Preparing to Apply to Medical & Health Professional School

This document has been prepared by the Duquesne University Pre-Medical & Health Professions Programs (PMHPP) to provide a brief overview of the processes and components of applying to medical and other health professional school programs and does not constitute an agreement or formal advisement relationship between Duquesne University, the PMHPP, or any individual entity related to those organization. This document is solely informational in nature and content; changes in procedures may change occur.

Overview
The practice of medicine, regardless of discipline, requires exceptional knowledge, skills, abilities and personal attributes. A component of almost every professional school application is that the student is able to document not only academic success and exam scores, but also observation/shadowing experiences, volunteer experiences, employment and research experiences. While each discipline and program varies on which of these activities bears the greatest importance, all admissions committees will be considering your submission of these types of experiences as part of the application process. This is why every application and/or interview required during the application process requires students to not only relate those experiences or opportunities, but also describe specifically what was learned or the value of those experiences in preparing the student to be qualified to enter professional school. This will require you to maintain a very detailed log of your experiences and activities that includes the provider involved, name, credentials, contact information, dates, hours recorded, and the types of activities in which you engaged. Students should begin collecting this type of information from the first day they enter the University; while high school experiences and activities may be helpful, most schools will be looking for what the student is able to accomplish while in college.

The factors that will be considered on most applications are the following:

- QPA/GPA (Overall, Math/Science, Science, and "other" coursework)
- Types and levels of courses taken, as well as course withdrawals and repeats
- Professional exam scores and relationship to expected rankings
- Activities, shadowing, volunteer and work experiences
- Scholarly activities and research involvement
- Letters of recommendation/evaluation and relationship of those evaluators to the applicant
- Ability of applicant to articulate and communicate in both written and oral situations
- How the student’s goals/aspirations match the school/program’s mission

There are literally thousands of students making application to professional schools annually, so it is essential that you make yourself not only highly qualified through your
academic preparation, but also through the “extra” things you do. High grade point averages (QPA/GPA) and admissions tests scores alone will not necessarily grant a student admittance into a professional school. Likewise, a student who has a low QPA/GPA and numerous hours of volunteer experience may not be considered for acceptance. Over-achievement on one requirement cannot compensate for any other requirements that have not been met. A balance of these factors in combination with acceptable overall and science QPA/GPAs and admissions test scores are the key to a strong application.

It is important that students preparing to make application to professional school assume ownership over their processes and progress. The student, can do the work, take the exams, write the essays, and make a positive impression on those professors, professionals, and others you work with or shadow. YOU must make a commitment to your success and realize that it is not about just “checking the boxes” that you achieved an outcome or were part of an organization, you must have the passion and dedication to make a difference and be engaged in all activities that you undertake. To do anything less will not allow you to achieve your professional goals. The best and most successful professionals are those who strive for the best in all they do and who are never satisfied; they strive to be the best and to improve and be “ready” every day.

Below are some areas where students can excel and become involved that not only will meet the needs for professional school applications, but also should provide them with insight and experiences that will help to form impressions, gain an understanding, become knowledgeable and empathetic about the situations of others.

Investigating Schools/Programs
Students are highly encouraged, during their freshman year, to begin to identify potential programs/schools that they may wish to apply to for their professional education program. It is never too early to begin this very important process. When investigating schools, it is a good idea to develop a spreadsheet to compare important aspects of each program. Headings of your spreadsheet may include items such as tuition, residency matches, unique pre-requisites, demographics of last year’s matriculants. By gathering and organizing this information, students may become more fully aware of all of the unique pre-requisites, competitiveness of the program, and “fit”. The effectiveness of PMHPP advisement is only as good as the information that the student discovers and shares through these searches. For more detailed information on each school’s requirements, please refer to the appropriate medical and health discipline manuals available on-line. Please be advised that there is a nominal fee associated with the use of some of the on-line resources.

- **Allopathic Medicine:** Medical School Application Requirements (MSAR); ($25 on-line subscription) [https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/](https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/requirements/msar/)
- **Osteopathic Medicine:** Osteopathic Medical College Information Book* [http://www.osteopathic.org/inside-aoa/about/affiliates/Pages/osteopathic-medical-schools.aspx](http://www.osteopathic.org/inside-aoa/about/affiliates/Pages/osteopathic-medical-schools.aspx)
- **Chiropractic Medicine:** [http://www.chirocolleges.org/prospective-students/find-a-school/](http://www.chirocolleges.org/prospective-students/find-a-school/)
- **Dental:** Admissions Requirements of United States and Canadian Dental Schools* [http://www.ada.org/en/coda/find-a-program/search-dental-programs/dds-dmd-programs](http://www.ada.org/en/coda/find-a-program/search-dental-programs/dds-dmd-programs)
Professional Involvement during College

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Professional organizations are important vehicles for learning and the development of professional skills and understanding. It is not just enough to be a member. Professional schools are looking for students who are actively engaged and contribute to the mission of the organizations to which they belong. Membership in professional organizations allows medical and health care professionals to increase knowledge of current issues in the profession, foster a sense of fellowship and camaraderie among peers and contribute to the organization’s direction, success, and influence.

Professional Organizations and Websites

AMSA (American Medical Student Association)-
http://www.amsa.org/AMSA/Homepage.aspx

Pre-SOMA (Pre-Student Osteopathic Medical Association)
http://www.studentdo.com/WCM/Inside_SOMA/Programs/Pre-SOMA/WCM/_InsideSoma/_Programs/Pre-SOMA.aspx?hkey=f8f52c56-21ed-4ea6-b902-fae8f2eae2d9

ASDA (American Student Dental Association)- http://www.asdanet.org/

AOSA (American Optometric Student Association)-
http://www.optometristudents.com/aosa/

APVMA (American Pre-Veterinary Medical Association)- http://apvma.org/index.html

Extracurricular Activities and Experiences

All students are encouraged to identify and secure the “missing” qualifications needed to apply to the schools/programs of choice. Every student will have unique needs to create a more comprehensive application moving forward. For example, some students may need more shadowing experiences, whereas others may want/need more research laboratory experience. Students are encouraged to ensure that all qualification needs are met.

Shadowing/Observation Experience

Some ways to demonstrate motivation and discover more about a career in any health profession is through volunteer work and shadowing/observing professionals. For the most part, this can be accomplished through hospitals, a physician’s private practice, nursing homes, clinics, or campus activities. Students generally have their greatest
successes securing these experiences when they approach their own (or their family’s) health care professionals. Almost every medical or health professional school requires applicants to have obtained experience in the related health profession.

**Scientific Research**
A significant commitment to conducting research and/or participating in the development, implementation, and/or dissemination of research can demonstrate that a student has the intellectual capacity necessary to successfully complete the academic rigors of a health professional school. Opportunities to conduct research are available in a variety of departments and schools at DU. Interested students should contact their student mentors in BSNES, reach out to their science course faculty, and/or inquire within the Mylan School of Pharmacy, Rangos School of Health Sciences. While these experiences are highly regarded by all professions, it is particularly valued by the allopathic medical community and all professional programs housed in Carnegie Level 1 research institutions.

**Medical and Professional School Application Process**
The majority of medical and health professional schools utilize centralized application services (CAS) to process professional school applications; however, there are some professional programs that still require students to apply directly to that school/program. During the investigation of programs process, it is helpful to list whether your program choices use the centralized application process or some other process for its professional school admissions. It is the student’s responsibility to become familiar with the application processes and the prerequisite course and other requirements of the schools to which you are applying.

**Centralized Application Services**
Almost all of the professional disciplines now utilize centralized application services (CAS) that are designed to collect candidates’ applications materials and then send that information out to the schools/programs that are designated by the student during the application process. The centralized application service (operating independently from the health professional schools) produce and distribute the applications, most of these applications are available online. These systems, while convenient, require a great deal of time and advance preparation to be certain that all the required materials are available and prepared in sufficient time to put forward a competitive application. There are specific windows of time for each formal application process; however, the preparation of application materials, including personal statements, should begin well in advance of the open periods.

The centralized application for most types of programs may be completed 6 months to one year prior to the year in which you wish to matriculate into that school. Students are encouraged to wait until they are fully qualified and are able to present the most competitive application possible before actually applying. Application to professional school is a long, arduous, and expensive process with transference of great amounts of detail, accurately, and in formats appropriate for the schools and the disciplines. It may take several months to gather and insert all of the required information, so students are encouraged to use due diligence when completing their professional school applications.
The **major components of the centralized applications** are:

- general personal and demographic information
- academic record (which includes typing in grades from all institutions attended)
- personal statement and disclosure of sanctions
- extracurricular experiences, including volunteer experiences (often requesting that you rank and more fully describe your most impactful experiences)
- letters of evaluation/recommendation
- standardized examination scores
- transcripts
- resumes/vitaes

Once the medical/health professional schools receive a centralized application, they may send applicants links/copies of their own institutional applications. These applications are referred to as “**secondary**” or “**supplemental**” applications. Some professional schools send secondary applications to every individual who applies to their programs, while others only send secondary applications to those individuals who pass their first selection criteria. There usually are additional fees associated with the submission of each secondary/supplemental application.

**Applications for Schools not participating in Centralized Applications:**
For non-participating medical/health professional schools, including some chiropractic, but also non-participating veterinary, podiatry and medical schools, **you must obtain an application from each of the individual professional schools by directly requesting an application from the admissions offices.**

**ADMISSIONS TESTS**
Most medical and health professional schools require completion of a standardized admissions test as part of the application process. You should not schedule this examination until you have completed all of the necessary coursework that is included on the admission test. Below is a list of each test required by medical or health professional schools. All test applications can be obtained directly by contacting or going on line to the appropriate testing distribution center.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Test</th>
<th>Professional Applications Requiring Test</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT)</td>
<td>Allopathic Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, Podiatry, Physician Assistant (few), Chiropractic (few)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental Admissions Test (DAT)</td>
<td>Dental Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optometry Admissions Test (OAT)</td>
<td>Optometry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Records Examination (GRE)</td>
<td>Chiropractic Medicine, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, Veterinary Medicine</td>
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Preparing for Admissions Tests
Preparation to take any admission test should be a continuous process beginning with a student’s first year. There are a number of study guides available to assist you in preparing for a specific admissions test, as well as several different private companies that provide study materials and review/preparation sessions. Many of these review sessions are offered on the Duquesne campus and/or on local campuses of Pitt or Carnegie Mellon University for a fee. There usually are sample sessions offered from these companies, free of service, so that students can identify the program for which they are best suited.

- Several months of intensive study must be dedicated to preparing for an admissions test in order to be fully and properly prepared for the examination.
- You may also wish to consult your academic advisor regarding additional courses that would be of benefit to preparing for the test.
- Resource/study materials can be purchased through the testing agency or professional organization on an individual basis.

Letters of Evaluation/Recommendation
Most professional schools require letters of evaluation/recommendation. These normally include at least one letter from a science professor, a non-science professor, a health care professional (preferably from the discipline you are pursuing), and a general or “character” reference who can speak to your personal attributes and characteristics; however, requirements can vary by school and should be investigated and used to guide your decision processes.

Deciding When to Move Forward with the Application Process
As mentioned previously, the application process is very competitive for medical and health professional school; therefore, there will come a time that a student will need to make a decision, based upon MCAT/DAT/GRE outcomes and grade point averages, as to whether he/she should move ahead with the application process. It is important that students consider these data when deciding whether they are qualified to apply and they are competitive enough to be considered as viable qualified applicants. Because this process is so time and financially-intensive and has little room for error, students who are marginal candidates, based upon the data, should wait until their applications are more competitive before they complete the application process. In almost every case, it is better to wait to apply as a highly qualified applicant rather than to make a decision to apply when not qualified or competitive. These types of decisions often are viewed as rash or short-sighted by admissions committees, and could work against the applicant should he/she not get accepted and need to reapply during the next cycle.

Personal Statement
Every application requires a written personal statement which allows the student to explain why he/she wishes to study that field of medicine and the qualifications or abilities that that student has developed in preparation for entrance into professional school. This Personal Statement is not a reiteration of the students resume or list of activities, as that information is collected in other ways throughout the application. This is an opportunity for students to reflect on previous learning, research, life experiences, and/or professional activities and observations to describe what was learned and how
that learning impacted your preparation for professional school. The best personal statements demonstrate your passion and drive in such a way that make you "stand out" from the crowd, and they are in much greater depth and more factual than typical college essays. If no specific instructions regarding content are given, you should discuss the origin and evolution of your interest in a particular health profession, along with incidents that demonstrate your motivation towards a career in the field of interest. Any experiences that had a definite impact on your decision to pursue a particular field can also be mentioned. Additionally, you should address your academic and personal strengths and weaknesses in an honest and positive manner, indicating awareness of areas that need improvement and the steps taken to improve these areas. Grammar and writing assistance can be accessed through the Duquesne University Writing Center. For more information about resources and appointments with the Writing Center, please refer to their website for more information: http://www.ltc.writingcenter.duq.edu

Medical and Professional School Interviews
Upon a complete review of your application file, the admissions committees of the medical and health professional schools may decide to invite you in for an interview. These interviews are JUST as important in the application process as your original application submissions. The most common forms of interview are personal, group, video, or MMI (multiple mini interview) opportunities. Each school will have their own processes, and regardless of the format, students participating in interviews should realize that they are being interviewed at all times, not just when they are in a particular official’s office.

If you are invited for an interview, a prompt decision as to whether or not to accept the interview must be made. Either an interview date will be given to you or you will be asked to schedule a date for the interview. We recommend that you schedule an interview as soon as possible since many other students will be interviewing at the same time. During the summer of your application year, it is imperative that you notify the professional school of where you can be reached at all times. If you must go out of town, even if it is only for a day, you must phone the professional school. You may be able to give them a name and phone number of a person that you authorize to speak on your behalf. Many professional schools will contact the next persons on the wait list and offer admission if you do not respond.

Medical and Professional School Admission Outcomes
The interview is generally the final step in the admissions process; however, not all schools require personal interviews. Admissions committees will discuss your complete application and make a decision after the interview. You will be informed of the decision and your status may be:

- Accepted
- Rejected
- On Hold
- Alternate/Wait List/Under Consideration

Students on the alternate/wait list/under consideration (AWU) have opportunities for acceptance as positions become available. This may continue into the fall of the next academic year. To enhance your opportunity for your application to be reconsidered
while on the AWU, students are encouraged to contact the schools/programs directly; if a student has one such school that is his/her first choice, that information also should be relayed to the school/program in a strong and confirming correspondence.

**GENERAL TIMELINE FOR APPLICATION PROCESS**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| **SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER** | Analyze qualifications and determine deficits  
Develop plan to address deficits or weaknesses  
Devise study plan for professional entrance examination  
Begin to identify possible evaluators for letters of recommendation  
Research schools of interest – unique entrance requirements (spread sheet) |
| **NOVEMBER** | Finalize dates/plans for profession entrance examinations –  
Adjust study timeline if necessary |
| **DECEMBER** | Begin Final Entrance Examination preparations |
| **JANUARY** | Entrance examination study  
Possible GRE Examination option for those applying to PA & Vet School |
| **FEBRUARY** | Select Entrance Exam test date - May/Early June best choices  
Entrance examination study |
| **MARCH** | Personal statements should be completed  
MD/DO/DENT/OD remind Letter Evaluators of letter deadlines  
PA Applicants ask for Letters of Recommendation  
Finalize list of possible activities and experiences will use on application  
Identify needs associated with having transcripts sent to application services  
Secure unofficial copies to be certain grades inputted to on-line application are correct |
| **APRIL** | CASPA (PA Central Application Service) application service opens  
Vet Applicants ask for Letters of Recommendation |
| **MAY** | MCAT, DAT and GRE (Pre-Vets) professional entrance examination  
VMCAS (Vet Central Application Service) application service opens |
| **JUNE** | AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS (MD/DO/DENT) application services open  
MD/DO/DENT/OD - Take professional entrance examination |
| **JULY** | OPTOMCAS (OD) application service opens  
Applications begin turning over to schools  
Start receiving secondary applications (may vary depending on student)  
Take professional entrance examination again, if needed |
| **AUGUST** | Continue with secondary applications as received; submit all initial applications before September 1st. |