

Hamilton College

The “How to” of Applying to Medical School



Health Professions Advisory Committee

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The "How To" of Applying to Medical School for Fall 2010

Completing the medical school online applications becomes less stressful every year. Timeliness and correctness, however, are essential to a successful application. You will want to apply as early as you can prepare an effective, complete application. Leslie North is available for consultation throughout the year, but if you send your essay and application, please allow at least a week for editing suggestions.

Overview: AMCAS (American Medical College Application Service) and AACOMAS (American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service) provide the common applications that allow you to apply to the vast majority of schools you will be interested in. Students planning to apply to medical schools in Texas, Canada or “off-shore” medical schools in the Caribbean or in Mexico should contact Leslie North for instructions on the special applications required.

Links to all the applications are available at: <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/start.htm>

The AMCAS and AACOMAS are common application services that will:

- 1) collect your application information and transcripts
- 2) “verify” the grades you have entered on the application against your transcripts
- 3) pass all information on to the medical schools you designate.

You do not send transcripts to each medical school—just to AMCAS and AACOMAS. If you are applying to MD/DO programs, you will be asked to write one short personal statement of 5300 characters. If you are applying to MD/PhD programs, there are two additional essays. Your MCAT scores are released automatically to AMCAS, but you will have to contact MCAT to release your scores AACOMAS. If you file your applications before you take the MCAT, the services will process your application and send information on to the medical schools without your scores. The medical schools will send you secondary applications even before they receive your scores. If you plan to take the MCAT in August, I urge you to consider filing the application *before* you take the MCAT or, if not before, *immediately* after taking the test. Your goal is to complete application as early in the summer as possible. Because medical school decisions are made on a “rolling” basis, if you snooze, you lose. By mid-September half the interview slots for the year may already have been offered.

The stages of the application process are:

- 1) Take MCAT—no later than July of the year you plan to apply—much earlier, if possible
- 2) Complete the first three sections of the applications (these sections are your name, address, biographic information, family information and colleges attended) and print Transcript Request Forms for every college you have attended—even those colleges you attended during high school.
- 3) Send transcript Request Forms to all Registrars' Offices.
- 4) Using official transcripts from every college you have attended, enter your academic record using the exact course name in English and the exact course number in the designated fields. This is the section where candidates make mistakes, so I advise you to look carefully at the instructions, paying particular attention to pp 39-49. <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/amcas2010instructions041509.pdf> If the exact course name does not fit, enter a logical abbreviation. This information is critical for AMCAS to verify each course on the official transcript and to the medical school's evaluation of your application. **If the lab credit is included with the lecture course credit, append the phrase "and lab" to the exact course title as it appears on the official transcript. For example, if Chem 120 "Principles of Chemistry" appears on the official transcript and lab credit is included with the lecture course credit, enter "Principles of Chemistry and Lab" and indicate "Yes" in response to the question, "Did this course include a lab section?"**
- 5) The entry on the application will appear like this

| School | Status | Year | Classification | Course No. | Course Name | OT Hours | OTGrade |
|----------|--------|------|----------------|------------|------------------------------------|----------|---------|
| Hamilton | FR | 2005 | CHEM | CHEM 120 | Principles of Chemistry and lab | 1.00 | B+ |

- 6) Your verified grade point averages on the AMCAS and AACOMAS applications will be different from the gpa's figured by Hamilton.
- 7) Make certain you use the Course Classification list starting on page 43 of the AMCAS 2010 instructions and page 4 of the AACOMAS 2010 instructions. This is the section of the application where students make the most mistakes.
- 8) Complete "Experiences"—a section allowing 15 entries for jobs, honors, awards, clinical work, research, publications, with room for a *short* explanation of each. Do not feel you have to use all 15 slots—often consolidating your Dean's List and other honors into one entry is preferred.
- 9) **The 2010 AMCAS application will be available on line on or about May 5, 2009 and application can be submitted on or about June 4, 2009.**
- 10) **The AACOMAS (D.O.) application became available on Friday, May 1 and can be submitted immediately when you have completed the application.**
- 11) The AMCAS fee for 2010 will be \$160 for the first school and \$31 for each additional school. The AACOMAS fee for 2010 is \$155 for the first school. There is a sliding scale for additional schools with a charge of \$430 for 10 schools and \$680 for 20 schools.

When they receive your application, most medical schools will immediately send you a secondary application--without evaluating your credentials. Only a handful of medical schools evaluate credentials in the primary application and select the most qualified to receive the secondary.

Pay NO attention to the deadlines published by the schools. If you wait until the deadline your application is DOA.

A successful application to medical school requires more than filling out the application correctly. You must FOLLOW UP by getting online to make certain AMCAS or AACOMAS has received all your transcripts, has “verified” your application correctly, and has sent your application materials to the schools you designated.

Even though the process is straightforward, the responsibility is yours to make certain there are no snags.

Note well: After you file your AMCAS and AACOMAS applications, please print two copies—one to keep, and one to send to Leslie North. Or take the easier route and send an email to Leslie your with your username and password for each application. When she has your application she will:

- Know that applications have been submitted and that the Committee should upload your recommendation
- Have access to your AMCAS ID and AMCAS Letter ID and AACOMAS ID numbers that must be included on your recommendations
- Use your application form to track your progress at each school throughout the process

To increase your chances for success, most students should explore both allopathic and osteopathic medicine and consider filing both the AMCAS (MD) and AACOMAS (DO) applications. Take time to become familiar with both the AMCAS and AACOMAS web sites, where you will find comprehensive information about all aspects of the process:

Note well: Many osteopathic schools require a letter from a D.O. stating that you understand the osteopathic philosophy and possess the personal qualities required to be an osteopathic physician. This is important! Get busy and make an appointment to talk to a D.O. so we can include this letter with you're your other recommendations.

Please remember that the medical school application process is **expensive** and requires tremendous **PATIENCE**.

- Depending on the number of school you apply to, and the number of interviews you attend, the total cost can be as high as \$2,000- \$5,000. The MCAT fees, initial AMCAS/AACOMAS application fees, secondary application fees, trips to interviews, plane ticket and hotel rooms will (hopefully) be required. If you think your family income is low enough to qualify you for a fee waiver, see Leslie

North or: <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/> This year a fee waiver is available to US citizens or permanent residents whose family income is equal to or below 300% of the poverty level for the size of their family.

- The medical school application process ordinarily takes a **full** year. If you apply in June 2009, you may still be waiting for decisions in June 2010. Do not get frustrated or discouraged. The process is slow, deliberate, and out of your control. Buckle up and get ready for a long ride!

Hints and Admonitions:

- The importance of filing an **EARLY application cannot be overemphasized**. Remember that **80% OF STUDENTS FILING THE AMCAS APPLICATION HAVE SUBMITTED IT BEFORE THE END OF JUNE!** Medical schools use a “rolling admission” process, and they begin interviewing in late August or early September. It can take 4-6 weeks for AMCAS/AACOMAS to “verify” your application and send it to the medical schools. If you plan to take the August MCAT, please be aware that you will be at a disadvantage. If you choose, you can apply to at least one school before taking the MCAT. AMCAS will collect your transcripts, “verify” your grades and courses, and send the information to the med schools **without your MCAT scores**. The med schools will send you secondary applications and you can complete them as soon as you’ve taken the MCAT. Your application will be complete when your secondary application, fees and scores are received.
- **It goes without saying that you must be completely HONEST.** 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, even though such action may not have interrupted your enrollment or required you to withdraw.” If you have been placed on probation, or been required to withdraw from a course, you must discuss this with Leslie North and report the violation to AMCAS/AACOMAS. The HPAC will make every effort to put your difficulty into perspective, but we check with the Dean’s office and we will discover any “action” and report it, if necessary. Again I emphasize: you must be honest. If you have questions about what must be reported, speak to Leslie North or Dean Nancy Thompson.
- **The applications also ask if you have been convicted of misdemeanors or felonies.** Remember that the medical schools will do a careful Criminal Background Check on all accepted students. If you have questions about this section, you should ask Leslie North to be certain you are answering honestly and completely.
- Early Decision plans are available at many schools but are appropriate only in exceptional cases. Unlike the undergraduate admissions process, which rewards your willingness to commit early to one school, the medical schools offer no preference to ED applicants. If you apply ED to one school, you cannot apply to other schools until October—when you have a decision from the ED school—putting you at a disadvantage and very late in the process.
- In recent years, the majority of those applying through AMCAS have entered schools in their home states. Research each school before you apply, with particular attention to the in-state/out of state ratio, and file only applications that make sense. Take a close look at every school in your home state, and apply to as many as appear to be a valid

“fit.” A copy of the MSAR (Medical School Admissions Requirements) is available in the library, or you can borrow a copy from Leslie North overnight.

- If you plan to apply over the summer, log into the AMCAS application before you leave campus in May. Fill out the personal sections of the application until you can print the "**AMCAS transcript request**" form. Attach the AMCAS form to the Hamilton Registrar's request for transcript form, telling them to send your transcript as soon as your spring term grades have been posted.
- Follow the same transcript request procedure for every college where you have taken classes for credit. Even if the credit has been accepted by Hamilton, you must give AMCAS/AACOMAS an official transcript from the Registrar's office of every US college you have attended. Most colleges charge a transcript fee. Research fee on line and send required amount.
- Read application instructions carefully to know how to handle foreign programs not connected to US universities. (Note DIS exception.)
- Make certain you have copies of the official transcripts for ALL schools where you've taken classes. You will need a copy of your transcript so that you can accurately enter your courses and grades onto the applications.
- The most frequent error in the application process is a missing transcript. Make sure you check your application online to ascertain that all transcripts have been received.
- All Hamilton classes for which you received 1 Hamilton credit should be entered as a 1 credit course on AMCAS. Choir, Orchestra, etc. for which you received .25 Hamilton credits, should be entered as a .25 credit for AMCAS
- Recording your grades into the Academic record section of the application requires that you follow directions carefully!
- It is my judgment that you do not have to include any courses from which you withdrew, unless they appear on your transcript. E.g. if you signed up for a class and withdrew before the end of the add/drop period, do not include the class. If a class appears on your transcript with a W/P or W/F, then you must include it.
- It is very difficult to cut and paste your essay into the AMCAS application without losing your format and the AMCAS application offers no spell check option. It is best to type your essay directly into the AMCAS application. If you must cut and paste, make sure you use a "text-only" word processing software, e.g. Microsoft Notepad, and print and proof read with care.
- The application has “pop up” instructions and tips and allows you to move easily from one section of the application to another.
- Please make sure Leslie North knows where to find you this summer and during the coming year. Send an email with a phone number and email address.
- Make have an email account that won't jam batched messages. The medical schools will contact you via email to invite you for an interview.
- The big changes this year concern the Letters of Recommendation. Most Hamilton students and graduates will apply with a “Committee Letter” from Hamilton. Although the Committee Letter includes recommendations from all the professors, employers, coaches etc, you do NOT have to list all these people as writers. Simply say you are submitting a Committee Letter signed by Leslie North, Chair of the Health Professions Advisor Committee. The AMCAS application will assign you two ID numbers: your

AAMC ID and your AMCAS Letter of Recommendation number. I will need both of those numbers to send in you're a recommendation. Hamilton transmits your recommendation via "Virtual Evaluations," a very effective and timely service that the College pays to use. REMEMBER: if you add new medical schools to your list throughout the year, you MUST inform Leslie North. Otherwise the additional schools will not receive your recommendations.

How to Make Your Point

The Personal Statement offers you an excellent opportunity to distinguish yourself from the thousands of other well qualified students applying. If you write an elegant, cogent essay and express your ideas clearly in your own voice, you will make good use of this opportunity. Forget that this is an online process. **The name of this game is your ability to communicate your "story" and suitability for the medical profession.** The AMCAS essay is short (5300 characters, or almost 1 full page). Think carefully about the two or three points you want to impress upon the reader. Remember that your audience is intelligent, very experienced, and has read thousands of essays. Your essay may well determine whether you will be invited for an interview. Invest serious time and thought in writing and editing. **Leslie North will be happy to see a draft of your essay and offer editing suggestions.**

Ideally your personal statement will address your motivations, values and commitments, and will discuss (either directly or obliquely, your decision to pursue a career in health care. Are there people who have influenced you? Is there a story you can tell that illustrates why medicine is a good 'fit' for you?

Try to avoid focusing on childhood and high school experiences. It is hard to write a mature, adult piece while portraying the ideas of a child.

The purpose of this statement is to convince the readers (mostly physicians) that you have made a well-considered commitment to serving others through medicine. This is the section of the application that the committee will continue to reexamine throughout the process; Avoid any statements criticizing the medical system or descriptions of physicians you have encountered who do not reflect the best of medicine. You are applying to be a member of a profession that physicians are proud of. This is not the place to spout off on reforming the profession.

The personal statement may be the best chance you have to turn any negatives into positives. If you have faced difficulties (academic or personal) you can discuss what these challenges taught you and how your difficulties might make you more sensitive to the challenges your patients face.

Give your essay to others to read and try to be open to their suggestions. Try to write a sincere essay in your own personal "voice"

Allow time for several drafts of this important essay.

The Personal Essay and the Experiences section offer an opportunity for you to demonstrate that you have the attributes and experiences sought by admission committees:

- Psychological maturity
- Character and integrity
- Self-discipline
- Judgment
- A realistic understanding of your strengths and weaknesses
- Compassion and empathy
- Communication skills
- Concern for helping others
- Intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm
- Motivation and persistence
- Reliability and dependability
- Resilience and adaptability
- Accountability
- Experience with and knowledge of medicine
- Leadership skills
- Experience in overcoming hardship or disadvantage
- Volunteer and community service experience
- Knowledge of health care delivery systems
- Commitment to caring for the underserved and disadvantaged

EXPERIENCES

The "Experience" section of the application offers you space to include 15 post secondary experiences. Jobs, research, volunteer service, honors, publications, etc. can be included here. The application allows you to "describe" each of these experiences, but limits the description to 510 characters. **Be as brief as possible.** Do not use the allotted characters. Med school admission personnel will assume that you have asked for editing suggestions for your essay, and will likely look carefully at the writing in the "Experience" descriptions. Use these descriptions to show excellent writing skills, and to allow the reader to understand your values and why the experiences listed were important to you. But remember that your reader will have to read thousands of applications. Be succinct!

The following recommendations are promulgated by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to ensure that applicants are afforded timely notification of the outcome of their medical school applications and timely access to available first-year positions and that schools are protected from having unfilled positions in their entering classes. These recommendations are being distributed for the information of prospective medical students, their advisors, and personnel at the medical schools to which they have applied.

The AAMC recommends that:

1. Each applicant be familiar with, understand, and comply with the application, acceptance, and admission procedures at each school to which the applicant has applied, as well with as these Recommendations.
2. Each applicant provide accurate and truthful information in all aspects of the application, acceptance, and admission processes for each school to which the applicant has applied.
3. Each applicant submit all application documents (e.g., primary and secondary application forms, transcript[s], , fees) to each school in a timely manner and no later than the school's published deadline date.
4. Each applicant promptly notify all relevant medical school application services and all medical schools with independent application processes of any change, permanent or temporary, in contact information (e.g., mailing address, telephone number, e-mail address).
5. Any applicant who will be unavailable for an extended period of time (e.g., during foreign travel, vacation, holidays) during the application/admission process:
 - a. Provide instructions regarding his or her application and the authority to respond to offers of acceptance to a parent or other responsible individual in the applicant's absence.
 - b. Inform all schools at which the applicant remains under consideration of this individual's name and contact information.
6. Each applicant respond promptly to a school's invitation for interview. Any applicant who cannot appear for a previously scheduled interview should notify the school **immediately** of the cancellation of the appointment in the manner requested by the school.
7. Each applicant in need of financial aid initiate, as early as possible, the steps necessary to determine eligibility, including the early filing of appropriate need analysis forms and the encouragement of parents, when necessary, to file required income tax forms.
8. In fairness to other applicants, when an applicant has made a decision, prior to May 15, not to attend a medical school that has made an offer of acceptance, the applicant **promptly** withdraw his or her application from that (those) other school(s) by written correspondence delivered by regular or electronic methods.
9. By May 15 of the matriculation year (April 15 for schools whose first day of class is on or before July 30), each applicant who has received an offer of acceptance from more than one school choose the specific school at which the applicant prefers to enroll and withdraw his or her application, by written correspondence delivered by regular or electronic methods, from all other schools from which acceptance offers have been received.
10. Immediately upon enrollment in, or initiation of an orientation program immediately prior to enrollment at, a U.S. or Canadian school, each applicant withdraw his or her application from consideration at all other schools at which he or she remains under consideration.

Letters of recommendation

It is each student's responsibility to complete the Health Professions Advisory Committee's Questionnaire and make an appointment for a comprehensive interview with Leslie North. The Questionnaire indicates the names of the faculty, employers, coaches, etc. who have agreed to write a letter in support of your application. Leslie North will write a composite letter for the HPAC and will attach a copy of each of your recommendations to the "Committee" letter. The Health Professions Advisory Committee meets in June, July, August and, if necessary, September to consider the letters and votes on the level of recommendation. The earlier your file is complete, the earlier your letter will be considered by the Committee. In recommending you the Committee will consider your academic qualifications, including the strength of your program, your community service, and clinical exploration, but will recommend without reference to your MCAT scores. Hamilton transmits your recommendation as a PDF to the specific schools you have applied to through Virtual Evaluations, a secure web based service. Virtual Evals will send you an email when your letter has been transmitted with the specific schools that were designated to receive your letter.

All necessary information is available at: <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/start.htm>