Health Professions Committee (HPC) Application Guide

The process of becoming a competitive applicant for graduate and professional schools in the health professions has already begun. You've successfully completed the prerequisites required for the schools you intend to apply for, acquired practical experience in healthcare, demonstrated a commitment to service through volunteer work, and developed good relationships with your professors and mentors who will be providing you with strong letters of recommendation. The time has finally arrived for you to put this all together into an application showing you in the best possible light.

This guide contains procedures and policies meant to help you understand the process of applying to graduate and professional programs in healthcare. Unfortunately, even the most qualified student can compromise an application by not paying attention to "the process." Because you will be just one of over 50,000 other similarly qualified applicants, it is imperative that all procedures are followed *to the letter* to ensure the professional schools see you at your best.

All Cornell College students and graduates of Cornell College applying to the following programs are *strongly* encouraged to use the HPC: allopathic medical schools (MD), osteopathic (DO) medical school, physical therapy (DPT), veterinary medicine (DVM), physician scientist (MD-PhD), physician assistant (PA), pharmacy (PharmD), and dentistry (DDS). Individuals pursuing healthcare fields not listed (including e.g. graduate programs in biochemistry) are welcome to utilize the HPC and should contact the Associate Director of Dimensions for additional information.

Health Professions Committee

The HPC serves in an advisory capacity to students planning to pursue a career in the healthcare professions and is responsible for the preparation of a committee letter of recommendation to support your application to professional school. The committee is comprised of 4 individuals:

1. Sophie Gillett, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Biology
HPC Chair

2. Sydney Meeker
Associate Director of Dimensions

3. Collin O'Leary, PhD
Assistant Professor, Departments of Biology and Chemistry

4. One additional Cornell College faculty or staff member of your choosing. We encourage you to choose as your 4th committee member someone who is not a member of the natural sciences faculty or staff.

The Process

Applying to professional school is a fairly long process. You should be knowledgeable of several key deadlines if your goal is to begin a program immediately following graduation. **First**, you must complete courses preparing you to take the MCAT/DAT/GRE no later than the summer before your senior year (if you hope to enroll in school immediately following graduation.) **Second**, you submit your primary application to a centralized application service specific to the discipline you are choosing to pursue during the summer following your junior year. Applicants provide the application service with all of their application materials including transcripts, co-curricular activities, admittance examination scores, and a personal statement. There are fees associated with the use of centralized application services.

The centralized application websites and the HPC Guide are great resources available to help you learn and understand the application process. <u>The HPC expects you review this guide and the corresponding centralized application website in their entirety before beginning the application process</u>.

Allopathic Medicine
[American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS)](#)

Osteopathic Medicine
[American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service (AACOMAS)](#)

Physician Assistant
[Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA)](#)

Dentistry
[American Dental Education Association Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (ADEA AADSAS)](#)

Pharmacy
[Pharmacy College Application Service (PharmCAS)](#)

Physical Therapy
[Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service (PTCAS)](#)

Veterinary Medicine
[Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS)](#)

Nursing
[Nursing Centralized Application Service (NursingCAS)](#)

Occupational Therapy
[Occupational Therapy Centralized Application Service (OTCAS)](#)

Public Health
[Schools of Public Health Application Service (SOPHAS)](#)

Third, once you submit your primary application through a centralized application service, schools will ask you for secondary applications. The secondary application includes additional and often more specific essays, additional information regarding your academic background and extracurricular activities, and recommendation letters. Be mindful that some schools ask <u>all</u> applicants for a secondary application, and other schools ask only <u>preferred</u> applicants for secondary applications. There are additional fees for processing secondary applications, generally between $30-$100 per

school. Keep in mind that many schools have a very short (2-4 weeks) turnaround time for secondary applications.

The Committee Meeting

The HPC meets on a first completed, first served basis. The HPC will not meet until your entire HPC application (materials required on the page 4 checklist) has been submitted to the Associate Director of Dimensions. <u>If you are applying to medical school (MD, DO, MD-PhD), the HPC deadline (when you must turn in your materials to be reviewed) is June 1st. If you are applying to another program, work with the Associate Director of Dimensions to determine an appropriate deadline for your materials.</u>

Some centralized application services require your letter of recommendation writers to submit their letters to the centralized application service directly. We strongly recommend that you communicate the HPC process to your letter writers, and only have them submit the letter of recommendation once you have received feedback from your committee.

Please keep in mind that if you are taking an entrance examination or retaking an examination later than April or May, your scores may not arrive before the June 1st deadline. In this instance, you must still submit all other materials by the HPC's deadline. A committee letter of recommendation cannot be generated until your final scores have been received. The committee uses your final scores, as well as your other application materials, to determine your strength as a candidate in their committee letter.

Note: The HPC will not review application materials that have already been submitted to the centralized application service. The HPC will also not write a committee letter of recommendation for students who submit their centralized application before receiving feedback from the HPC.

The Committee Letter

Many medical schools and occasional other professional schools ***require*** a committee letter of recommendation to support your application to their school. It is a very important part of your application.

The committee letter is created using a combination of the individual letters of recommendation you ask to be written on your behalf, your transcripts, your personal statement, test scores, resume, and any personal interactions and knowledge the members of the committee have had with you. The committee letter supplements your 3 individual letters of recommendation. By signing the attached waiver, the HPC may also discuss your academic achievements with faculty members and administrators who don't serve on your Committee, so that the letter can reflect the breadth of your academic and personal life at Cornell.

HPC Application - Checklist

Check when Complete	Materials Required for HPC
	Resume
	Autobiography
	Personal Statement
	Unofficial Cornell Transcript
	Official Transcript *(for credit earned at all institutions outside of Cornell College)*
	Admission Test Scores *(MCAT, GRE, DAT, etc. You must submit a copy of the score report you received each time you sat for the exam.)*
	Signed Request for Committee Letter of Recommendation & Waiver *(Page 12 of the HPC Guide)*
	Centralized Application ID Number *(You are assigned this number upon starting the centralized application.)*
	List of Schools (Including those included in and excluded from the centralized application *(You must send the full name of each school you intend to apply to.)*

	Name and contact information for your 4th HPC member
	    o At most 1 HPC member can write you an individual letter of recommendation if you are also requesting a committee letter
	    o We strongly recommend your 4th HPC member not be a member of the natural sciences faculty or staff

	3 letters of recommendation sent directly from the letter writer to the Associate Director of Dimensions (they should NOT send the letter to you – you are waiving your right to view them)
	Name and contact information for all 3 of your individual letter writers.
	A pdf copy of your completed, *unsubmitted* centralized application. NOTE: You can download your application as a pdf (in some cases, this might mean you need to 'print' the application, and then select "save as pdf" for the printer). For some portals, you will only be given the option to download a pdf if you look at your application for a specific school – in that case, just pick one school as an example and use that as your pdf. Again, make sure you DO NOT ACTUALLY submit the application.

Letters of Recommendation

Requesting letters of recommendation and the writing of letters should take place in late spring or early summer as you are completing the primary application. Contact each of your evaluators regarding the writing of a recommendation letter on your behalf. Your evaluators should know you well enough to provide an in-depth evaluation of your suitability for your chosen career. For applicants who are applying while enrolled in undergraduate coursework, at least 2 letters should come from Cornell faculty. The third letter can be another faculty member or from a person with whom you have conducted research, participated in an internship, or worked in a professional setting. Relatives and family friends are not appropriate letter writers. You should request these letters months in advance of the June 1st HPC deadline to allow your evaluators sufficient time to write and forward the letters.

To assist them in writing you the best possible letter, provide your evaluators with:
- Your resume, transcript, and personal statement
- The request for letter of recommendation form included in this guide
- [Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant](#)

Letters of recommendation must be signed and printed on letterhead, and must include the date. If your evaluator is able to include an electronic signature on his/her recommendation letter, letters can be e-mailed to the Associate Director of Dimensions at smeeker@cornellcollege.edu.

Alternatively, your evaluator can mail the letter to:

Sydney Meeker
Associate Director of Dimensions
Cornell College
600 First Street SW
Mount Vernon, Iowa, 52314

Letters are sent to the Dimensions office at Cornell College for the purpose of creating your committee letter and for assisting you in transmitting them to the schools you are applying to. The Associate Director uploads your committee letter and the letters of recommendation you want sent to each school for you. You will receive an e-mail letting you know that the upload has occurred. At Cornell, letters will be kept strictly confidential within your HPC file and will be kept under lock and key in the Dimensions office.

Note: Discuss letter deadlines with the Associate Director of Dimensions before requesting that your letter writers submit their letters of recommendation to the centralized application service when applicable.

The HPC is not obligated to accommodate students who fail to adhere to the policies and deadlines stated in this manual. In addition, if you do not utilize the HPC's assistance, faculty members at Cornell may decline to write individual letters of recommendations on your behalf. In addition, if you fail to meet deadlines and/or do not follow procedures, the committee could be delayed in providing your committee letter of recommendation (which will of course delay your application).

Application Timeline for Medical School Applicants

(Note: as before, if you are applying to another program, like for DDS, DPT, DVM, etc., work with the Associate Director of Dimensions on developing an appropriate timeline.)

If you are applying in the 2025 application cycle, meaning you hope to start school fall 2026:

Starting now / already ongoing (Fall 2024 – January 2025):
- € Write autobiography
- € Start brainstorming personal statement
- € Research programs you will apply to
- € Ensure you meet all of the prerequisites for each of the programs you plan to apply to
- € Organize information for each activity you plan to put on your application:
  - ● Name of contact, phone number AND email address
  - ● Dates and number of hours completed
  - ● What you accomplished AND what you learned
- € Discuss admission information for schools you want to apply to with the Associate Director of Dimensions
- € Take practice MCAT/GRE/DAT/etc. (properly simulating timing of sections, etc.)
- € Outline parallel plan

Feb/March 2025:
- € Attend Dimensions workshop – Personal Statement Writing, Part II
- € Create TWO personal statements (rough drafts). Choose and work with a single faculty / staff member over several occasions to work on your personal statement (you can also seek advice from the Writing Studio).
- € Identify who will write your *strong* letters of recommendation
- € Update personal statement
- € Take second practice MCAT/GRE/DAT/etc. to gauge progress. If possible, take actual exam.
- € Schedule anticipated / tentative HPC meeting date

By mid-May, 2025:
- € Finish personal statement
- € Send personal statement, resume, and letter writing resources to each letter writer
  - ● Confirm submission protocol
- € Begin working on centralized application (many open in May)
- € Take MCAT/GRE/DAT/etc. (note: this is often the latest you should plan to sit for the MCAT)
- € Confirm who the 4th member of your HPC will be

Before June 1, 2025:
- € Submit all HPC materials to the Associate Director of Dimensions (Sydney)

June-July 2025:
- € The HPC meets, provides you with initial feedback on your application materials, and – if relevant – begins preparing your committee letter
- € Finalize and submit primary application (to AMCAS / AACOMAS) after implementing feedback

July-September 2025:

- € Start receiving and completing secondary applications. (This occurs once your application is verified by the centralized application service and forwarded to the schools you select on the application. The verification process can take anywhere from 3-8 weeks after submitting your centralized application.)

Fall 2025:
- € Set up a mock interview with the Associate Director of Dimensions to help prepare for your interviews

Useful Links

See the Dimensions guide for your [specific healthcare area](#) on the Dimensions website.

Contact Information

Please contact the Associate Director of Dimensions if you have any questions before, during, or after the HPC process.

Sydney Meeker
smeeker@cornellcollege.edu
319-895-4136

Helpful Hints

Letters of Recommendation

You can determine which individual letters you'd like sent to each school by looking at the types of letters each program requires on their websites and specifying where you'd like each letter sent on the centralized application service. Your committee letter should be sent to each school you apply to.

Résumé

You are required to prepare a résumé or CV to help the HPC and your evaluators prepare their letters. Your resume / CV should be polished and inclusive of all of your medical and non-medical related experiences beginning with Cornell College. Experiences include all paid and unpaid work experiences including, but not limited to, leadership, campus involvement, community service, internships, shadowing, and research. We strongly recommend you utilize the Berry Career Institute and/or the Associate Director of Dimensions to help polish your resume.

Personal Statement

Don't underestimate the power of the personal statement. This can give your application the edge that results in an interview. It should be prepared with great care, revised and reworked until every word counts and communicates to the reader your character and personality. The statement you submit to the HPC may not be the final one you use in your application, but it should serve the same purpose. We will use it to ask any additional questions we may have of you and to write your committee letter.

Your personal statement should typically be one single-spaced page in length (for AMCAS and AACOMAS it cannot exceed 5300 characters; PTCAS, 4500 characters; AADSAS, one page; PharmCAS, 4500 characters…) which addresses the prompt provided in the application portal.

The HPC strongly recommends you seek out the services of the Associate Director of Dimensions, The Berry Career Institute, the Writing Studio, and/or individual faculty members to help you with revisions. Ideally, you should choose one individual to primarily work with until you submit your materials to the HPC. Dimensions also has several writing and essay guides to assist you. The HPC will not act as an editor of your statement. If the HPC feels your statement is lacking, we will return it to you and delay the meeting of your HPC and your committee letter.

Primary Applications

The primary application is seen by each medical school you choose to apply to. It is how each school sees your grades, co-curricular activities, personal statement, research experiences, internships, job shadowing, awards, and other academic achievements. Make sure to shine on your application – don't undersell yourself! Use complete sentences and paragraphs in describing what you did and what you learned from the experience. Be sure to explain how the experience personally benefited you and helped you decide to apply to medical school. Don't just say "I shadowed Dr. Smith". Instead, say, "Through my shadowing experience with Dr. Smith, I learned how many health professionals it takes to successfully run a family practice in a rural community".

Your Email Address

We recommend using your college email address for your applications and that you check it daily. Provide this address to the HPC, your evaluators, and make sure it is on your résumé. The application services/schools sometimes send out important mass e-mails to all applicants and these are sometimes filtered out as spam. We will also use your college email address as our primary means of communication with you.

Regular Admissions Process: Deadline – rolling

Submit your application to AMCAS as early as possible to ensure full consideration; most schools admit using a rolling admissions policy. A rolling admissions process means that schools begin accepting students during the summer, and continue accepting until the class is full. If you wait to turn in your AMCAS primary application in October, receive secondary applications in November, turn in your secondary applications in December, and interview in January, it is likely that most of the class has already been chosen. **Do not compromise your application by unnecessary delays!**

Early Decision Programs: Deadline – August 1

Early Decision Programs (EDP) allow you to apply early and seek admission to just one school. If you are an *outstanding* applicant and are *absolutely set* on attending one certain school, this may be the choice for you. Guidelines for EDPs generally require that your application and transcripts be submitted to AMCAS before August 1. You cannot apply to other programs if you are applying to an EDP until you have received confirmation that you were not admitted under the EDP which occurs on or before October 1st. If this is the case, you can then enter the general rolling admissions process at any school. If you are thinking about applying through an EDP, please discuss this with the HPC prior to applying as many schools require your undergraduate advisor to contact the school prior to receiving or accepting your application.

Waivers

A waiver for you to sign is provided for each letter of evaluation that you request, including your committee letter from the HPC. By signing the waiver, you waive your right to read or review the letter of evaluation. The positive aspect of signing the waiver is that your evaluators can be as honest and open as possible regarding your suitability for professional school. Also, many evaluators refuse to write letters without a signed waiver. A drawback of signing the waiver is that you cannot read or access the letter after it is written; however, you should be confident in your choices of evaluators prior to asking them to write you a letter.

Request for Individual Letter of Recommendation

Instructions:
- Applicants: Fill out this form, sign, and provide to evaluators.
- Evaluators: If you can provide **a signed, pdf version of the letter on letterhead**, return this form with your completed letter of evaluation (see attached guidelines) by June 1 to **smeeker@cornellcollege.edu**.

Alternatively, you may mail the letter to:

Sydney Meeker
Associate Director, Dimensions Program for Health Professions
Cornell College
600 First Street SW
Mount Vernon, IA 52314

Date of Request: _____

Applicant's Name: _____

Year of Graduation: _____

Major(s): _____

Evaluator's Name and Address:
_____
_____
_____
_____

Applicant is applying to:
_____ Medical School (allopathic or osteopathic)
_____ Dental School
_____ Veterinary School
_____ Other (specify) _____

Check One:
_____ I waive my right to read or review this letter of recommendation.
_____ I do not waive my right to read or review this letter of recommendation.

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Applicant's Name: _____

Year of Graduation: _____

Major(s): _____

Evaluator's Name and Address:
_____
_____
_____
_____

Applicant is applying to:
_____ Medical School (allopathic or osteopathic)
_____ Dental School
_____ Veterinary School
_____ Other (specify) _____

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Year of Graduation: _____

Major(s): _____

Evaluator's Name and Address:
_____
_____
_____
_____

Applicant is applying to:
_____ Medical School (allopathic or osteopathic)
_____ Dental School
_____ Veterinary School
_____ Other (specify) _____

Check One:
_____ I waive my right to read or review this letter of recommendation.
_____ I do not waive my right to read or review this letter of recommendation.

Request for Committee Letter of Recommendation

Date of Request: _____

Applicant's Name: _____

Year of Graduation: _____ Major(s): _____

Applicant is applying to:

_____ Medical School (allopathic or osteopathic) _____ Dental School
_____ Veterinary School _____ Other (specify) _____

I request the Health Professions Committee (HPC) to prepare a committee letter of recommendation for me. The purpose of this letter is to support my admission to an educational institution in the health professions. The committee will only release the letter to specific educational institutions provided by me.

Initial Here: _____

I authorize the HPC to release information and provide an evaluation about any and all information from my academic records at Cornell College, including information pertaining to other institutions that appear on my academic record. The HPC is authorized to solicit opinions from any instructor listed on my transcript, as well as additional individuals at Cornell as listed in an attachment to this form. I further authorize the HPC to seek confidential information from the VP of Student Affairs / Dean of Students concerning issues of my personal conduct while a student at Cornell College.

Initial Here: _____

Check One:
_____ I waive my right to read or review this letter of recommendation.
_____ I do not waive my right to read or review this letter of recommendation.

_____ _____
Applicant's Signature   Date

Health Professions Committee Guidelines for Letter Writers

Thank you for providing a letter of recommendation for a health science applicant from Cornell College. The Health Professions Committee (HPC) at Cornell suggests referencing the following guidelines when writing a letter or recommendation. These guidelines were adapted from several professional schools' recommendation forms.

Please address the letter to the Cornell Health Professions Committee and return the letter to the Dimensions Associate Director, as indicated on the waiver form. Your letter will be provided to Cornell's HPC for purposes of constructing a committee letter of recommendation for this candidate. The Committee includes two biology faculty, the Dimensions Associate Director, and a fourth Cornell faculty or administrative member of the student's choice. As preferred by most professional schools, your letter will be submitted in a packet format to the professional schools indicated by the candidate. The candidate will not have access to your letter unless he/she has not waived their right to review it.

Characteristics listed below are those that are commonly suggested by professional schools when evaluating candidates. In narrative form, please address those areas in which you can honestly evaluate the candidate, providing details or examples of interactions you have had with the candidate that exemplify these characteristics. It is also helpful to state the capacity in which you know the candidate, and any distinctive characteristics that may set the candidate apart.

Motivation for the profession
Genuine motivation and enjoyment for the healthcare field, depth of commitment, stamina and endurance for the profession, providing service and assistance to others, knowledge of the specific functions and activities of healthcare delivery.

Interpersonal skills
Rapport with peers and supervisors, cooperation with others, ability to motivate and inspire, leadership skills, empathetic and sensitive to needs of others. Communication skills as witnessed in written and verbal clarity of expression. Knows limits and seeks assistance when needed.

Personality
Maturity and mood stability, performance under pressure, shows ethical and moral integrity and honesty, assuredness, independent but also a team player, works autonomously, reliable, self-confidence in abilities.

Intellectual ability and academic performance
Ability to grasp, analyze, integrate, and retain a large quantity of information. Original and imaginative, resourceful in collecting and using information. Intellectual curiosity, seeks out information above and beyond the classroom.

Additional information
Personal interactions with applicant, distinctive or unique qualities of applicant, thoughts on success of applicant in a professional academic program in the health sciences, and on their future success as a clinician, researcher, or healthcare professional.

[Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant](#)