attend, but please withdraw from any schools you know you will not attend.
- Many DO schools have the unfortunate practice of requiring early deposits. This is frankly a deplorable practice, but is a cost of applying to some schools. It is a way of squeezing funds out of applicants and of trying to get a high quality applicant to commit early. If you do pay a deposit, then get into a school you would prefer to attend, feel free to reject the school where you paid to hold a spot – this is not unethical - but you likely won't get your money back. For DO schools, this happens after traffic rules.
- Check with the application services and schools to make sure everything is complete. Ultimately this is your responsibility. If there seems to be a long delay in getting a secondary back from a school, check to make sure everything is complete. Sometimes individual schools make mistakes or lose things, and it is your responsibility to keep track.
- Holy Cross will report an "institutional action" to your medical/dental/vet school if you have been suspended in the past or are on probation when you apply. Otherwise the college does not report community standards board infractions and destroys records right after Commencement. Medical/dental/vet schools also perform background checks, social media checks, etc. You should always be honest in your applications. If a medical/dental/vet school finds out about an incident that you didn't disclose, they will likely reject you or rescind an acceptance.
- Make sure your social media and web presence is clean.