



Amherst College Guide for Pre-Health Students
Part II: The Medical School Application Process

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Overview

Applying to medical or dental school is an exciting culmination of your many years of hard work, dedication, and preparation for a new chapter in your life. It's a major opportunity to support and bond with your pre-health peers in a spirit of community. At the same time, it's a complex, demanding, competitive process.

This application process provides you with an opportunity to understand yourself in a deeper way, to clarify why you want to be a doctor, to refine your own strategies to stay healthy, and to join with your fellow applicants from Amherst College to strengthen a sense of community and collaboration among pre-health students.

There are roughly 20,000 places in first-year allopathic medical school classes for the more than 50,000 applicants each year. Nationally, fewer than half of all medical school applicants in any given year are accepted to allopathic (MD) medical schools. Amherst students do much better, and we want to sustain that. This *Amherst College Guide for Pre-Health Students Part II* aims to place you among the successful 20,000.

In addition, an increasing number of Amherst students and alumni apply to doctor of osteopathy (DO) schools and are accepted. Ultimately our shared goal is to launch you on becoming a great doctor. Although much of this guide is geared to medical school applicants, a substantial portion of it is relevant to veterinary and dental school applicants.

By now you will have read and followed the advice in the *Amherst College Guide for Pre-Health Students Part I: Preparing to Apply to Health Professions School*, and you are aware of the deadline to complete the MCAT exam by this coming April 2023 and the basic pre-medical course requirements by this coming May 2023.

We hope you find the information contained in this *Guide for Pre-Health Students Part II: The Medical School Application Process* useful and helpful as you make your way through this process.

Contact information

For questions about academic requirements, advanced standing, and letters of recommendation, contact Professor of Physics William Loinaz, Chair of the Health Professions Committee, at waloinaz@amherst.edu

For questions about all aspects of the application process, contact Dean Richard Aronson, MD MPH, Health Professions Advisor at raaronson69@amherst.edu

Becca Tishler, the Assistant Director of Health Professions Advising, manages the logistics of the application process and can answer questions about it as well. **Do not** send application items to Becca, Dean Aronson, or Professor Loinaz unless asked to do so. You can contact Becca at rtishler@amherst.edu

Perspectives on applying

Humane and competent doctors:

- Are empathetic.
- Take care of their own health and well-being.
- Love to learn.
- Address inequity in health and health care
- Think critically.
- Love to serve people and communities.
- Be proactive advocates for their patients, mentors for other health professionals, and be ready to learn from others, regardless of their age, role, or status.
- Respect people, healthy or ill, in a thoroughly non-judgmental way.
- Demonstrate cultural humility.
- Support patients and their loved ones when and where they are needed.
- Promote health and healing as well as treat illness.
- Show leadership.
- Always ask courteous respectful questions, let people tell their stories, and listen to them carefully.
- Give unbiased advice, let people participate actively in all decisions related to their health and health care, assess each situation carefully, and help whatever the situation may be.
- Use evidence as a tool, not as a determinant of practice; humbly honor and respect the fundamental connections between physical, mental, emotional, and social health.
- Value community.
- Work collaboratively with other members of the healthcare team.
- Honor and respect the culture(s) of patients and colleagues.
- Understand the biopsychosocial model of health.
- Understand the social determinants of health.
- Understand narrative medicine.
- Understand patient- and family-centered care.

“I come from a country that understands the need for hard work to overcome past destructiveness and to escape a threatened future. But, we have also learned that miracles happen with vision and spirit. The world needs that vision and spirit still, and all the more. We are all threatened by entrenched inequality and divisions. We all must prove ourselves equal to a better possibility.”

Nelson Mandela,
Amherst College Honorary Degree, 2005

“We need to learn to live together as brothers (and sisters) or we shall perish together as fools.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“In every clinical encounter, a person feels better. That’s the ideal of medicine, the deeper meaning of healing.”

Bernard Lown

SOME UPFRONT ADVICE: “IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME FOR ME TO APPLY?”

Our most important advice is to apply only when your record is good enough to have a decent chance of success, and when you are committed to devote enough time and energy to apply successfully. With that in mind, ask yourself: *is this the right time for me to apply?* This is a key question for you to consider carefully.

What kind of record is good enough and what resources do you need to devote to the application?

You could look at it as a question of "risk factors." For example, someone with one risk factor for heart attacks (e.g. high cholesterol) may well never have a heart attack. However, as the number of risk factors goes up (no exercise, overweight, family history, etc.), the chances of a heart attack increase.

In the same way, some applicants get in even though they have one or more risk factors for rejection. But as the risk factors pile up, so do the chances of rejection.

If you are just starting the process, some items in the list below may not mean much to you, and you won't know yet about some, (e.g. your MCAT score if you haven't taken the test yet). You'll learn more as you read this Guide and go further on the path towards applying.

“Risk factors” that reduce your chances of being accepted

- Not having enough clinical experiences, whether inside or outside of a medical context (and whether volunteering, working, shadowing), that have let you interact and engage with people in a health context (*see p. 6-7*)
- Not taking the time to reflect on your personal, academic, and professional experiences deeply and how they inform your motivation to pursue medicine
- Being unable to appreciate the deeper meaning behind medicine, health, caregiving, healing; or, thinking that preparation for medical school is exclusively STEM classes- and lab research-focused
- Not having substantial, robust community service and engagement that is non-medical in nature.
- Taking the MCAT after April 30, 2024 (*see p. 18-19*)
- Having an MCAT total score less than 510 (82nd percentile). *Note:* Exceptions may apply according to a variety of factors. This is especially true for students from groups historically underrepresented in the medical profession (under-represented in medicine). See Dean Aronson or Professor Loinaz.
- Having a science GPA (calculated on a 4-point scale for biology, chemistry, physics, and math courses) below 3.4. *Note:* Exceptions may apply to some students, as noted above for the MCAT. Discuss with Dean Aronson or Professor Loinaz.
- Having an individual MCAT section score below the 50th percentile on any of the four sections. Again, exceptions apply.
- Applying to the wrong schools (e.g. applying to only the most highly selective schools; failing to apply to your state school; applying to certain state schools outside of your state).

- ❑ Taking several required premedical science courses over the summer, not during the academic year.
- ❑ Not spending enough time writing your AMCAS application in May or rushing through it, ending up with inaccurate entries on your AMCAS application that cause delays in verification, and not representing yourself fully on the application.
- ❑ Submitting your AMCAS application after June 30 (see p. 16, 21-23)
- ❑ Submitting secondary applications later than two weeks after you receive them. **This is so important!** (see p. 21)
- ❑ Missing deadlines! Not attending the mandatory applicant meetings (see p. 9-10, 16)
- ❑ Not staying in frequent, close touch with us throughout the entire process (see p. 11, 16)
- ❑ Not giving serious consideration to also applying to osteopathic (DO) medical schools.
- ❑ Taking only the minimum number of science courses to fulfill premed requirements (2 Biology, 4 Chemistry, 2 Physics, and biochemistry) before the submission of your application.
- ❑ Never taking more than one science course in any semester.
- ❑ Failing to disclose an institutional action (see p. 16-7)

The first four factors listed above are extremely important. Having experiences where you see people navigating their health concerns is fundamental to knowing that this path is right for you (see p. 6-7, *On clinical experiences*). Those experiences can, but do not have to, take place in a medical setting: the ability to live a healthy life involves so much more than biomedical treatment and diagnosis. Medical schools will evaluate you based on the depth of your understanding of this issue.

Additionally, though there are quantitative aspects to applying to medical school (like MCAT scores and GPA, discussed below), the medical school application and subsequent medical school interviews are narrative-based: they require you to express what you have seen and learned, who you are, how you have prepared and gained experience, and therefore why you are passionate about this career path (see p. 14, *Personal statement*). As a result, it is imperative that you regularly take time to reflect on who you are and what you value, both for the sake of your application (if you cannot express why you want to be a doctor and how you've learned this, you will not get in to medical school), but moreover for your own personal growth and self-efficacy.

The factors listed above referring to **MCAT scores and grades** are very important in determining success in medical school admissions. Unfortunately, even the most sterling personal qualities usually don't substitute for low MCAT scores and science grades. To avoid those three risk factors, and to re-emphasize what we state above, you need to have:

- ❑ A science GPA (i.e. in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Math) of at least 3.4 on a 4-point scale; this is just above a "B+" average in the sciences; **and**
- ❑ An MCAT total score of at least 510, achieved no later than late April of the year you are applying (April 30, 2024 for applicants for 2025 matriculation). (As mentioned, exceptions are possible, but must go through an appeal process to the Health Professions Committee). An MCAT retake in the summer is risky, and should only be undertaken after a discussion with Professor Loinaz or Dean Aronson. And, whatever the total score, no individual score should be below the 50th percentile. Even with a score of 510 or higher, a section score

below the 50th percentile could be problematic.

Important: There are a number of other factors that may influence the chances of any individual student. The science GPA and MCAT thresholds are intended as guidelines, and may vary according to unique circumstances of the applicant. Again, see Dean Aronson or Professor Loinaz to discuss your particular situation.

On clinical experience (and during COVID-19)

Over the past few years, we have spoken to a number of students who recognize that they need more clinical experience as a component of preparation for applying to medical school, but are unsure of how to manage that need given the changes and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, in any year, there are questions about how much clinical experience is necessary.

For students applying to medical school after Spring 2020, and the unraveling of normalcy that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic, gaining clinical experience – how, what kinds, and how much – will be an issue that continues for many years to come.

Shadowing a physician in a doctor's office, or a hospital setting; volunteering in an emergency room; easily joining on as an in-person medical scribe: these once-standard activities became fraught, or more complicated, or were not possible in any form depending on where you are located and what course the virus is on locally and nationally. Though these opportunities are now becoming more available again, they may still be limited in their capacity or availability.

Medical schools understand that plans got disrupted significantly as a result of the crisis, and many are asking students to speak to how their preparation for medical school has been changed due to the pandemic (on what's called "secondary applications": the applications specific to medical schools that you might submit after sending in your primary "AMCAS" application which opens May/June, see pg. 22). **However, many medical schools also consider robust, in-depth, meaningful clinical experience to be a non-negotiable aspect of an application.**

The good news is that "clinical experience" is a very broad term: it refers to something much broader than working directly in the setting of a clinic, but rather any kind of experience that lets you interact and engage with people in a health context. Health is an intersectional issue: the ability to live a healthy life is not simply a matter of biomedical diagnosis and treatment, or scientific preparedness. Health, and its attainment, is as complicated and multifaceted a concept/goal as the people seeking to be healthy.

What do we mean by this exactly? Take, for example, a job as a crisis call center counselor. On the face of it, this might not seem like a clinical experience. But in that work, you have received training (the more the better) on how to engage with people in vulnerable situations, and through your position are learning to talk to people in crisis, hear their stories, being an empathetic and supportive listener, knowing when to ask questions and what questions are the right ones, affirming these individuals' experiences. These are all extremely important to health, healing, and treatment, and moreover, these are foundational aspects of how doctors practice medicine every day.

Furthermore, demonstrating that you have a deep, expansive understanding of the many skills and qualities that go into the compassionate, humane, and competent practice of medicine is absolutely in your best interest. Being able to make these connections, and show that you know medicine to be about more than just biomedical treatment and diagnosis, will overwhelmingly improve your application and make you a more attractive candidate for medical school.

This also ties in to the perspective we hope you have gained and cultivated as part of the Amherst pre-health community: that there is no formulaic "track" to medical school, no set of activities that guarantee your admission and success. Your path to medical school is totally unique and personal. These experiences are about what you need to feel ready and aware of the path ahead. The AAMC's [Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students](#) is an **extremely important** guide to this thinking (see also page 7 of the *Pre-Health Guide: Part I*); keep these competencies in mind as you're exploring opportunities and also thinking about your past experiences, and how they inform your understanding of the greater meaning behind concepts like caregiving, health, healing, treatment, etc. For example: maybe you are the only person in your family who speaks English, and so has had to translate and interpret for your family members in a medical setting for many years. Or, maybe you have spent a lot of time as a patient yourself. Or, maybe you were a caregiver for a family member when they were ill. These three life experiences would absolutely constitute important clinical experiences: how would you characterize them within the Core Competencies?

All this being said, it is still important to have seen what care looks like in an explicitly medical setting: again, this is as much for you as it is for your application. Do you understand what you're getting yourself into?

If you feel like you need to gain more clinical experience that takes place in an explicitly medical setting (a hospital, a doctor's office, a clinic) to confirm that this is a path you know and feel sure about, then **the harsh but true answer – based on many years of experience advising Amherst students applying to medical school – might be to wait to apply until you can gain that exposure and experience.** We can say with certainty that it is unwise to apply to medical school without much clinical experience. It is almost never a bad idea to wait a year to apply: it is often a bad idea to rush towards an application without having the kind of preparedness necessary to demonstrate you are ready.

As COVID-19 has decreased access to medical spaces, and made it difficult to impossible to be present in person in some of these spaces, the idea that you cannot find these types of experiences but need them to apply to medical school can be a source of anxiety. It can feel extremely unfair to think that you have to delay your application to medical school because of factors entirely outside of your control. Medical schools are sympathetic to the disruptions and demands on students due to the pandemic, but as we said above, for many schools, being able to point to significant, meaningful clinical experience is a non-negotiable part of an application. Whether or not your lack of clinical experience is your fault does not, from their perspective, have much bearing on the matter. We understand the anxiety this might produce, and sympathize with this feeling fully. But again, it is far better to push back an application to medical school until you can put together a competitive application than it is to push forward and "see how it goes."

On the topic of how much clinical experience is enough, there is no magic number of hours of clinical experience, just as there is no formula of activities to complete that will guarantee your successful application. Rather, it is important to think about the amount of clinical experience – and service, more broadly – you need in order:

- A) to be sure you have seen and experienced enough to be sure that medicine is indeed your passion and what you truly want to do, and
- B) to know why in a deep, thoughtful, multifaceted, and interdisciplinary way, and
- C) to have developed a foundation for preparedness for your medical education, according to the AAMC's [Core Competencies](#).

On applying in your junior year

Although not a risk factor for everyone, applying at the end of junior year for admission right after college graduation, rather than a year or more later, is **often premature**. Students who apply at the end of senior year or later almost always have a stronger record; they have graduated from Amherst, often with honors (often also with departmental distinction), usually with a higher GPA and more accomplishments and experience. The average age of first-year medical students in the U.S. is 25 and those older applicants haven't been sitting on a beach since graduating from college! Many have been working in labs or hospitals, showing other medically-related accomplishments, and engaging in teaching and other forms of community service - all of which make them more attractive to medical schools than someone who "only" has a good academic record and some summer experiences. Some Amherst students with strong records are successful when they apply at the end of junior year for admission immediately after graduating from Amherst. However, some who were rejected, and others who were accepted but not to the schools they were hoping for, would have done well to apply a year or two or three later.

Some important additional “don’ts”

DO NOT apply intending to request a year's deferment after being accepted. First, you will almost certainly be a stronger applicant in terms of grades, honors, and experience at the end of the additional year, so it's better to apply later rather than sooner. Second, some medical schools don't permit deferments or allow them only under conditions you may not meet. Third, most schools don't allow deferments at all for applicants admitted from their waiting list, and it's not uncommon to be admitted to one's top choice (i.e. most selective) school from a waiting list.

Once you have decided to apply, **don't apply halfheartedly!** We cringe when we hear a student say, "I guess I'll apply to a couple of schools this year to see if I get in, even though my record is weak, and if I don't make it this time I'll really go for it next time around." This is a recipe for frustration and failure in a process that requires a great deal on the part of the student and his/her/their family, as well as on the part of those at Amherst who are supporting the applications.

What often happens in this situation is that the applicant lives in hope all through the cycle, having not heard from some schools at all, or maybe being on a waiting list, until a final rejection in the late spring or early summer. By then it's too late to do anything to remedy the weaknesses in the person's record in time for the next application cycle. The student then either must delay applying again until another year has passed so grades or MCATs can be improved, or submit a rushed, late application with weak credentials a second time, which is, of course, a recipe for another failed attempt.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS

This chart below gives you a broad overview of how the application process looks from start to finish, including deadlines and what you can expect when. It takes around **18 months** to apply to medical/other HP schools from start to finish.

Please see the last page of the guide, **HPC Applicant Deadlines for 2025 Matriculation**, p. 30, for a simpler timeline of deadlines.

There are **no exceptions** to these deadlines other than very occasional and special arrangements that require permission from Dean Aronson. It is essential that you complete each step that is outlined below, that you **meet all deadlines**, and that you are in touch with Dean Aronson and/or Becca promptly if you have any questions or run into problems.

SEASON	DEADLINES & STEPS OF THE APPLICATION PROCESS
Fall 2023	<p>September 20: First mandatory (virtual) meeting for all applicants, 7 – 8:30 PM EST</p> <p>October 18: Second mandatory (virtual) meeting for all applicants, 7 – 8:30 PM EST</p> <p>November 1: Register your intent to apply with the Health Professions Committee by 11:59 PM EST on this date.</p> <p>Receive letter of recommendation (LOR) waiver, full application opens.</p> <p>November 30: Full application completed, due by 11:59 PM.</p> <p>Start planning for the MCAT this coming winter or spring if you haven't taken it yet. Decide how to prepare, if you need to retake.</p>
Winter 2023 & the first months of 2024	<p>Receive the Letter of Recommendation Instructions form.</p> <p>Confirm who will write your letters of recommendation, enter their information in the application.</p> <p>Start drafting your personal statement, and attend Becca's Personal Statement Writing Workshop (date TBD). A "final" draft of your personal statement is due March 15.</p> <p>Begin serious MCAT preparation and register for the test, if you haven't already taken it.</p> <p>Those who studied abroad: request a hardcopy of your official transcript from that school/university. Consult the AMCAS Applicant Guide and resources to learn how. <i>START THIS PROCESS EARLY.</i></p> <p>February 9: Alumni letters of recommendation due</p> <p>Log in and look at last year's (2024) AMCAS application: familiarize yourself with the format, what is asked, what is required.</p>

Spring 2024	<p>March 15: All applicants must submit their “final” personal statement and resume to the Health Professions Office.</p> <p>March 15: All applicants must be done with the medical school application interview.</p> <p>March 29: most letters of recommendation due for current students</p> <p>April 17: Mandatory Applicant Meeting, 7 – 8:30 PM EST</p> <p>April 30: MCAT must be taken; AMCAS application opens soon.</p> <p>May 17: letters of recommendation for current students by current thesis advisors/spring 2024 professors due</p>
Summer 2024	<p>May 31: deadline to commit to applying through the Health Professions Committee for this cycle</p> <p>May 31: <i>reapplicants only</i> revised personal statement, updated resume, and summary of updates due</p> <p>Early June: submit your AMCAS/AACOMAS application as soon as possible after earliest submission date</p> <p>June 30: last date to submit your AMCAS/AACOMAS application to receive a committee letter</p> <p>June-August: complete supplementary applications (aka “secondaries”) for the schools where you’re applying <i>as soon as possible</i> – aim to return them ideally within 2 weeks of receiving them</p> <p>End of July: Health Professions Committee letters uploaded to your schools. We will inform you when they are uploaded.</p> <p>Interviews and acceptances begin, until March! Keep in touch with us on a regular basis with all updates, interview invitations, dates of interviews, and subsequent interview accounts. Mock interviews are available upon request.</p>
Fall 2024-Winter 2025	Interviews and acceptances continue. You continue to keep us updated about what’s happening!
Spring 2025	Decisions are made!
Summer-Fall 2025	You matriculate in medical/graduate school!!

Stay in close touch with us through all phases of the application process, start to finish!

THE ROLE OF THE AMHERST COLLEGE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COMMITTEE (HPC)

The Health Professions Committee (HPC) works with the Health Professions Office to prepare materials to support applications to health professions schools, most notably in producing a committee letter on behalf of each person who applies through the Committee.

If you have registered your formal intent to apply for Fall 2025 matriculation with the Health Professions Office, then you are stating your intent to apply through the Health Professions Committee.

Students applying while at Amherst (i.e. at the end of junior or senior year) are expected by medical schools to apply through the HPC, rather than having individual recommendations sent separately to medical schools. Recent graduates who took at least half of their required premedical science courses at Amherst are also welcome to apply through the Committee.

Students who took many premedical courses elsewhere; who cannot meet the letter of recommendation requirement (*see p. 15*); or who missed one or all of the mandatory applicant meetings must apply "independently" or through their post-baccalaureate program (if applicable), not through the Amherst Health Professions Committee.

The HPC writes a "committee letter" on your behalf, which is a narrative endorsement of your candidacy to medical school on the basis of your academic record, personal and professional preparedness, and letters of recommendation. Your Health Professions Committee letter will be based on four (i.e. exactly four—not more or less than four) letters of recommendation from faculty and others at Amherst College that you request (with an additional letter available for alumni), plus your personal statement, resume, questionnaire, and medical school applicant interview. Copies of your individual letters of recommendation are included as part of the committee letter. These letters of recommendation (4 faculty letters of recommendation plus a 5th for alumni), a cover letter with information about Amherst College, and a statistical page showing the median grades in the premedical science courses you took at Amherst, are uploaded on your behalf to each medical school you select (the purpose of the statistical page is to show that grades in Amherst science courses are not all A's). In this way, the HPC committee letter is "your Amherst recommendation."

Given the immense effort, time, and attention needed to write a committee letter for each applicant that is as true a reflection of them, and their values and passions and experiences, as possible, applicants must commit to applying (or not) through the Health Professions Committee by May 31, 2024.

Your committee letter will be sent to medical schools by the last week in July. All committee letters are uploaded at the same time—we do not accelerate or delay the upload for any applicant, for any reason.

The Amherst Health Professions Committee is comprised of three faculty members elected in two-year terms by the Committee of Six, as well as Professor William Loinaz, Chair of the HPC, Dean Richard Aronson, member *ex officio*, and Becca Tishler, staff to HPC.

INFORMATION FOR THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COMMITTEE

Getting started

The Health Professions Committee (HPC) requires a great deal of information from you, including a detailed application, your personal statement, resume, and participation in a one-hour medical school applicant interview. This information helps us to learn more about you and your plans to study medicine, and also helps you and us to assess if this is the right time for you to apply.

*As of Fall 2023 and this application cycle, the registration of intent to apply and the Amherst HPC Application are moving to SurveyMonkey. Details on this will be covered in the mandatory meetings in the fall and will be sent directly to prospective applicants as well.

Registering your intent to apply

The first step in applying through Amherst's HPC is registering your intent to apply. It is quick and involves providing some basic information. You must register your intent to apply by 11:59 PM EST on November 1, 2023 in order to be able to apply through the HPC.

The Amherst HPC Application

A critical part of the application process—for everyone involved—is the Amherst HPC Application. The HPC Application consists of a detailed questionnaire, your up-to-date resume, and your signed letter of recommendation waiver. The HPC Application provides important information about you to the Health Professions Committee (the better we know you, the better we can support you), and it is also important for you in your application: it can provide the framework for your personal statement, future AMCAS application, and interviews. The application asks many questions that you will encounter in some form or another throughout the application process. Take your time responding to the questions: give it a lot of thought, and provide detailed and specific responses to the questions. When we have received your completed HPC Application, the Health Professions Office will contact you on how to schedule the medical/graduate school application interview.

As with the registration of intent to apply, this part of the process is moving to SurveyMonkey. Details on this will be covered in the mandatory meetings and will be sent directly to prospective applicants.

Submission of the HPC Application closes at 12:00 AM EST on December 1. If we do not receive your application by 11:59 PM EST on November 30, 2023, then our office will assume you are not applying through the HPC and will remove you from our email list.

Resumes

Resumes should be one page in length and include the titles and dates of pertinent activities such as internships, research, volunteer work, extracurricular activities, and leadership positions.

Your most up-to-date resume is due to our office on November 30, 2023 as a part of your Amherst HPC Application. The final version of your resume for the Health Professions Committee is due, along with your near-final personal statement, on March 15, 2024.

Interview

Your one-hour medical school application interview is your opportunity to talk openly and candidly about your motivation and preparation for a medical or dental career, as well as to ask questions about the application process. It is in the medical school application interview that we will talk in detail about how your application is shaping up and give you our perspective on whether this is the right time for you to apply. Once the Health Professions Office has received your Amherst HPC Application, we will contact you about scheduling.

All interviews for alumni and current students must be completed by March 15, 2024 for current students. **If you do not complete your one-hour interview appointment by March 15, 2024, you will not be eligible for a committee letter from Amherst.**

Letter of recommendation (LOR) waiver

This is a simple form that states that you waive your right to review the materials submitted on your behalf by the Health Professions Committee. This form is required to ensure that the contents of the committee letter are kept confidential. If you do not waive your right to review these materials, you must contact Dean Aronson immediately to discuss next steps.

Your signed LOR waiver is due to our office on November 30, 2023 as a part of your Amherst HPC Application.

Mandatory applicant meetings

In September, October, and April, the Health Professions Office holds mandatory meetings to gather as a community of Amherst applicants and learn important information about the application process. All meetings are held over Zoom to accommodate alumni applicants—joining details will be sent ahead of the meetings.

- September 20, 2023 from 7 – 8:30 PM EST
 - We will provide a broad overview of the application process, how to decide when to apply, and how to know if this is the right time for you to do so.
- October 18, 2023 from 7 – 8:30 PM EST
 - We will discuss the basics of the application process and what to expect over the next few months, including information about the importance of the Amherst HPC Application and how to draft your personal statement, with insights from recent Amherst applicants
- April 17, 2024 from 7 – 8:30 PM EST
 - We will focus on more specifics about the AMCAS application itself, as well as going over outcomes and trends based on the 2023/2024 cycle.

Please contact Dean Aronson and Becca if you know already that attending either of these meetings will pose a problem to you. **All applicants are expected to attend all meetings—those not in attendance at any meeting who do not make prior arrangements ahead of the meeting will be unable to apply through Amherst’s HPC for 2025 matriculation.**

Personal statement

The Health Professions Committee requires a near-final draft of your personal statement, approximately one single-spaced page long, in which you convey to us how you know you want to be a physician. The AMCAS application asks you to respond to a similar statement (though the wording changes year to year), so this is a way to get started on that part of your application. Here are some questions to consider, taken from previous year's AMCAS instructions: "Why have you selected the field of medicine? What motivates you to learn more about medicine? ... In addition, you may want to include information such as special hardships, challenges or obstacles that may have influenced your educational pursuits."

We will send much more information—on writing the personal statement, samples from past Amherst applicants, and details about a personal statement writing workshop—directly to applicants later in the fall 2023, but here are some ideas to start thinking:

- Dig deep into your original motivation, values, and ideals for medicine. Brainstorm, reflect.
- State early on in your statement and be explicit about why you're applying/want to be a doctor.
- Think about your life and experiences like you're telling someone a story: create a narrative.
- Build a case for your initial statement – using at most two to three personal experiences or stories. Convey a sense of your journey. You don't need to have had an epiphany. But, if you felt any particular turning points, what were they?
- Be specific (context) and paint a rich picture of the experiences that have led you to this decision. Make them come alive!
- Avoid clichés, jargon, acronyms that might be unfamiliar to readers, and self-absorption.
- Build a case for your personal qualities, esp.: empathy; honoring and respecting the dignity of all people and cultures; humaneness; seeing the strengths and resilience in others; commitment to service; understanding the social determinants of health, etc.; and back it up. Don't just list qualities.
- Avoid generic statements such as, "I want to be a pediatrician because I love children."
- If you talk about a personal health condition or adversity, show your resilience and recovery without being self-absorbed.
- Don't duplicate what you will say in other parts of your application.
- Close with a strong synthesizing statement that shows the depth of your passion and commitment.
- Avoid over-romanticizing the medical profession. Show your idealism, but also show your awareness that there is much to do to make health care better, and you want to be part of that change.
- It's fine and important to show passion for a specific area of medicine, but don't give the impression that you've already decided, say, that you're going to be a surgeon. Show openness to all aspects of medical education, and excitement about medical school itself, and a love of learning.
- Don't worry about "doing it all" in this statement – you have limited space!
- Write from your heart and soul!
- Submit as part of AMCAS application in June. Don't duplicate Activities/Experience Section.

Letters of recommendation

Your Health Professions Committee letter will be based on four (4) (i.e. exactly four—not more or less than four) letters of recommendation from faculty and others at Amherst College that you request, plus your personal statement, resume, questionnaire, and medical school applicant interview. Copies of these individual letters of recommendation are sent along with the Committee letter of evaluation, which includes quotes from the faculty letters.

At least two of your four letters of recommendation must be from science professors at Amherst. ("Science" in this case means Biology, Chemistry, Math/Statistics, Physics, or the Neuroscience faculty in the Psychology department.) There are no exceptions to this rule. The other two letters may be from science or non-science faculty, Deans, coaches, or administrators.

Transfer students, or students who studied at another institution on an exchange program, may obtain one of the four letters from faculty at the other institution. We do not take letters from faculty who may have taught you in summer school courses. Since what we prepare is an institutional recommendation from Amherst College, for the 4 Amherst letters, we do not use letters from job supervisors or others outside Amherst College for the committee letter.

The only exception to the "four and only four" rule is that, if you are applying at least one year after graduation (i.e. you graduated in 2023 or earlier), you are strongly encouraged to include one additional letter from someone outside Amherst who knows you well in a science or educational setting since graduation. This is optional, but we encourage you to make use of this 5th letter if feasible. Even if as a graduate you have the optional outside letter sent, you still must have four Amherst recommendations, at least two of which come from Amherst science faculty, in order to apply through the Amherst Health Professions Committee.

In December 2023, assuming you have met all other deadlines up to that point, you will receive the "Amherst HPC Letter of Recommendations instructions 2025" document. This document is designed to be sent to your recommenders, so they can be informed of the deadlines for submitting letters of recommendation and understand the format of this piece of writing. After you have confirmed with your recommender that they will write for you, please send them this document.

Again, it is your responsibility to provide the "Amherst HPC Letter of Recommendations instructions 2025" document to each of your recommenders after you have confirmed that they will write on your behalf.

More information about how and where a recommender can submit their letters will come later in the fall 2023.

Send a follow-up note to your recommenders before the due date of the letters, thanking them for their willingness to write the recommendation, to serve as a reminder for them.

Also, osteopathic medical school applicants will, for most schools, need a recommendation letter from an osteopathic physician in addition to the Amherst letters and, for alumni, the fifth letter. This isn't a big deal, and applicants are urged not to be dissuaded from DO school applications because of this.

Consequences of missed deadlines

It is extremely important to adhere to all deadlines in the application process. If you anticipate that meeting the deadlines will be a challenge, then that is an important reason to postpone your application. Failure to adhere to deadlines can disqualify you from applying through the Health Professions Committee for fall 2025.

The reason for this is because once each applicant's file is complete, it takes many more weeks for us to compose, format, and assemble the packets on behalf of our roughly 50-70 applicants each year. After the Health Professions Advisor drafts each committee letter, the four faculty members in the Health Professions Committee review and edit each letter individually. The committee members then meet to finalize each letter. Only then can we format and upload the packets with the committee letter and individual faculty letters of recommendation. Count back in time from the July upload, and you can see that we can't include someone in the July upload if the applicant's file is not complete by early summer.

Of course, things can come up unexpectedly; emergencies happen. We will do what we can for applicants who miss deadlines and are in touch with us about it. However, at some point in the early summer it becomes impossible to include applicants with incomplete files (items missing or letters of recommendation not yet arrived) in the July upload without delaying it, and we will not delay the upload *by even one day* to accommodate a late applicant.

Additionally, over our many years of experience, we have learned that delaying the submission of your AMCAS application has a profound impact on the attention that your application receives, and keeps applicants deserving of consideration from standing out. While we realize that life happens and unexpected barriers can get in the way, you have many months to plan ahead and be ready to submit your application early.

For that reason, we require that you submit your AMCAS application by June 30 in order to receive a committee letter.

Institutional action

The following is the question from the AMCAS application:

Institutional Action

i You must answer "Yes" even if the action does not appear on or has been deleted or expunged from your official transcripts due to institutional policy or personal petition. [Please review these important instructions to help answer this question.](#)

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? *

Yes

No

The [2024 Applicant Guide](#) further explains:

“If you were ever the recipient of any institutional action by any college or medical school for unacceptable academic performance or conduct violation, you must answer Yes to the question about institutional action, even if such action did not interrupt your enrollment or require you to withdraw. Furthermore, select Yes even if the action does not appear on, or has been deleted or expunged from, your official transcripts as a consequence of institutional policy or personal petition. Examples of institutional actions include, but are not limited to, academic probation, academic standing warnings, suspension, residence hall policy violations, and ethics policy violations.

Failure to provide an accurate answer to the question about institutional action or, if applicable, failure to complete the form provided by the school will result in an investigation. The AMCAS program will report institutional actions listed on your transcript, regardless of whether you report them on your application. Medical schools require you to answer the question accurately and provide all relevant information. Medical schools understand that many individuals learn from the past and emerge stronger as a result. Full disclosure will enable medical schools to evaluate the information more effectively within the context of your application.

If you become the subject of an institutional action after certifying and submitting the AMCAS application, you are required to inform your designated medical school(s) within 10 business days of the date of the occurrence.”

Please note that this question, and the criteria for disclosure that it requires, is much broader than what may rise to the level of an institutional action at Amherst. As a result, it is very important to think about this question carefully. In general, it is our perspective that being upfront and open is the best policy—again, medical schools understand that you are human; that people make mistakes and learn from them.

If you are unsure about how to answer this question, discuss it with Dean Aronson at your application interview and consult with the Dean of Student Conduct. Our office is in close contact with the Student Affairs Office and other relevant campus bodies and consults with them each year.

THE MCAT: AN OVERVIEW

The Medical College Admission Test® (MCAT®) is a standardized, multiple-choice examination given by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and required by every medical school in the U.S. It is designed to assess the examinee's problem solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine. It tests specific science and social science knowledge as well as reading and quantitative skills. It has four sections: Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills. The science material is what the AAMC assumes is covered in the minimum required premed courses, i.e. introductory and organic chemistry, biochemistry, introductory biology, and non-calculus physics. The social science material is often covered in introductory courses in psychology and sociology.

[Fee assistance](#) is available for the MCAT for students who meet the criteria. We highly recommend pursuing this if you think you may qualify, as there are many other benefits as well.

All applicants to medical school who apply through the Health Professions Committee for 2025 matriculation must have taken the MCAT by April 30th, 2024.

This deadline also applies to any retake exams. You receive your scores 1 month after you take your exam. **So, you must have the score you intend to apply with no later than May 30 or 31, 2024.** If you take the test any later than that, you will not know your scores when applying to medical schools, putting you behind applicants whose MCAT scores are known at the beginning of the application process, and adding a "risk factor" to your application (see p. 4).

The deadline to request an exemption to this deadline (a letter, sent to Professor Will Loinaz, chair of the Health Professions Committee) is March 15, 2024. Exemptions are granted on a case-by-case basis and are not guaranteed.

A calendar of 2023 test dates and registration deadlines is on the MCAT website [here](#). 2024 dates will be announced sometime in the fall. Please note that the MCAT is only administered in eight months out of the year, and not at all in the months of October, November, December, or February. The test is administered by PearsonVUE, a commercial testing company with test sites located around the country.

Bottom line: plan ahead!

Most schools will accept MCAT scores up to three years old, although this can vary by school. Check the admissions websites of schools you're interested in to see their specific policy.

Why you need to prepare for the MCAT

It is absolutely necessary to set aside time over many months to prepare for the MCAT exam. First, you need to be familiar with the format of the test and the types of questions and passages it contains, because these are very similar from test to test, but different from exams in Amherst science courses. Also, you have to work up the stamina required to concentrate for the duration of the test, which is longer than tests you probably have taken before such as SATs and exams in courses.

In addition, you would be unusual if you remembered everything from your introductory science courses, so you'll need to relearn some of it. Finally, a number of subjects on the MCAT aren't covered in Amherst's

introductory science courses, at least not in the detail required to do well on the MCAT. Examples of these subjects include buoyancy, optics, nuclear chemistry, organ physiology, and basic immunology.

Preparing for the MCAT

There are three ways to prepare: (1) entirely on your own, (2) with a student-organized study group at Amherst, or (3) by taking a commercial review course (Kaplan or Princeton). Outcomes for Amherst premeds show that good science students can prepare successfully without taking a commercial course, but many such students take Kaplan or Princeton courses anyway.

1. Preparing on your own

MCAT practice materials are available through the AAMC on their website. There are a number of free resources that have been very helpful to Amherst applicants: please contact our office to learn more. Some printed MCAT materials are also limitedly available through the Health Professions Office. We highly recommend speaking to friends or peers who have taken the MCAT already to learn about their study plans—let us know if you'd like to be connected with someone.

Other MCAT preparation books are available. You may also come across used Kaplan or Princeton Review materials. In addition to outlines and sample passages and questions, these materials contain practice tests, but not actual released MCATs like the ones from the AAMC.

2. Forming a study group

The Health Professions Office encourages students to get together to form study groups! Again, in general, some of the best preparation you can do is talking to peers, friends, or classmates who have taken the MCAT to learn about how they did it. Please contact Dean Aronson if you need help connecting with someone—we can put you in touch with someone.

3. Commercial Review Courses

Kaplan and Princeton Review will gladly take your money (over \$2,000 with a possibility of small fee reduction based on income), and they do provide a service. They give you study guides and practice exams, as well as a series of classes, sometimes reported by students to be of poor quality. If you are willing to spend the money, want a structured study plan, and are worried about the exam, consider this option. For what it's worth, the MCAT folks did a study of those who did and didn't take a commercial course, and they say the study shows that the "gains derived from commercial review courses are small."

"What score do I need to have?"

Scores on each of the four main sections of the MCAT (Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems; Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills) will range from a low of 118 to a high of 132 (a 24-point range) with a midpoint of 126. The total score range from 472 to 528 has a midpoint of 500.

What score is “good enough”? At this time, we are suggesting that applicants aim for a score of at least 510, which is at about the 82nd percentile. We note, importantly, that individual circumstances differ, e.g. with state residency, demographic group, under-representation in medicine status, and other factors, and these factors are important to consider when considering the implications of a set of MCAT scores. Some applicants with very strong MCAT scores have been unsuccessful in applying to medical school; others with lower scores have been very successful. Every applicant should talk to Dean Aronson or Professor Loinaz about their MCAT scores, when they get them, to interpret the scores in the context of their full application and to consider the next steps.

If your total is less than 510, your chances of acceptance at an allopathic medical school may go down and you may wish to re-take the MCAT. Consider postponing your application for a year in order to improve your scores, and consider applying to osteopathic schools. (Students who are members of certain underrepresented groups in medicine may be successful with somewhat lower scores on their MCAT and science GPA.) As recommended many times in this Guide, **don't think your life is over if you don't begin medical school just weeks after graduation from Amherst.** The average age for first year medical students is 25; take your time and do it right, so your application is as strong as possible! Also, please give serious consideration to also applying to osteopathic medical schools!

By the way, the Amherst Health Professions Committee's recommendation is completely independent of your MCAT score—we leave it to the medical schools to take the MCAT into account. The committee is usually not even aware of MCAT scores when compiling recommendations. However, we do ask that you check the box on the test which releases your score to us, so we will have data on which to base our advice for future applicants.

"If I could give one piece of advice to anyone applying to med school, it would be 'APPLY EARLY.' Winter/Spring MCAT, June AMCAS, return every secondary within two weeks, [submit] everything on time."

- Amherst graduate

THE AMCAS APPLICATION

The American Medical College Application Service provides a centralized application service to which most medical schools subscribe (notable exception: Texas state schools). Applications are online, change slightly year-to-year, and will become available to view in early May 2024. There is typically a three-week delay between when the application opens, and when you can first submit the application: plan ahead to use that time to the fullest to complete your application, take advantage of that time, and then submit as soon as possible (and no later than the end of June).

Check the AAMC's website, and Dean Aronson will also keep applicants who have registered with the Health Professions Committee updated by e-mail. Submit your AMCAS application early—no later than the end of June! The earlier, the better.

Filling out AMCAS: what to know now

We will provide a lot more information on the AMCAS application in the mandatory meetings, but some preliminary information to know now.

Each year, the AMCAS application differs slightly from the year prior. That being said, there are many commonalities year to year. So, it is extremely useful to log in to AMCAS and look at last year's application. Doing so will give you a sense of how the application is structured, what is asked, and what you need to get ready for. Definitely do this!

As part of the AMCAS application, you will request an official transcript from the Registrar's Office and work from that to manually enter in your coursework exactly as it appears on your official transcript. Errors in entering in your coursework are the #1 reason for delays in your application's verification (the process whereby AMCAS checks to make sure what you have on your application matches what is on your transcript). Delays in verification can delay your receipt of secondary applications and subsequent interviews. Request your official transcripts early, and take your time with this aspect of the application. Only a student may request an official transcript, so this is your responsibility, not the job of the Health Professions Committee.

Additionally, if you studied abroad, the AMCAS application requires you to account for that coursework as well. This can get complicated. We will provide more information on this process in the mandatory applicant meetings, but our advice right now is to **request those official study abroad transcripts as soon as possible**. Like, in December or January.

Other sections in the AMCAS application are the Work/Activities and Most Meaningful Experiences section. The Work/Activities section is in lieu of uploading a resume, where you choose from your academic, extracurricular, and personal experiences to describe fifteen experiences that paint a full picture of who you are and how you've prepared for medical school. From those fifteen things, you can designate three as a Most Meaningful Experience, which lets you go into greater detail about what that time meant and why it is so meaningful to you in your pursuit of medicine.

For questions on filling out AMCAS, their website and the information contained therein is genuinely helpful, especially the [Applicant Guide](#). This is updated each year with each new AMCAS application.

Also, be sure to check the box on AMCAS that gives us access to the Advisor Information System. This is very important, enabling us to be of optimal support to you.

Secondary and non-AMCAS applications

It would be great if the AMCAS application was the end of it, but you will also have to complete "secondary applications" also known as "secondaries." Most schools that participate in AMCAS require an additional fee ranging from \$50-\$100, plus additional application material. These secondaries may be substantive, such as additional essays that ask you to speak about your interest in that school in particular. Or, it may be a trivial form to fill out, perhaps an attempt to disguise the fact that it's really the money they are interested in!

The questions that schools ask on their secondaries generally stay pretty static, and can be found online through various student databases. Given the time commitment involved in responding to, sometimes, upwards of 20 secondaries, we do recommend that students try and track down the secondary questions from the schools where they applied and do some pre-writing of ways to respond. Doing this will reduce the burden of responding swiftly if and when you do receive the secondaries, as it is **very important** that you send back those secondaries as soon as possible (our recommendation is within two weeks of receipt).

Schools that do not participate in AMCAS (mostly the Texas state schools) have their own forms, which you must request individually. Again, the application fees for each school range from \$50-\$100.

Situational judgment tests (SJTs)

The situational judgment tests (SJTs) are newer assessments used by some schools that present a series of hypothetical scenarios that students may encounter in medical schools. The two to be aware of are called Casper and AAMC PREview. [Not every school uses them](#), and each school uses them as part of their application process differently, but if you apply to one school that does, you have to take it. Medical schools who use them say that they use them to evaluate personal competencies and qualities like those laid out in the [AAMC's Core Competencies](#) because in their mind, the application itself is not as revealing of those things.

We recommend not stressing too much about these tests, and preparing by getting very familiar with the format of the test and taking any practice tests offered. Amherst students, who are used to approaching ideas and situations from a variety of angles, with generosity towards other people, with an understanding of nuance and the pitfalls of black-and-white thinking, tend to do quite well.

The tests are only offered at certain times in the year and it takes a month to receive your scores. We recommend planning to take these tests if needed in May or June.

More on your personal statement

The questionnaire for the HPC Application is a great way to start thinking about and writing your personal statement, as well as preparing you for the secondary application essays. The personal statement you prepare for the HPC can be the basis for your AMCAS personal statement, but probably you will edit and revise it several times, and make sure it is within the AMCAS length limit of 5,300 characters.

Make the statement interesting, honest, clearly written, passionate, and grammatically correct. This is the only chance before you are granted an interview to tell admissions committees something you think is important about yourself and your interest in medicine. Some secondary applications include a required additional essay on a specified topic.

Have friends, parents, or professors read over your personal statement and make suggestions and

corrections. Consult with the Writing Center if you are a current student. If you are applying with anything atypical on your record, even if it doesn't appear on your transcript, such as disciplinary dismissal or very low grades, consult with us about how to address these concerns in the personal statement or elsewhere in the application.

Scheduling and timing of your application

The earlier you complete your applications, the earlier they will be considered, and the better will be your chances of being accepted. **We cannot overstate how important this is!!** Many schools have a rolling admissions process, which means that places are filled as they review and interview applicants. As stated above, errors in entering your coursework onto the AMCAS application is the #1 reason for delaying your application, which has implications for how soon you receive secondaries, which then impacts if/when you receive interviews, etc, etc. Everything builds off of what comes prior. Get familiar with last year's AMCAS application early; request your official transcripts early; begin working on your application early.

In order to receive a committee letter, you must submit your AMCAS application by June 30. You will be much better off if all of your secondaries are completed no later than September 1, but earlier than that is even better!

Publications

Only a few applicants will be authors of scientific or other publications, so if you aren't, don't worry. If you are, however, it is useful to include these in your AMCAS application, especially if they are "refereed" publications—if you don't know what that is, consult your research supervisor or Professor Loinaz. It is also important to use one of the standard citation formats. These always include all authors, the complete title, journal name, volume number, and page numbers. For example:

Konradi, C., J. C. Leveque, and S. E. Hyman. "Amphetamine and dopamine-induced immediate early gene expression in striatal neurons." *Journal of Neuroscience* 16: 2123-2130 (1996).

List "in press" publications only if the paper has been unconditionally accepted for publication, not being revised for eventual publication. Presentations at scientific meetings may also be listed, along with abstracts also identified as such. If you have a publication that you are either preparing for submission or that has been submitted but not yet accepted, you may also include this information. But it's important to be clear that this is in process, that it hasn't been submitted and/or accepted.

Documenting Advanced Standing

Occasionally an Amherst applicant will need to document advanced standing, usually in math but possibly in biology, chemistry, or physics. As noted in Part I of this Guide, many medical schools do not accept AP credit in fulfillment of requirements, especially in biology, chemistry, and physics, so you should take those courses at the college level. However, most schools that require math do accept placement, although some will ask for documentation. In that case, contact Professor Loinaz and ask for a "math letter" from the Health Professions Committee that you can send to medical schools.

Recordkeeping

Keep records of the dates you send out materials and receive notification of their receipt. It is your

responsibility to ensure that your application file is complete. If you have not received notification of your file's completion within a reasonable period of time, contact the school. Your application will not be reviewed until your file is complete.

On reapplying

The data from a decade ago, currently being updated, on Amherst students reapplying if not admitted the first time are very encouraging. Some factors which favor success in reapplying include: taking the time to make improvements on your application, showing a sustained interest in the medical field by getting a job/volunteer position that is health-related, doing more work (paid or unpaid) that offers you deeper clinical experience and engagement, retaking the MCAT if your scores were not terrific (and giving yourself enough time to study to make them better), and taking other science courses if your academic record is weak.

Discuss reasons why you were not accepted with Dean Aronson or Professor Loinaz, and create a plan for how to improve your application. Handshake has continually updated job and internship listings in medical research, community health services, and health engagement.

Call or write to schools which did not admit you and ask where your record is weakest. Sometimes Admissions staff will agree to meet with you to provide advice on reapplying.

It is important that you reapply only after you have invested time in improving your application. Reapplying automatically in the next year, with the only change in your application being the passage of time, is not in your best interest.

When you reapply, the Health Professions Committee will use the same committee letter and letters of recommendation for your first application. You do not need to ask faculty to send letters again, and we don't allow re-applicants to add letters for the committee's consideration. You may have new letters uploaded to your application independently.

You will need to inform the Health Professions Office of your intent to reapply. You will provide an updated resume and an updated personal statement, as well as a short summary of updates on what you have been doing in the past year, what you wanted to accomplish toward your application in that time, and what you have indeed accomplished. The Health Professions Committee will compile an updated letter using these materials that will be attached to your original application materials.

Those updated materials are due to Becca in the Health Professions Office by May 31, 2024.

SELECTING MEDICAL SCHOOLS

Overview

When an Amherst applicant with good qualifications isn't accepted to medical school, a common reason is that the student applied to the wrong number or choice of medical schools.

Because of the competitiveness and unpredictability of medical school admissions, you need to apply to a larger number of well-chosen schools than you probably did when applying to college—the average number for recent Amherst applicants is around 15 to 20.

It is also usually a mistake to apply to too many schools (more than about 20), because you won't have time to do a good and timely job on secondary applications for so many schools. Your list should include both "reach" schools as well as safer schools based on your circumstances, as discussed below.

Choose which schools to apply to based primarily on where you have reasonable chances of acceptance, not primarily on factors such as grading system, housing, social life, or curriculum—all medical schools prepare you to pass national boards and to become a licensed physician. After you have been admitted to several schools, you'll have the luxury of selecting the one that has the curriculum, size, atmosphere, housing, etc. that you prefer. However, do not apply to any school you would not be willing to attend!

For information about medical schools, consult the *Medical School Admissions Requirements* book and school web sites. Talk with Amherst College graduates who are current medical students. You need to take into account your grades and MCAT scores at the time of selecting schools (which means you have to have taken the MCAT by April 30, 2024) in relation to each school's selectivity for Amherst applicants. You can also include your own geographical preferences for particular cities or parts of the country. Discuss these issues with Dean Aronson as you formulate your school list.

Categories of medical schools

There are approximately 145 accredited MD-granting institutions in the U.S. and 33 accredited DO-granting institutions. Approximately 80 of these could be described as "state schools," i.e. associated with public rather than private universities and usually greatly favoring residents of their particular state.

Unless you have a good reason not to do so, you should apply to the state medical school(s) in your home state, since your chances of acceptance are usually higher and tuition is lower than at private medical schools. In most cases you will have as good a medical education as at a private medical school.

Conversely, in many cases it is futile to apply to state schools outside your own state of residence, so that eliminates a large number of schools from your list.

However, there is not always a sharp distinction between "state" and "private" medical schools. Some nominally private ones, e.g. Baylor and the University of Miami, receive state funding and therefore favor residents of Texas and Florida respectively. Some nominally public ones, e.g. the University of Michigan, Penn State, and the University of Vermont, accept substantial numbers of out-of-state residents. To help you sort through all this when you get down to choosing which schools to apply to, consult the *Medical School Admissions Requirements* book.

Criteria for acceptance

If your science GPA as calculated for AMCAS on a 4-point scale is below about 3.7, or your MCAT total is below the upper 10%, it's unlikely you will be accepted at the half dozen most selective medical schools unless you are a member of an under-represented group or have very unusual personal experience or other factors. However, as long as your science GPA is at least 3.4 and your MCAT total is at least within roughly the top 20%, that still leaves you in the running at more than three dozen private medical schools in addition to your state school(s). Again, there are exceptions to this.

Geography can enter your school choices in two ways. First, many nominally "private" medical schools give preference to applicants from their state or region of the country. Second, you can exercise geographical likes and dislikes yourself to some degree, e.g. if you just don't want to live in certain big cities, or conversely if you want exposure to rare horrible diseases and bloody trauma cases that you might not get in more rural settings!

Early Decision admission

Some schools offer admission by Early Decision (E.D.). The deadline for applications is during the summer; check *Medical School Admission Requirements* for specific information. Under the E.D. program, you may submit an application to just one school. The admissions committee will evaluate your application and interview you (if you are chosen for one) by October 1. Until this date, you cannot submit applications to any other schools. If you are accepted E.D., you are obligated to enroll. However, if you are deferred or receive no decision by October 1, you can then apply to other schools.

There is a risk in applying E.D.: if you are not accepted, your other applications will be submitted later than those of other students, putting you at a disadvantage. However, if you have a good record and a specific reason to attend a particular medical school, applying E.D. gives you a chance to resolve your future early in the application process. Consult Dean Aronson if you are considering this option.

M.D./Ph.D. programs

An MD/PhD program is a superb opportunity, but it is not for everyone. It involves a commitment of six to eight years of intensive study and research with minimum vacations, in addition to residency once you specialize. You should be very clear in your own mind about why you need both degrees in order to accomplish your career goals.

The *Medical School Admissions Requirements* provide a complete list of MD/PhD programs. The most selective and well-funded of these programs are those at the 39 schools funded by the Medical Scientist Training Program (MSTP) of the National Institutes of Health. Another 70 or so MD/PhD programs are funded internally at non-MSTP medical schools.

About 200 new students per year in the whole country are accepted to MSTP programs and Amherst students are almost always among them. The program pays tuition for both MD and PhD degrees, and provides a stipend of approximately \$18,000 per year for living expenses. (If you add it all up, it comes to more than \$300,000 in support!) If you drop the program midway, you must pay back the money they've spent on you.

You will also have an obligation to do research during at least part of your career after receiving the degrees. You should know what field you are interested in and apply to schools with appropriately strong departments. Apply only if you have already done substantial research, almost certainly

including an Amherst science thesis. Many students accepted into M.D./Ph.D. programs are coauthors of one or more publications in scientific journals at the time they apply.

Most schools reserve some spots for second year medical students. AMCAS does not provide a service for applying to the Ph.D. portion of these programs. You will need to submit separate applications and recommendations along with the normal M.D. application materials. Interviews for these programs are grueling, usually six or more consecutive individual interviews, focusing on research you've done.

Applicants may be asked to submit a copy of Amherst recommendations to the Ph.D. portion of the program; you will need to submit completely separate applications, plus separate recommendations in addition to the Committee recommendation for the M.D. portion of the program. Interviews for these programs are grueling, usually six to eight consecutive individual interviews, complete with specific science knowledge questions. You will have to interview separately for the M.D. and Ph.D. programs, often over two days.

MEDICAL SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

Note: most if not all interviews for the 2024 application cycle so far have still been conducted virtually. We cannot say whether interviews for the 2025 application cycle will be mostly virtual or mostly in-person. The advice that follows below is with in-person interviews in mind, but is applicable to both formats.

After reviewing applications, medical school admissions committees narrow down the pool and request interviews with those they are continuing to consider. Medical schools interview by their request only. Interviews are generally conducted from September to March or April. The percentage of students accepted from the interview pool can range from 10% to 40%.

The best pathway to a successful interview is preparation! Becca offers mock interviews, we have detailed information on file for each school, and we have extensive handouts on the interview process; both are things to schedule or ask for when you get your first interview offer. Think about how to present yourself, how to talk about your experiences, and what your strengths, successes, and goals are. Be yourself!

You must have a thoughtful answer to such questions as, "Why do you want to be a physician?" If it's because you want to help sick people, a fair question is, "Why should you be a physician rather than a nurse, medical social worker, or some other profession that also helps sick people?" Get to know the school beforehand, and well. Be prepared to answer the question, "Why did you apply here?" Have some questions ready to ask the interviewer.

Schools will send an email requesting an interview—some schools will ask you to arrange a date with them and others will assign a date. These assigned dates can be changed, but you should plan ahead and try to change it no more than once, so as to inconvenience the admissions offices as little as possible. If you will be in a certain area of the country for a group of interviews (e.g., during a vacation), you may call or write to schools in the area you have not heard from yet, to see if you can arrange an interview while you are in the area.

Your first interview will be more anxiety-provoking than subsequent ones. It is the rare interviewer who is out to intimidate you. The interview is an opportunity for you to become acquainted with the school, as well as for the school to become acquainted with you. The interview format varies—some schools have teams of interviewers who interview one person at a time, while some have group interviews. The most common practice is to have two one-on-one interviews.

Some interviews are "blind," meaning that the interviewer has not seen your record or read your application. Go over your application before your interview and feel free to reiterate or reemphasize anything you have written which may be important. If you feel that you have had an unfair interview, and especially if you have traveled to the school, you can request another interview promptly. There is no shame involved and you should ensure yourself of a fair chance. If the interviewer asks improper questions (such as "How are you going to have kids and also be a doctor?" "Do you have a boyfriend/ girlfriend?"), you should report the incident to Dean Aronson.

If you can, contact Amherst alumni who are studying, teaching, or practicing at the school you visit. That information is provided when you contact us about your interview.

FINANCING MEDICAL SCHOOL

The whole process of applying and then attending medical school can be very expensive.

The initial registration fee for the MCAT is \$330 and for the most recent 2024 cycle, the cost to send your AMCAS application to one school is \$175, with \$45 for each additional school. There is also a range of fees for submitting your secondary applications, which depends on the school.

Those who qualify for [AAMC's Fee Assistance Program](#) can waive all AMCAS fees for one application up to 20 medical school submissions, and medical schools will generally waive the secondary application fees as well.

The cost of then attending medical school can vary widely based on personal circumstances, what state you are in, if you're attending a private or public school, but of MD students in the class of 2022, 73% graduated with a mean education debt of \$202,450.

Medical school tuition and living expenses come from a combination of personal income, family or spouse assistance, scholarships, work, and loans. Most medical schools believe that it is the responsibility of the student to pay the primary cost of medical school. Some schools do offer scholarships and grants but these depend by school, there are some outside scholarships, and there are also loan forgiveness programs. Most medical schools in the United States typically require you to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and many schools also require you to file the College Board's CSS/Financial Aid Profile form.

In addition, schools may have their own forms to complete. Check the requirements and deadlines for each school to which you are applying. Financial aid application deadlines are typically in the early spring of the year in which you intend to start medical school. If you have particular financial aid questions or concerns, contact the financial aid officer at each school to which you have applied.

The [Medical School Admissions Requirements \(MSAR\)](#) contains up-to-date financial aid information. The AAMC website also has very useful and up-to-date advice. Also, our colleagues in the Health Professions Advising office at Princeton have put together two tremendously comprehensive resources that we highly recommend all applicants consult:

[Navigating Application Expenses for Health Professions School](#)

[Financial Planning for Health Professions School](#)

Amherst College gives a number of fellowships each year to students who will be attending medical school the following year. The fellowships vary in amount, depending on academic standing and financial need. The fellowships need to be reapplied for each year the student is in medical school. For further information, contact the Fellowships Office.

Two federal programs grant substantial funding for medical school, and in turn require the recipient to practice where assigned for a number of years. One is the National Health Service Corps, designed to provide medical personnel in underserved rural and urban areas. The second is the Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarship Program through the Army, Navy, or Air Force. This program may also limit residency and fellowship options after you have completed medical school.

Any student who is concerned that the cost of medical school might be prohibitive should contact Dean Aronson, but please be advised that we cannot give you financial advice. The decision to take on student loan debt is complicated and personal—we recommend you consider this very carefully.

HPC APPLICANT DEADLINES FOR 2025 MATRICULATION

- **SEPTEMBER 20, 2023**
Mandatory Applicant Meeting I: Is This the Right Time to Apply?
- **OCTOBER 18, 2023**
Mandatory Applicant Meeting II: Application FAQs
- **NOVEMBER 1, 2023**
Registration of Intent to Apply Due
- **NOVEMBER 30, 2023**
Amherst HPC Application due
- **DECEMBER 4, 2023**
Medical/Graduate School Application Interviews begin
- **FEBRUARY 9, 2024**
Alumni: Letters of Recommendation due
- **MARCH 15, 2024**
Final Personal Statement and Resume due for the Health Professions Committee (*You can, of course, continue working on the personal statement up until you submit your AMCAS application.*)
Deadline to request an exemption to the April 30 MCAT deadline.
Medical/Graduate School Application Interview must be completed.
- **MARCH 29, 2024**
Most Letters of Recommendation due for current students
(*EXCEPT for current thesis advisors and faculty currently teaching you*)
- **APRIL 17, 2024**
Mandatory Applicant Meeting III: AMCAS, Outcomes, Trends
- **APRIL 30, 2024**
Last date to take the MCAT to apply through the Amherst Health Professions Committee
- **MAY 17, 2024**
Letters of Recommendation due for current thesis advisors/current courses
- **MAY 31, 2024**
Deadline to commit to applying through the Amherst Health Professions Committee
Reapplicants only: revised personal statement, updated resume, and summary of updates due
- **JUNE 30, 2024**
Last date to submit AMCAS application to receive committee letter