

### WHAT CAN I DO NOW TO MAKE MYSELF A BETTER APPLICANT IN THE FUTURE?

A first step you can take is to meet with an advisor to ensure that you are taking the right classes to maximize your potential, grades and test scores. Call 848-445-5667 or stop by the office to schedule an appointment. Have a quick question? Check out our walk-in hours. Times are posted on [hpo.rutgers.edu](http://hpo.rutgers.edu)

Aside from classes, grades and MCAT scores, there are a few things that you can begin working on now to make yourself the best applicant that you can be. For example:

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. Therefore, volunteer work and/or shadowing in the medical field will help to solidify your passion for medicine to admissions committees.

Letters of recommendation are another vital part of your application, no matter your current class year. While you are required to have five, you should try to get as many quality letters as possible. It is the experience of many students that one (or more) potential letter writers 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, since the more they know about you, the more detail they can include in their letter.

Finally, do your best to stay out of trouble, as any disciplinary/academic action has the potential to tarnish the integrity of your application.

### I'M A JUNIOR. I SHOULD APPLY TO MEDICAL SCHOOL IN JUNE. TRUE OR FALSE?

It depends....

The answer is true IF you are able to present the best, most competitive application at that time. If not, consider these factors:

**Grades:** Is your GPA not as strong as it should be (optimally 3.5 or higher, both overall and science)? Would another year of grades help?

**Primary application:** Will you be able to file your primary application at the beginning of June?

**Clinical experience:** Have you had enough quality clinical experience?

**Life experience and leadership:** Have your experiences outside of the classroom and the lab been developed enough to show you have more to offer than just grades and test scores? Have you had the opportunity to demonstrate significant leadership at Rutgers or your community? What will you be able to offer besides grades and test scores?

**Research:** If you are doing research, will you have done enough to speak in-depth about your experience? Would another semester or two in the lab strengthen your application?

**MCAT:** Are you planning to take your MCAT before the end of June (mid-July at the latest)? MCAT scores take about a month to come in and you want the schools to get them as close to the time you file your primary application as possible. Is your score on the MCAT competitive enough?

**Letters of recommendation:** Will you have enough *quality* letters to support your application? Will you be able to get at least 5 letters and meet the other HPO requirements in time to get an HPO interview and committee statement?

There are many myths out there regarding the application process. We encourage you to meet with an HPO advisor to discuss your application game plan. A “gap” year is not a year off. It is a chance to make your application as strong as possible. As corny as it sounds, you only get one chance to make a first impression and you do not want to “throw your hat in the ring in case you get lucky.”

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

While the HPOdrome will tell you which letters have been received, only an advisor can tell you about the *quality* of your letters.

Regardless of the type of program, you will need letters that are supportive and specific to your goal — be it a graduate program or medical or dental school. Only an advisor can assess the usefulness and value of the letters you have already collected. Only an advisor can tell you if something is lacking or if something more is recommended.

Just a reminder: letters on file at the HPO *cannot* be used for employment or non-health-related programs. Also, we will **NOT** send **unsigned** letters. Finally, we will keep letters on file for 5 years after you graduate but older letters may not be very helpful to your application. Generally, schools want letters that reflect where you are now, not where you were several years ago.

## Attention 1st and 2nd Year Students

Rutgers University has two joint programs leading to a joint BA/MD degree and one program leading to a joint BA/DMD degree. These are very competitive programs which will allow accepted students to begin medical or dental school a year early. Certain courses and credits from that first year of medical or dental school will count both toward the undergraduate degree (BA) and the professional degree (MD or DMD). This acceleration (3 years of undergraduate plus 4 years of medical or dental school) saves a full year compared with the traditional application process.

There are significant differences between the programs and **students may only apply to one program.**

For more information, flyers are available at the HPO and on our web site at: <http://hpo.rutgers.edu/special-programs>. Applications become available after Spring Break and may be submitted as early as April 1st, though no applications are reviewed until after the deadline.

## Tips for BA/MD Applicants

Things you can do now if you are a sophomore:

- Start asking for letters of recommendation. You will need five RU Faculty letters (minimally, two science and two non-science; the fifth letter can be from either category). Recommendations from Teaching Assistants are acceptable. Additional letters are acceptable and need not be from RU faculty.
- Have your high school transcript submitted to the HPO.
- Transfer students must have an official transcript submitted from each institution attended.
- In anticipation of the interviews, continue reading medically-related current events article.

Things you must do later:

- **Rutgers transcripts should not be submitted until the spring grades are posted.** After your grades have been posted, go to the Registrar's Office and fill out the necessary form.
- Applications will be available after Spring Break. Applications will be accepted beginning April 1st. Deadlines vary.

## Important Information about Release Forms!

The HPO must have the appropriate release form to send out letters stored in our office. The HPO will select the best letters from your file and upload them to the appropriate application service.

**Please note: We are only able to upload letters to AACOMAS (DO) and AADSAS (Dental) once. We cannot add letters later. All letters must go together at the same time so don't submit your release form until you have all your letters in! For AMCAS (MD) packets, additional letters may be added after the initial release of the letter packet. Requests to add letters to your AMCAS packet must be made in writing, so if you would like us to do this for you, please email us at [hpo@biology.rutgers.edu](mailto:hpo@biology.rutgers.edu) and request that we add new letters to your packet.**

The fee for the HPO to process MD, DO and Dental Release Forms is \$60.00. The HPO will accept cash or checks made payable to Rutgers University.

Letters for foreign medical schools and podiatric schools will be mailed, so students will need to use the General Release Form and provide the proper address(es).

## General Timeline for students applying to medical/dental school in 2018\*

**\*Note: this is for students who wish to start medical/dental school in August 2019**

### February-March:

#### **Letters:**

Work on getting your letters of recommendation in order. Medical schools require a minimum of 3 letters of recommendation. The HPO requires a minimum of 5 as one of the qualifications for an HPO committee interview. These letters should include: 2 science letters, preferably from upper level courses and from professors, but TAs are OK. If your major is a science, you need letters from at least 1, preferably 2, upper level science (300 or above) specific to your major. **If your major is not science, you should also have at least 1, preferably 2 letters from your major.** The remaining letters should be mostly from academic sources, including anyone who supervised you in research. You may also have letters from outside of the classroom experiences such as shadowing, volunteer work, paid work etc. There is no limit to the number of recommendations you may submit to your HPO file. Avoid letters that are subjective personal testimonials.

#### **Personal Statement:**

You should have a working draft of your personal statement by now. For more help, give it to friends to read, put it in a drawer for two weeks and look at it again with fresh eyes, or attend a career services workshop for additional assistance (careers.rutgers.edu).

#### **MCAT:**

If you have not taken the MCAT already, you should be studying and have a target date in April, May, or June to take the exam. It takes at least 4 weeks for your scores to be processed. Remember a good portion of your final study time before the exam must consist of taking practice exams in conditions that

closely simulate the real exam conditions. Remember, most people score better on their practice exams so if you are barely making your target score on your practice exams, you are probably not ready for the exam. More information and registration information is available at: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/>

#### **DAT:**

Same as MCAT, except you can take the exam a bit later because scores are processed immediately. More information: [www.ada.org/dat.aspx](http://www.ada.org/dat.aspx)

#### **Autobiography and resume:**

Both are additional requirements to qualify for the HPO committee interview. The autobiography is **not** your personal statement. It is a brief story of your life from day one to the present. Please include experiences that exemplify the core competencies for entering medical students, as outlined by the AAMC

(<https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/admissions/initiative/competencies/>). Only the highlights please, 2-4 pages. This is only used by the HPO to help prepare for your interview and to get to know you a bit better. You do not need convince us of how great you are for medical school, rather give us a narrative version of your life and experiences so we get to know you a bit better. Resume is self-explanatory. Post both resume and autobiography to your on line HPOdrome account by the end of March.

#### **Late March/Early April:**

Download an HPO interview worksheet. Fill it out and submit to the HPO. You must have completed all of the requirements listed on the worksheet before you can submit it for review. Once we have reviewed and approved your worksheet, you will be placed on the HPO interview wait list. Interviews will start in late April/early May depending on committee members' availability. Preference will be given to candidates who have posted competitive MCAT scores. Try to

get on the wait list as early as possible.

#### **May:**

Strive to get excellent grades in your spring semester coursework. Continue working on personal statement. Finalize by the time your application cycle opens. Finalize MCAT plans (if not taken already). Create an account with the appropriate application service:

#### **AAMC:**

<https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/amcas> Applications open in May. First day to submit is on or near June 1.

#### **AACOMAS:**

<http://www.aacom.org/InfoFor/applications/Pages/default.aspx> Applications open early May.

Have transcripts sent to appropriate application services, following their directions. Be sure to have Rutgers send the transcripts that **include your spring grades**. As a reminder, we do not handle the sending of transcripts here in the HPO office.

#### **June:**

Submit your primary application as early as possible.  
June/July  
Have your HPO interview and release your letters of recommendation.  
Work on your secondary applications

#### **Mid August:**

Have all of your application materials in to the medical schools. This includes your MCAT (or DAT), primary and secondary applications, letters of recommendation, etc.

Podiatry and Optometry schools have later deadlines, find out more here:

#### **Podiatry: AACPM:**

<http://www.aacpm.org>

#### **Optometry: OPTOMCAS:**

[www.optomcas.org](http://www.optomcas.org)