

Application process for medical, dental and veterinary school

College of the Holy Cross

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

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 MCAT 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 yourself.**
 - 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.

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. And, do not count on connections you have to people at any given medical school. 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 which are often more holistic in admissions.
 - 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).
 - 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.
 - Past experience of Holy Cross students (from February meeting handout).

3. Fill out the application in advance.

- The application portals open up in early May. Take your time filling it out, making sure everything is perfect. This will take much longer than you think so start early.
- Admissions committees have low tolerance for typos, etc., so make sure your application is perfectly clean. Make sure you make the best possible use of your writing opportunities. Select your important experiences carefully. Use the writer's workshop and other resources to help craft your personal statement – this is a key way for you to separate yourself from the other applicants who have similar metrics.

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 MCAT score as well, so ideally you apply in June with your MCAT/DAT score in hand. If you plan to deviate from this, talk to Prof. Cahill or your advisor. **For medical school, the deadline to get your application processed by AMCAS in order to get a committee letter is July 31.**

5. Request letters from the Health Professions Advising Office.

- Follow the instructions on the Health Professions Advising web page carefully. (<http://www.holycross.edu/academics/programs/health-professions-advising/instructions-apply-medical-and-health-professional>)

6. Fill out secondary applications 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 about yourself that you think the college will particularly like, or what specific aspects of the college you are attracted to. Sometimes searching sites like studentdoctor.net or other sites can give you a hint of secondary prompts from schools you are applying to so you can start them early.
- Our letters are not useful for medical/dental/vet schools until your secondaries are back and the admissions committees are meeting. Once you submit your list of schools and other materials to the office, your advisor will be notified and your letter will be written in first-come, first-served order. We generally do not send out letters until July and finish by the end of August, which is more than enough time for medical schools.

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 medical school staff, and multiple mini interviews (MMI) where you are given a series of very short interviews (usually 8 minutes each). MMIs may be standard questions or scenarios that you have to react to. Practice these with your friends 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 it openly. If it is a question about what you would do in a certain situation, make sure to identify who (hypothetically) might be affected by your answer, and acknowledge that – caring about others, and allowing others to make decisions for themselves is a key skill for care providers. Interviewers may also 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 someone I want to be my student, colleague, and ultimately my care giver?” There are many web resources available to help you with interviewing, but practice is a must.
- Remember that you are being evaluated every second you are on the campus. Be professional and polite to everyone. Ask good questions.
- Send a thank you note after the interview with something specific you liked about the school. Keep this very short.

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 in earnest after this day.
- 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.
- Let us (healthprofessions@holycross.edu) know of all of your interviews, acceptances and rejections – please send keep us updated every month or so. This is important so we can help you navigate an acceptance and also to advise other students (in this and future years). Perhaps most importantly, it is common courtesy – we have worked hard on your evaluation letter and are interested in how you are doing.
- Familiarize yourself with what sort of updates each of your schools would like, especially later in the cycle. Some schools appreciate regular (e.g. monthly) check-ins, some only want substantial updates (e.g. a new course grade or a new publication but not enrolling in a new course or a new paper submission) and some do not want anything at all. Generally speaking, non-substantial updates are considered annoying and not helpful. Additional letters might be helpful, but most of the time trying to use connections will backfire, particularly at medical schools.
- Don’t hold spots at schools you know you won’t attend – you may be holding a fellow student’s spot.
- Many DO schools have the unfortunate practice of requiring early deposits. This is frankly a deplorable practice, but a cost of applying to some schools. It is a way of squeezing funds, and of trying to get a high quality applicant to commit. If you pay a deposit but then get into a school you would prefer, feel free to reject a school where you paid to hold a spot, but you won’t get your money back.
- Holy Cross will report an “institutional action” to your medical 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 upon Commencement. Medical schools will ask you about disciplinary history and will generally overlook early minor infractions but will not tolerate lying.
- Medical and dental schools will perform background checks, social media searches, etc. Make sure your social medial profile is clean and professional.