GUIDE THREE

Applying to Health Professions School

Johns Hopkins University

Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising
http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/preprofadvising/
Overview

In *Guide Three: Applying to Health Professions School*, we introduce important details, timelines, and jargon for Johns Hopkins University students and alumni who intend to apply to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) schools.

In general, reference in this guide to “medical school” refers to allopathic (MD), osteopathic (DO) and dental (DDS, DMD) schools. Details of the services we offer to applicants to other health professions schools, including veterinary medicine, nursing, optometry, pharmacy, and others, are explained on the Pre-Professional Office website.

Focus of Guide Three

Guide Three focuses on details to consider when applying to medical or dental schools. In this guide, we help future applicants assess if they are ready to apply to medical/dental school.

Advice for successfully navigating the medical or dental school application process following the submission of your primary application is covered in *Guide Four: The Ongoing Application Process*.

Overview of Applying to Health Professions School

The Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising offers advice, support, and feedback throughout the application process. The vast majority of medical and dental school applicants from Johns Hopkins University participate in the *Health Professions Committee Process*. Our goal as an office is to assist you to the best of our ability throughout the application process.

What Can I Expect of My Pre-Professional Advisors?

First and foremost, the role of a Pre-Professional Advisor is to advise and support you through the application process. Part of this responsibility, however, requires us to provide a realistic assessment of your readiness as an applicant. Our goal is to help you become the strongest applicant possible and, for some of you, that might mean slowing down the process by delaying your application to a future cycle. It is important that you be flexible about your timeline and we will encourage you to do so. Ultimately, however, the final decision of when you apply is all yours.

We will support you as an applicant by providing up-to-date and relevant information, assisting you with presenting the strongest application possible, and helping you make good decisions throughout the process.
Introduction: What Medical/Dental Schools Seek in Applicants
It is essential that you realistically assess your grades and test scores, the depth and relevance of your experiences, and evidence of the competencies necessary to succeed in the medical profession. You must also be able to articulate specific reasons why you want to be a doctor.

As you review the components of an effective application, it is important that you critically assess your strengths and weaknesses so that you are applying from a position of relative strength. For these reasons, it is vital that you reflect upon what makes you a unique or compelling applicant. As a reminder, schools are considering several factors, including academic achievement, performance on standardized tests, research and/or scholarly inquiry, medically-related experience with direct patient interaction, community service, extra-curricular activities, letters of evaluation, and evidence of competencies (see below).

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<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
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<td>Competencies are the skills, knowledge, and abilities medical schools seek in applicants. The competencies outlined by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) are as follows:</td>
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<td>Interpersonal Competencies:</td>
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<td>• Service Orientation</td>
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<td>• Social Skills</td>
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<td>• Cultural Competence</td>
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<td>• Teamwork</td>
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<td>• Oral Communication</td>
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<td>Intrapersonal Competencies:</td>
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<td>• Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others</td>
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<td>• Reliability and Dependability</td>
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<td>• Resilience and Adaptability</td>
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<td>• Capacity for Improvement</td>
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<td>Thinking and Reasoning Competencies</td>
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<td>• Critical Thinking</td>
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<td>• Quantitative Reasoning</td>
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<td>• Scientific Inquiry</td>
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<td>Science Competencies</td>
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<td>• Living Systems</td>
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<td>• Human Behavior</td>
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For Dental Applicants: The field of dentistry requires a high degree of dedication and social consciousness. A good way to help you decide whether dentistry is right for you is to spend time visiting different dental offices. This will provide you an opportunity to observe the work of a dentist as well as discuss what a career in dentistry involves. In addition, it is helpful to attend an information session at a dental school or to take the initiative to visit as a prospective student. A dentist must be able to communicate effectively, develop rapport with others, and to demonstrate similar personal competencies as outlined above. Dental school applicants are advised to also be concerned with community issues and demonstrate a record of sustained service to underserved populations.
**Application Timeline**

There are several possible timeframes for applying to medical school and each of them depends on the strength of your candidacy at the time of your application.

- Applying at the end of your third year of college. For many applicants, this means applying without a bridge or gap year.
- Applying at the end of your fourth year of college. For many applicants, this means applying with one bridge or gap year.
- Applying as an alumnus. For many applicants, this means applying after several years of work/other experience.

Regardless of when you apply to medical or dental school, here are the steps to consider…

**In the fall semester before you apply:**
- Create a veCollect account (See Guide Two) and begin requesting letters of evaluation.
- Attend the Pre-Professional Advising “Applicant Information Session” (late November/early December.)

**January through March of the year you apply:**
- Enroll in the applicant Blackboard site. (Instructions for enrolling in the applicant Blackboard site will be sent via email to juniors, seniors, and alumni.)
- Complete and submit the Health Professions Committee Application (HPCA)
- Submit documents to Blackboard
- Draft your personal statement.

**Early May:**
- Primary applications open. (Specific dates will be announced by each application service.)
- Begin working on your AMCAS, AACOMAS, TMDSAS and/or AADSAS application(s).
- Complete and submit your primary application as soon as possible

**Early June:**
- Complete and submit your primary application as soon as possible
- Letters of evaluation due to veCollect by mid-June.

**July through August:**
- Complete secondary applications. Try to return them as soon as possible. The sooner you submit your secondary applications, the better your chance of securing earlier interviews.
- The Pre-Professional Office begins submitting Committee Letters and individual letters of evaluation to medical schools in mid-July, continuing into late August.

**Early September:**
- Interviews at medical and dental schools begin.
Mid-October:
- First acceptance decisions for schools with rolling admissions.
- October 15: The Johns Hopkins University Health Professions Committee Process and application cycle closes. Completed primary applications and all other supporting documents must be uploaded to the Blackboard by this date.

Late February of the following year:
- Interviews end.

March through May of the following year:
- Applicants must narrow down acceptances; follow each medical or dental school’s guidelines for choosing the school to which you plan to matriculate.

**Standardized Tests**

Medical and dental schools expect applicants to take standardized tests relevant to their professions. We suggest you aim to take the MCAT or DAT once, after you have allowed for ample study time.

**The Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)**

Comprehensive MCAT information can be found at the [Association of American Medical Colleges](https://www.aamc.org) website.

**The Dental Admission Test (DAT)**

Comprehensive DAT information can be found at the [American Dental Association](https://www.ada.org) website.

**Fee waivers** are available for both the MCAT and DAT and each of the centralized application services. Any applicant who qualifies for fee assistance automatically qualifies for an HPCA fee waiver through the Pre-Professional office.

To learn more about FAP, go to: [http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/)

**When should I take the MCAT or DAT?**

Ideally, you should have your entrance exam score prior to applying to medical or dental school. If you plan to take a gap/bridge year, optimal timing can be late in the summer between junior and senior year. Some applicants choose to take the January test senior year, prior to submitting a primary application that summer. In any case, we recommend you take the MCAT no later than April of the year you plan to submit your application to medical school. It takes about four weeks to receive your official MCAT score, and an April exam will allow you to have your score before submitting your medical school applications.
If you are taking an MCAT/DAT in June or July, we recommend you submit your primary application before receiving your test scores. You should indicate the date of your future MCAT/DAT, but AMCAS and AADSAS will still verify and process your primary application without an MCAT/DAT score. This way, your secondary applications will not be delayed; however, schools will not review your application until your test scores, secondary applications, and letters of evaluation are received. **Please follow the AMCAS/AADSAS instruction manual regarding any changes to your MCAT/DAT test dates** (e.g., if you decide NOT to date the MCAT/DAT at the date you designated).

**What is the best way to prepare for the MCAT?**
Both self-study and preparation courses are effective, though each has pros and cons. A test prep course provides you with copious review materials and practice exams, as well as a structured classroom and study schedule. However, the monetary price can be quite high. Self-study is less expensive and many good review books and practice exams are available at bookstores and through online booksellers. Note that the self-study approach requires a tremendous amount of self-discipline. If you opt for self-study, consider forming a study group, making sure your study partners are self-motivated, reliable, and dedicated. For more information about study resources, please refer to the Pre-Professional website.

**How/when are my MCAT or DAT scores sent to schools?**
For the MCAT, scores are automatically released to AMCAS. You may release your scores to non-AMCAS schools via the MCAT Testing History (THx) System. Scores generally are processed and sent within 30 days of your test date. For dental schools, AADSAS will obtain your official DAT scores from the American Dental Association's Testing Services Center and import them directly into your application. If you take the DAT after your ADEA AADSAS application has been sent to your designated dental schools, an updated application reflecting your DAT scores will be forwarded to schools as soon as the scores are received. At the time that you register for the DAT, you can opt to have your DAT score forwarded to as many dental schools as you select, at no cost. You will be charged a fee for reports requested and forwarded at a later date -- and once you have received your DAT score.

**When is it appropriate to retake the MCAT or the DAT?**
It is in your best interest to take the MCAT or DAT **only once**. However, if your score is below average for medical or dental schools of interest to you, then you should consider retaking the test. If you have a solid overall score but one section is significantly lower than the others, speak with a Pre-Professional advisor about whether it makes sense to retake the exam and strategies to improve in that section.

Schools vary in how they consider multiple test scores; regardless, you can assume they will see every score from all tests you have taken. Only retake the test when you have truly assessed what you need to improve, spent time on additional preparation, and have proven to yourself in practice tests that you can earn a higher score. This means that, in most cases, you do not want to immediately repeat the test and you may be in a position that requires you to postpone your application.
If I have a very high MCAT or DAT score but average grades at Hopkins, will the medical or dental schools place less weight on my grades? An applicant should never assume that a high MCAT or DAT score will offset average or poor grades. Standardized test scores are only one metric that health professions schools evaluate. Remember that your academic record and MCAT or DAT score are just one of many components necessary for a strong and competitive medical or dental school application.

What are the Implications of a Gap/Bridge Year?
There are several reasons to delay your application until senior year or beyond. In fact, more than 80% of JHU applicants to medical and dental programs take at least one bridge year. Many Hopkins alumni choose to pursue research or a master’s degree during their bridge year(s), or engage in opportunities such as AmeriCorps, Teach for America, City Year, a Fulbright, etc. Medical schools value the maturity and life experience gained after graduation, and choosing a bridge year may ultimately make you a more successful applicant.

For more information about how to approach a bridge year, visit the Pre-Professional website.

You should also consider meeting with a Life Design Educator for ideas on how to spend a bridge year.

When Should You Apply?
You should apply to medical or dental school when your application is strong and competitive, and you have a reasonable chance to be invited to interviews. All applicants are encouraged to apply only once to medical or other health professions school, so it is important to think carefully about the timing of your application. Here are qualities to consider for a successful application:

- **Your MCAT or DAT scores are competitive.** Consult the Medical School Admissions Requirements (MSAR) to review MCAT score ranges for your schools of interest. If your overall MCAT score falls below the 10th percentile for a majority of your schools of interest, we strongly encourage you to retake the MCAT and, for most of you, this means delaying your application for at least one year. Pre-dental applicants should consult the ADEA Official Guide to Dental School to reference DAT score ranges for individual dental schools.
• **Your cumulative and/or BCPM GPAs are competitive.** Consult the MSAR to reference the cumulative GPA and BCPM GPA ranges for your schools of interest. If your overall cumulative or BCPM GPA falls below the 10th percentile for a majority of your schools of interest, you should delay applying, taking the time to enhance your academic record. Applying as a senior allows your senior year grades to be included in your application and academic record enhancer post-bac programs may help strengthen your academic profile before applying to medical school.

• **Your letters of evaluation (LOEs) are strong.** It is absolutely critical you secure LOEs that are strong and are going to be an asset to your overall application. This is no easy task at Johns Hopkins; with large lecture classes and team-taught courses, it can be difficult to get to know your professors. Classes during the junior and senior year are often smaller and, if you put your mind to it, you will certainly be able to develop the type of rapport with your professors and others that will result in strong evaluations.

• **You have exposure to clinical medicine or patient interaction.** If you have participated in activities that allow you to serve the community and build the interpersonal skills you need to be a physician, you are demonstrating to schools that you have a realistic understanding of what you’re about to undertake. If you would like to develop a plan for obtaining significant clinical and/or volunteer experiences, please consult a Pre-Professional Advisor.

• **You can answer the basic question “Why do you want to be a doctor (or dentist)?”** Articulating an answer to this question often means that you have had exposure to the medical profession, meaningful work and volunteer experience, and have challenged yourself to reflect upon those experiences. You will be asked this question repeatedly throughout the application process. Take the time to practice articulating your motivations for pursuing a career in medicine and be prepared to provide *specific* reasons why you have chosen this path.

• **You are able to balance competing priorities.** You have to balance essays to write, letters of evaluations to gather, standardized tests to study for, schools to research, as well as the rest of the challenges of real life. Make sure that you are able to dedicate sufficient time to preparing your application now and writing secondary essays over the summer.
The JHU Committee Process

The Committee Process refers to the procedures required by Johns Hopkins University and the Office of Pre-Professional Programs and Advising for applicants to obtain a Committee Letter.

Applicant Responsibilities

In one word, professionalism is required through every stage of the application process. In order to do our work as professionally as possible, we rely on you to uphold the following responsibilities:

- **Stay organized.** Create electronic and paper files for your application materials.
- **Meet deadlines.** Missing a deadline could mean you have to delay your application for a whole year. Set up your calendar now. Use the tools or devices at your disposal to help you remember the timelines and deadlines related to applying for your target schools.
- **Read and save emails.** You will receive a good number of emails from the Pre-Professional Office during this time. It is important to read them carefully and save them for future reference.
- **Address all involved in the application process in a professional manner.** Pay special attention to how you introduce yourself, acknowledge others, and follow-up on a correspondence or interaction.
- **Establish good verbal and non-verbal communication.** Make sure you establish eye contact, shake hands, verbally express your gratitude, and send thank you notes when appropriate.

Overview of Health Professions Committee Process

The Health Professions Committee Process refers to the steps required for obtaining a Committee Letter from Johns Hopkins University. Applicants to medical or dental school must complete the Health Professions Committee Application (HPCA), providing information that is vital to the writing of the Committee Letter. The individual letters of evaluation collected from faculty, supervisors, research PIs, etc., are attached to the Committee Letter and that entire packet is uploaded to the medical and dental schools of your choosing.

There are some key aspects to the Committee Process that are helpful for you to know:

**Blackboard:** The Pre-Professional Advising Office communicates and works with applicants through a special Blackboard site. Specific information about the Blackboard site will be sent in January via email to juniors, seniors, and alumni.

**Health Professions Committee Application (HPCA):** The first step in the Committee Process is the completion of the Health Professions Committee Application (HPCA). The HPCA is the online application to obtain a Johns Hopkins Committee Letter. It collects demographic information, academic record, and co-curricular experiences (research, medically-related clinical experience, community service, employment, etc.). The HPCA mirrors the AMCAS application in that much
of the information you are asked to provide is the same (or very similar) to the information you will enter into the AMCAS/AACOMAS/AADSAS applications.

Committee Letter: The information collected in the HPCA is referenced in the writing of your Johns Hopkins Committee Letter. The Committee Letter introduces you as an applicant, shares what makes you compelling, discusses what has shaped your interest in medicine/dentistry, and highlights your experiences and activities.

Letters of Evaluation and veCollect: Letters of evaluation are a critical element of the health professions application process. Medical and dental schools value the perspectives of people who have observed your work and can speak to your abilities and personality. At Johns Hopkins, you are responsible for monitoring all aspects of requesting and collecting evaluations through our online letter of evaluation system called veCollect. An overview of how to obtain letters of evaluation and a description of the veCollect letter system are covered in Guide Two: Letters of Evaluation and the veCollect Letter System.

The Medical/Dental School Application Process

Two important steps of the medical school admissions process are submission of primary (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS) and secondary (school-specific) applications.

Primary Application Services
There are four primary centralized application services for medical and dental school:
1) American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) – MD programs
2) American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS) – DO programs
3) Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS) – dental programs
4) Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Services (TMDSAS) – MD and dental programs at Texas public schools

It’s imperative to submit your primary applications as early as possible, rather than later in the application cycle.
Does it really matter when I submit my primary application?
Yes. Pre-Professional advisors often talk about the benefits of applying early in the application school cycle. We define “early” as submitting a primary application in late May or early June; this allows you to receive secondary applications by July with the goal of finishing those applications by early or mid-August, which in turn increases your chances for a fall interview.

Each school has its own application deadline, but we hope that you submit your materials well before those dates.

**Personal Statement**
Please refer to the Pre-Professional website for information and resources to help you write an effective personal statement.

**Resources**

- The *Medical School Admission Requirements (MSAR)* is the primary resource for students applying to allopathic medical schools and includes information on application procedures and deadlines, MCAT and GPA data, medical school class profiles, costs and financial aid packages, and MD-PhD and other combined degrees.

- Prospective applicants and students interested in learning about osteopathic medical schools should review the Choose DO Explorer and the *Student Guide to Osteopathic Medical Colleges*, which are supplied by AACOM.

- Dental applicants are encouraged to buy the *ADEA Official Guide to Dental Schools*. Prospective applicants will learn general information about each school's entrance requirements, application and selection processes, dental curriculum, special programs and services, costs, and financial aid.

**In Closing**
Navigating your way through academic requirements at Johns Hopkins is in itself a challenge that takes careful planning and great patience. If you are completing pre-medical or pre-dental requirements, the academic planning process requires precision, adaptability, and flexibility. Each student’s academic path is unique and the one you set for yourself should take into account your ability to handle multiple science courses, your strengths as a student, and a timeline that is yours alone. Most of all, we encourage you to seek input from your Academic and Pre-Professional Advisors to make sense of your situation and to devise a plan that is appropriate for your emerging academic and professional goals.