In an attempt to choose the best students for their school, more and more admissions officers are visiting the Facebook pages of their applicants. It gives them more insight than they can get out of an hour interview and an application, because here the applicant is free to express himself/herself.

The downside — you may have posted more information than you would like for them to have.

Way back in 2009, www.msnbc.msn.com article, the Associated Press reported, “From Facebook to YouTube to personal blogs, future doctors are crossing the line — and getting into trouble.”

For example, did you know that all twitter posts are “immortalized” by the Library of Congress?

The best approach is to be professional. What was cute while you were in high school may no longer serve you, or it may not be appropriate for someone aspiring to a health professions career. Take a critical look at your information before someone else does.

For the same reason, think about the message you are using on your phone. Is it professional? For identification purposes, it should include your phone number or name.

Emails that are so informal that they are grammatically incorrect with misspellings, give a poor impression of the writer. Be sure that when you are addressing a professional office, that you are respectful and take the time to write appropriately.

And speaking of emails, is your username appropriate?

Be professional and put your best foot forward.

Meet with an advisor to ensure that you are taking the right classes to maximize your potential, grades and test scores.

Aside from grades an MCAT scores, there are a few things that you can do now to make yourself the best applicant that you can be.

Experience in the field is crucial. Without some sort of experience, you cannot really answer the “How do you know that you want to be a doctor” question. In addition, a lack of experience may lead the interviewer to question how committed you are to your stated goal. For more information about volunteer work and/or physician shadowing, please see your prehealth advisor.

Letters of recommendation are another vital part of your application. Whatever your class year, you should be thinking about getting letters of recommendation. While you are required to have five (see the attached HPO brochure on “Letters of Recommendation for details), you should try to get as many quality letters as possible. It has been the experience of many students that one (or more) potential recommenders are unable to write or do not write in a timely fashion; therefore, it is a good plan to ask for more than five letters. It is also a good idea to meet with your instructor before asking for a letter. The more they know about you, the more they can include in their letter. Be sure to include a one page resume to help the author write about you.
It is well known at Rutgers that if you drop a class anytime after the add/drop period that you will get a "W" on your transcript. A "W" notation means that you were enrolled in the course and then chose to withdraw from it; a W does not affect the grade point average. There is, however, a common and dangerous misconception among undergraduates that a W implies that you were failing the course. That is not the case. Medical schools do not use the W as an evaluative measure; they understand that students drop courses for many reasons, and it is useless to their process to speculate about why a student would decide to drop a class. Consequently, a W or even a few W's are not an issue on a student's transcript; in fact, W's are very common on transcripts. A pattern of "W" notations each semester might be questioned by an employer or medical school committee because that would more likely indicate that the student was not managing his/her time adequately. The dangerous aspect to students' misconception of the W is that it may interfere with the rational process of evaluating whether you should keep attending a class. I have actually had students tell me that they believed it was better to have an F in the course rather than a W on their transcript. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many, many, many students with W's on their transcripts have been admitted to medical schools. If you are considering withdrawing from a course, please plan to see an adviser at the HPO or at your college. And help me spread the word to your friends and classmates that W's are NOT negative marks and they will NOT keep you out of medical school.

— Julie Traxler, Ed.D. First-Year Dean, SAS PreHealth Advisor, HPO

Do Your Grades Need Significant Improvement?

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has compiled a database of post-baccalaureate and graduate programs for students. There are several different types of programs, including Academic-Record Enhancer programs which are specifically designed for applicants whose credentials do not meet the medical school requirements.

Both non-matriculating, post-baccalaureate programs and graduate programs are listed, by state, at https://services.aamc.org/postbac/

(Permission note, the Rutgers Postbac program is not for record enhancement; rather, it is for career changers who have not taken all of the science courses needed prior to applying to medical school.)

The AAMC provides contact information for the Rutgers Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences master’s level programs in Newark and Piscataway (gsbs.rutgers.edu)

To find out if this type of program is a good option for you, please call the office and schedule an appointment with an advisor to discuss your options for improving your academic record.