

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR REAPPLICANTS TO HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

In 2016, 53,029 individuals applied to allopathic medical school, and 22,031 were accepted – about a 41.5% acceptance rate<sup>1</sup>. The number of well-qualified applicants far outweighs the number of seats available in US MD programs. For those who were not admitted, there are a number of next steps to consider. This handout will provide some thoughts on each of the following:

1. Do you want to reapply?
2. What about your candidacy could you improve?
3. In what year should you apply?
4. What are the logistical steps to reapplying?

### ***To reapply or not to reapply?***

The first step is to decide whether you are still interested in pursuing a medical education right now. Throughout the application process, particularly if you had the chance to interview, you should have thought fairly deeply about your motivation for becoming a physician. You have considered the time it takes to complete your education, the costs, the lifestyle it will entail, the responsibility you will have, and other aspects of the profession. If you find that you've lost that motivation, there are myriad other possibilities to pursue that may be better aligned with your interests, values, and abilities. Remember that medicine will always be there if you decide to return to it. There is no need to hurry into the application process if you cannot give it your full focus, and it is nearly impossible to follow through with the applications well a second time if you are not completely invested in doing so.

### ***Barriers to Acceptance:***

If you decide to continue, you will need to take a critical look at yourself and your candidacy and try to determine areas that you may need to improve before you next apply. The following are some of the most significant barriers to acceptance to medical school:

1. “Numbers:” Nationally, matriculants in 2016 had mean MCAT scores of 127.1 Chemical and Physical Foundations (~79<sup>th</sup> percentile), 126.7 Critical Analysis and Reading (~77<sup>th</sup> percentile), 127.4 Biological Foundations (~83<sup>rd</sup> percentile), and 127.4 Psychological and Social Foundations (~79<sup>th</sup> percentile), for a 508.7 overall (~80<sup>th</sup> percentile); a mean science GPA of 3.64; and a mean overall GPA of 3.70. Among Princeton applicants over the past four application cycles, the averages were 3.58 science GPA, 3.61 overall GPA, and MCAT 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile Chem/Phys; 91<sup>st</sup> percentile Biological; 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile Verbal; and 91<sup>st</sup> percentile overall.
2. MCAT Timing: If you took the MCAT later than early June, your score reporting may have delayed your application.
3. Primary Application Timing: The application cycle requires a number of tasks, all of which must be done in a timely manner in order to have your file completed early, and completed well, at your schools. The AMCAS processing date is one of the key elements of this timeline – you must have your personal statement, activities list, and school selections ready to submit by the first week of June so that your AMCAS is processed quickly, and you can move on to completing secondaries.
4. School Choices: You should apply to your public, state schools. You should not apply to public schools outside of your state that accept very few out of state residents. You should not apply to so

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<sup>1</sup> all national data in this handout comes from the AAMC, <https://www.aamc.org/data/facts/applicantmatriculant/>

many schools that you cannot complete your secondaries in a timely manner. You should consider your school list as carefully as possible – read websites, learn about the curricula, and think about the location and your happiness in different settings. Read the mission statements and descriptions of the schools in the MSAR and see if they appeal to you. Look at the secondary application questions (you can find last year's at [www.studentdoctor.net](http://www.studentdoctor.net)) and be sure that you'd be willing to fill out the secondary once you receive it. Talk to HPA advisers about where Princeton students who have similar profiles have been accepted in the past. Consider applying to osteopathic medical schools, where the admissions process can be more holistic and less competitive due to the smaller number of applicants relative to the MD pool.

5. Secondary Applications: An early AMCAS means that you will have more time to write detailed, personalized secondaries. Many schools consider the secondary essay responses more closely than the personal statement, so it is critical that you write well-crafted essays that answer the questions being asked. The more schools you apply to, the less time you have for each secondary, so it can also be problematic for those students who apply very widely to complete their secondaries in a good and timely manner.
6. Familiarity with medicine: Some of the stronger candidates academically who were not accepted did not have a strong familiarity with the clinical environment. This was probably a factor that became most critical at the interview stage, when they were asked about their motivation to work with patients, or their experience in a setting where they cared for others. If you cannot articulate your understanding of health care and patient care, and your drive/passion for medicine in a convincing way, you will be at a disadvantage.
7. "Intangible Qualities": These can include maturity, service orientation, communication skills, leadership ability, ability to work well with others, familiarity with diverse populations, sincerity, self-awareness, and numerous other personal qualities. Think of the kinds of personal qualities you would want in a physician who was treating you or your family members, and think about how to develop these qualities in yourself, as well as how to articulate the ways in which you demonstrate that you have these qualities in your application.

**Apply when you are a strong enough candidate to reach your goals, and a tangibly stronger candidate than you were in previous application cycles.**

### ***When to re-apply?***

Now, you will need to determine when to reapply. This is a critical step - just as it is best to apply when you are the strongest possible applicant, it is best to reapply when you have made substantial improvements to your candidacy from your previous application, particularly in areas that might have been seen as shortcomings in your previous attempt. **In many cases, applying in two consecutive years is not the ideal strategy to use in reapplying, as it does not allow enough time for you to improve your candidacy.**

As you decide whether to reapply in this cycle, consider the following questions:

- Academics
  - If your GPA was low, did you take more classes to improve it, either through a post-bac program or on your own?
  - Can your recommenders speak to your academic ability? If your numbers are low, the letters from those who know you in an academic setting become more critical.

- Have you completed all of your pre-requisite coursework with grades of C or better? Multiple Cs can be a hindrance to acceptance – repeating courses or taking higher-level courses with better results may be necessary.
  - Is your MCAT competitive (preferably 85<sup>th</sup> percentile or above overall and in each section)? If you chose not to retake, Admissions Committees will want to know why you chose to go forward with your score rather than studying and retaking the exam this year.
  - Is your MCAT score still valid? If you took the MCAT earlier than 2015, you should retake the exam this year. If you have to retake, keep in mind that you'll be taking the new MCAT exam.
- Activities
    - Have you continued to participate in activities, particularly those that show leadership, service, research, and/or clinical exposure?
- Letters of recommendation
    - Will you be able to obtain at least one new letter of recommendation that supports your candidacy, preferably addressing areas that may have been seen as weaknesses in the previous application cycle?
- Motivation
    - Will you be able to talk about your experiences and your continued motivation for the health profession if you are invited to interview?
    - Are you really sure that this is the route for you?
- Timing/Quality of applications
    - Will you be able to have your AMCAS submitted by early June, with a new personal statement and updated activities list?
    - Are you ready to complete new secondary essays?
    - Are you financially able to apply to schools this cycle?

If you answered no to any of these questions, then this year is probably not the best time to reapply. Consult with a pre-health adviser on strengths and weaknesses in your candidacy before continuing with the application cycle.

***Suggestions for re-applicants:***

If you decide to reapply, keep the following considerations in mind:

- Stay in touch with an adviser throughout the process. It's more difficult being off campus and applying. Meet with a pre-health adviser (in person or by phone/skype) in the spring to get organized and create a game plan. Send an email every couple of weeks to let us know how everything is going, and to make sure that you are still on track.
- Write a new essay. Your personal statement should be new and current. While you do not need to focus solely on what you have done since your last application, Admissions Committees expect that you have gained some perspective on yourself and your motivation in the application process, and this should be reflected in what you write.
- Apply early. This is critical. You may be scrutinized more closely as a reapplicant; you know how the timing should work, so stay on top of your application timeline.
- Reconnect with the clinical setting. If it has been a while since you spent time working with patients, returning to a volunteer position, EMT work, becoming a Certified Nurse Assistant and working in an assisted living facility, or otherwise getting some hands-on work is encouraged. This will both demonstrate your commitment to the AdComs, and help you to remember why it is you're tackling this application process again.

- Check in with current medical students. You may know a number of people who are now in medical school. Learn more from them about their schools that will help you gain an inside perspective on some of the schools you might apply to, and see if they have insights for you on the application process this time round. If you don't have any contacts in medical school, contact HPA and we may be able to connect you with others.
- Don't rule out DO schools. To learn more about the DO profession, start with <http://aacom.org>, which has a section especially for prospective applicants.
- If you have participated in a postbac program that offers a committee letter, consult with your postbac advisor and with HPA to decide whose committee process to use.
- Practice your interview skills. If you received interviews for your previous applications but were not accepted, it may be beneficial to work on your interview skills, and oral communication skills in general. This could include mock interviews with friends and mentors, coming back to Career Services and meeting with a counselor, or taking a public speaking or acting class to help you improve in these areas.

### **ELIGIBILITY FOR AN UPDATED COMPOSITE LETTER FOR REAPPLICANTS**

In order for an updated composite letter to be written for a reapplicant (i.e., an applicant who has received a committee letter in a previous year but was unsuccessful in the health professions school application process), the following criteria must be met:

- The reapplicant must have significantly improved their candidacy since the unsuccessful application, as determined through consultation with HPA.
- The reapplicant must secure at least one new letter of recommendation from someone with whom they have worked since the previous application.
- The reapplicant must meet all paperwork deadlines:
  - Prior to scheduling the pre-application interview: Submit HPA Reapplicant Intake Form.
  - Seven days prior to PAI: HPA forms 1-4, updated activities list and essays
  - June 10: Deadline for HPA PAI scheduling (prefer much earlier)
  - August 15: Deadline for AMCAS submission
- The applicant must sign up for and participate in a pre-application interview.
- The applicant must release application information to HPA through the primary application process and send HPA a copy of the verified primary application(s).

Once the letter is written, a packet of materials is sent to the applicant's schools. The packet includes:

- Addendum to composite letter of recommendation, highlighting the steps the student has taken to become a more competitive applicant.
- One to two additional individual letters of recommendation.
- Original composite letter of recommendation.
- Original individual letters of recommendation.
- Pre-health Course Form with description of Princeton's grading policies, independent work requirements, and other highlights of the academic program.
- Letter addressing disciplinary/academic institutional action, if applicable.

### **The deadline for notifying our office of your application status is June 10, 2017 for 2018**

**matriculation** -- that is, you must have completed your Intake Form and contacted our office to schedule a meeting to discuss your candidacy prior to your PAI. If we do not hear from you by then, we can send your old committee packet and additional letters to your health professions schools, with a cover sheet that states that did not meet requirements to receive an addendum to your committee letter.

This is the timeline to follow as a reapplicant:

ASAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact HPA to let us know that you may be reapplying. We will give you access to the current cycle's Blackboard Coursesites, which includes all relevant application material.</li> <li>• Submit reapplicant Intake Form and schedule a meeting to discuss your candidacy.</li> <li>• Register for veCollect</li> <li>• Begin updating your autobiography, short essays and activities list.</li> <li>• Ask for new letter(s) of recommendation.</li> <li>• Sign up for your pre-application interview (PAI) with HPA.</li> </ul>
One week before your Pre-Application interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deadline for submitting to HPA (by email or hard copy): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• updated autobiography</li> <li>• updated short essay answers</li> <li>• updated activities list</li> <li>• New Forms 1-4</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Jan – May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview with HPA.</li> <li>• Work on your personal statement and primary applications.</li> <li>• Access Applicant Seminar powerpoints via Blackboard</li> <li>• Study for and retake standardized test, if necessary</li> </ul>
June 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deadline for submitting to HPA by email for fastest composite letter processing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-Health Course list: Should be typed and submitted electronically with spring grades included.</li> <li>• Letters of recommendation from each recommender</li> <li>• File Completion Form</li> <li>• Copy of verified primary application(s)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Absolute deadline to schedule Pre-Application Interview: If you have not scheduled your PAI by June 10, we will not be able to provide an updated composite letter on your behalf. We can forward your old composite letter and old and new individual letters of recommendation to your schools.</li> </ul>
June – Aug	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit verified primary application through Blackboard</li> <li>• Submit AMCAS Letter Request Form (if MD applicant)</li> <li>• Composite letters will be prepared and sent based in part on date of file completion, date of standardized exam, and date of processing of primary application. AMCAS will notify you when your letter is sent to your schools.</li> </ul>
Aug 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If your file was completed late, there will be a delay in submitting your committee letter. Once the new academic year is underway, the demands of advising limit the time we have to write letters.</li> <li>• Absolute deadline to submit your AMCAS: if you have not submitted AMCAS (the application and your transcripts) by August 15, we will not be able to provide an updated composite letter on your behalf. We can forward your old composite letter and old and new individual letters of recommendation to your schools.</li> </ul>

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