INTERNAL APPLICATION ESSAYS AND OTHER UPLOADS

Introduction

The main work of the internal application is the composition of a clear, comprehensive, and self-reflective account of your life (emphasizing your experiences as an adult) and of the circumstances that have led you to pursue a career in health care. The statements you will write fall into two categories: (1) Essays for internal use by the Premedical Committee; and (2) Work & Activities entries to be inserted into the common application you will submit in June (or during the winter/spring months for linkage nominees). For General Applicants, there are seven mandatory essays, while for linkage applicants there are eight. All applicants can write an additional optional essay if they choose to; in practice, very few of these optional essays are submitted. Ideally, the contents of the essays should complement the contents of the Work & Activities entries.

We are clearly asking you for a great deal of information about some of your most profound experiences, especially those that may have influenced your decision to pursue a career in health care. More than that, we are asking you to think deeply about those experiences. For some students, the work of pondering sensitive experiences may stir difficult or upsetting memories. We therefore wish to remind you of campus resources that may be able to help you process your feelings. These include:

- Gender-Based Misconduct Office
- Disability Services
- Sexual Violence Response
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

We also wish to remind you that all University faculty members, staff members, and administrators, with the exception of those working in a confidential capacity (e.g., counselors, rape crisis advocates, medical providers, and clergy) who learn of suspected instances of discrimination, harassment or gender-based misconduct, directly or indirectly, have a duty to refer the information immediately to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (http://eoaa.columbia.edu/contacts) or the Gender-Based Misconduct Office (http://studentconduct.columbia.edu/gbm.html). Such reports may result in outreach from the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action to ensure that you have access to pertinent forms of support, information, and guidance.

Uploading Documents

Students are required to upload the following to their internal applications:

- a photo (headshot)
- résumé
- a first draft of your personal statement
- the essays described below under I
- a set of “work & activities” entries (discussed below under II)
1. Essays

ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS

The answers to the following required questions will enable the Committee to get a better understanding of who you are and why you are applying to a health professional school. Your answers will form the groundwork for the essays you will need to write on your application and questions you will be asked in your interview. There are eight sections below (for the seven required and one optional essay).

Each essay should:

- include as a header your name and the title of the essay question;
- be individually paginated (i.e., you must include page numbers);
- be no longer than three pages (with the exception of “Work & Activities” which may need to be longer), typed, and double-spaced; and
- be stored in a separate file for uploading at the proper place in the online application form.

ESSAY PROMPTS

Undergraduate Experience

Please reflect upon your experience as an undergrad and tell us about that experience.

- Why did you decide to attend your undergraduate school? What led you to your choice of major? What were the most important classes you took as an undergrad? What extracurricular activities were important to you? What do you consider your greatest accomplishment during your undergraduate career?
- What were your initial post-college career plans when you started college? How did those change as a result of your college experience? What in your college experience contributed to your decision to pursue further preparation for a health profession through premed work either as an undergrad or as a Postbac?
- Please address any poor or weak grades on your undergraduate transcript(s), including withdrawals and incompletes.
- If you attended more than one institution over the course of your undergraduate career (including summer study and study abroad), please list in chronological order the institutions attended, including dates, the reason you attended and why you left.
- If you took time off during your undergraduate career or if there is a gap in your record of attendance (e.g. leaves of absence, medical leaves), please explain the reason you interrupted your studies and what you did while you were away.
Work Experience

• **[Postbacs:]** If you took time off from academic study between your undergraduate degree and the Postbac Program, what did you do in the intervening years? Please let us know about your employment and/or graduate school history. What led you on this path? What do you consider among the most influential experiences during this time? What are some of your career highlights? What lessons or skills did you learn that would be transferable to a career in medicine?

• **[Postbacs:]** If you did not take time off between your undergraduate and Postbac study, why did you decide to pursue your pre-professional studies after your BA instead of while an undergraduate; in other words, what led to your decision to enter the Postbac Premed Program. Also, describe to us what work experience you have had during college and the Postbac Program and what skills you think are pertinent to your desired career.

• **[Undergrads:]** Tell us about your work experience of career. If it led to an interruption or postponement of your studies, please explain the circumstances. If you have been working while pursuing your degree, it is important to discuss this situation and all the challenges it entails.

• **[Postbacs and undergrads:]** If you held internships or externships as an undergraduate or during graduate school, please write about them. What was their purpose? Were they integral to your academic studies? What did you learn from them? Did they help you launch a career?

• **[Postbacs and undergrads:]** If you have worked 15 or more hours per week while enrolled at Columbia, please discuss this. Did you do so out of financial necessity or were there other compelling reasons? How did you manage the competing demands of study and work?

Experiences in Health Care

• Please discuss the health-related volunteer or work experiences you have had, specifying clinical, wet lab or dry lab. Describe the setting of each work site. Who did you work under? Were there peer workers? If so, how many? Were they also premeds?

• What have you learned about the health field through your health-related work experiences?

• What have you learned about yourself through these experiences? Is there an incident or event that occurred during your clinical volunteer or work experience that made an impression on you or that was a defining moment for you?

• If you have engaged in extensive research for the purpose of applying to MD/PhD programs, please indicate this briefly here and use the Optional Essay to discuss your research experiences.

Health Profession Interest

• What led to your decision to enter the Postbaccalaureate Premedical Program? What brought you to the decision to pursue a career in health care? Be as concrete as possible. An understanding of the actual biographical circumstances that contributed to your interest in medicine may help you address the next prompt.

• Why health care? Most health professional school applicants cite the interaction with people, life-long learning, and helping others as reasons for wanting to enter the healthcare field. One could find these same satisfactions in other career choices, however; consequently, they are not sufficient reasons for choosing a career in medicine. While you are welcome to mention any of these factors, your answer needs to account for your desire to take on the acute and peculiar demands of the particular health care career you wish to pursue. Without
focusing on the negative aspects of your previous career or pursuits, explain why health care is the appropriate career choice for you.

- Many applicants to health professional school will have similar grades and similar exam scores. Without comparing yourself to others, explain what will make you stand out to an admissions committee. What makes you a good fit for your chosen profession?
- If you are applying to MD/PhD programs, explain what has led to this decision, and why you prefer the particular career path it affords through the field of medicine over an MD program. What can you point to in your experience to demonstrate that you have the right skills and temperament for such work? (Please use the Optional Essay to discuss your research experience to date.)

Extracurricular Interests and Achievements

Often admissions committees look for evidence of dedication and accomplishment in areas other than academics. Describe one or two activities to which you have devoted significant amounts of time and energy, and discuss the ways in which you have benefited yourself or others from any such pursuit.

Personal Attributes

In recent years, the academic health professional communities have sought to develop holistic means of assessing applicants with the goal of increasing the competence and diversity of those chosen to train for careers in health care. While academic competence remains a critical consideration, schools in the health professions have also sought to articulate an array of “non-cognitive” competencies generally desirable in a future clinician. These are cited below directly from the AAMC. Please choose the three competencies that reflect you best; for each one you choose, devote a single page (at most) to:

- explaining why you chose it; and
- relating one or two experiences (preferably from late-adolescence on) that illustrate its pertinence.

**Service Orientation:** Demonstrates a desire to help others and sensitivity to others’ needs and feelings; demonstrates a desire to alleviate others’ distress; recognizes and acts on his/her responsibilities to society; locally, nationally, and globally.

**Social Skills:** Demonstrates an awareness of others’ needs, goals, feelings, and the ways that social and behavioral cues affect peoples’ interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; treats others with respect.

**Cultural Competence:** Demonstrates knowledge of socio-cultural factors that affect interactions and behaviors; shows an appreciation and respect for multiple dimensions of diversity; recognizes and acts on the obligation to inform one’s own judgment; engages diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work; recognizes and appropriately addresses bias in themselves and others; interacts effectively with people from diverse backgrounds.
Teamwork: Works collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals; shares information and knowledge with others and provides feedback; puts team goals ahead of individual goals.

Oral Communication: Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; listens effectively; recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.

Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others: Behaves in an honest and ethical manner; cultivates personal and academic integrity; adheres to ethical principles and follows rules and procedures; resists peer pressure to engage in unethical behavior and encourages others to behave in honest and ethical ways; develops and demonstrates ethical and moral reasoning.

Reliability and Dependability: Consistently fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; takes responsibility for personal actions and performance.

Resilience and Adaptability: Demonstrates tolerance of stressful or changing environments or situations and adapts effectively to them; is persistent, even under difficult situations; recovers from setbacks.

Capacity for Improvement: Sets goals for continuous improvement and for learning new concepts and skills; engages in reflective practice for improvement; solicits and responds appropriately to feedback.

Autobiography

Tell us who you are. Tell us about your childhood and growing up, and about events that shaped, defined and guided who you are and the choices that you have made. Be sure to tell us where you are from and where you grew up. Do you consider yourself to be disadvantaged (socially, economically, or educationally)? Have you overcome any obstacles in your personal or educational life that you think are important for us to know about?

Linkage Program (For linkage applicants only)

[N.B. This essay is not due until December 1st to allow you time to visit schools.]

There are many obvious advantages in applying to health professional school through the Linkage Program, but it is important that an applicant be clear on why they are willing to commit to a particular school. Your informed decision is critical to this process. Students accepted by a linkage school are committed to attending that school. Explain in an essay the following:

- What about this school makes it the number one choice for you over all other schools?
- What steps have you taken to learn about your chosen school? (visits, contact with students, etc.)
- Why do you feel you will benefit from the opportunity to attend this particular school?
- What aspects of the school’s curriculum or educational philosophy appeal to you?

Alternate school option: Postbacs pursuing linkage at a medical school have the option of designating an alternate to their first-choice linkage program prior to nomination. Designating an alternate school is not required, and we recommend that linkage candidates discuss the pros and cons of doing so with their advisors. It is important to consider that by identifying an alternate, you are authorizing the
Premedical Committee to decide where to nominate you (candidates can be nominated only for a single school). We recommend that you choose an alternate if you would be genuinely happy to be nominated to either school and your main priority in the linkage process is to increase the likelihood of matriculating in medical school next fall. If, on the other hand, your interest in linkage is exclusively bound up with a particular school, it might be best to decline to choose a backup in order to assure you are not nominated to a school to which you would be likely to decline the nomination. (N.B. This option is not available to linkage candidates to Columbia’s dental school.)

If you wish to exercise this option, please use your linkage essay to write briefly about your first and second choices. Please include a heading in your document that clearly states the primary choice and the alternate choice, e.g. **First Choice: School X, Alternate Choice School Y**. Apart from that, the format of the essay is open-ended, but one obvious way to organize it might be to devote the first page and a half to two pages to a discussion of your first choice, and the last page (or page and a half) to a discussion of your second choice.

**Optional Essay**

It is possible to submit more than one optional essay, although it is unlikely you will need to do so. For EC21 linkage applicants and EC22 general applicants, the COVID-19 essay described below is **required**. Linkage applicants must submit it by December 1; general applicants submit it with their other essays by the January deadline.

- If there is anything you believe is relevant to your application to medical school which does not fit neatly into any of the first seven essay topics, you are invited to submit an additional, optional essay. Please note that writing this additional essay for its own sake confers no advantage to you as an applicant Write it only if it enables you to give a fuller picture of yourself.

- If you are preparing to apply to MD/PhD programs, you should use this optional essay to discuss your research experiences to date.

- If you have ever been the subject of a disciplinary process as a student or have ever been convicted of a criminal offense, we encourage you to discuss this. (We also expect you to provide corroborating documentation and to authorize the school at which the disciplinary procedure occurred to communicate with your advisor.)

- **EC21 Linkage Candidates and EC22 General Applicants: Please address the following:**
  - Write about your life and experiences during the pandemic. How has it affected your preprofessional trajectory and your outlook on your professional goals?
  - What has the COVID-19 pandemic taught you about health care in the US, about the societal implications of health and disease, or about the medical profession?

2. **Work and Activities**

When you apply to medical, veterinary, or dental school, you will fill out and submit the on-line common applications known as “AMCAS” (medical school), “VMCAS” (veterinary school), or “AADSAS” (dental school). This is a labor-intensive, time-consuming exercise which you will
probably not be able to complete in a single sitting. One section of the application will invite you to provide capsule descriptions of those jobs, publications, extracurricular activities, awards, and honors you regard as important. The AMCAS application will also ask you to identify up to three of your experiences as “the most meaningful,” and give you additional space in which to explain why. Because it requires some thought and care to write these entries, it is important that you prepare these Work and Activities entries as part of your application to the Premedical Committee. Please write capsule entries for those experiences, commendations, or achievements outside the classroom you regard as important. You must write at least seven entries and may not write more than fifteen.

These entries should be saved in a single Word document and submitted as part of your internal application by the deadline indicated on the internal application timeline. Please submit your Work and Activities entries to us in the format outlined by AMCAS, VMCAS, or AADSAS.

- Premeds will find guidelines for completing the Work and Activities entries in the 2021 AMCAS Applicant Guide on the AMCAS website: https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/applying-medical-school-amcas/

- Preveterinary students will find guidelines for such entries (under the rubric “Experiences”) at: https://help.liaisonedu.com/VMCAS_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_VMCAS_Application/VMCAS_Supporting_Information/2_Experiences

- Predental students will find guidelines for completing such entries (under the rubrics “Achievements” and “Experiences” at: https://help.liaisonedu.com/ADEA_AADSAS_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_ADEA_AADSAS_Application/Supporting_Information

When you are completing your AMCAS, VMCAS, or AADSAS application, please refer to these important resources.