

**HEALTH SCIENCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (HSAC)**  
**Advising Information and Time-line**  
**Revised, August 2012**

**Introduction:** The Health Sciences Advisory Committee (HSAC) stands to provide advice and guidance to students interested in preparing for graduate programs in the health sciences. One of its major roles is to write committee letters of recommendation for students applying to medical, and most dental, veterinary, optometry, podiatry and osteopathic medical schools. Students interested in nuclear medicine, nursing, physical therapy, sports medicine and many other programs that do not require a committee letter of recommendation, do not need to establish a HSAC file, but are encouraged to discuss their academic plan with the chair of the HSAC. General information meetings for all students are held the **1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of each month at 4:30 pm** (Glendening Annex Conference room unless announced otherwise), and special office hours are also available by appointment with Dr. Sabine Dillingham, chair of HSAC, 191 Glendening Annex, phone 240-895-4192.

There is a new HSAC website [www.smcm.edu/hsac](http://www.smcm.edu/hsac) through which many useful forms, documents, and sample statements may be found. Please download the introductory worksheet and email it Dr. Sabine Dillingham, current chair of HSAC, at [hsac@smcm.edu](mailto:hsac@smcm.edu) so that she has a record of your name, email address, and intended health-related career path and background.

Once you have started to build your HSAC file you will be assigned to a member of the HSAC Committee, who will serve as your HSAC advisor/mentor for your application process.

**Getting started - First year and Sophomore students:**

Questions you should be thinking about:

- \* Why do I want to enter the medical field?
- \* Am I a person of service?
- \* What personal experiences do I have that have fueled my interest in health care?
- \* Do I have any practical experience with health care that:
  - has helped me commit myself to the challenge of fulfilling the necessary course work required for a graduate program in the health sciences?
  - will strengthen my application to graduate work by giving me hands on experience and demonstrate that I am fully aware of what the career I have chosen involves.
- \* Am I committed and *strive* for a GPA of 3.5?
- \* Do I want to do more than fulfill the minimum requirements for my degree?
- \* Am I willing to find and take advantage of experiences such as
  - a summer research internship.
  - an independent research project.
  - assuming leadership roles in campus programs?

**PLANNING YOUR COURSE SCHEDULE:**

<p><b>What medical school programs require:</b></p> <p>2 semesters of Chemistry (Fy.)      CHEM 103 &amp; 106</p> <p>2 semesters of Organic Chem. (So.) CHEM 311 &amp; 312</p> <p>2 semesters of Physics (So./Jr.)    PHSY 121 &amp; 122 or PHSY 131 &amp; 132</p> <p>2 semesters of Biology (Fy.)      BIOL 105 &amp; 106</p> <p>English literature                      ENGL</p>	<p><b>What medical programs may require:</b></p> <p>Calculus                                  MATH 151 &amp; 152</p> <p>Biochemistry                              CHEM 420</p> <p><b>What schools like to see:</b></p> <p>*Liberal arts students</p> <p>*Breadth in course selection and student interests</p> <p>*People of service active in their communities</p> <p>*High achievers and improvement</p>
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**Note on Calculus:** Calculus is strongly recommended for any student in the sciences. While some medical school programs require calculus, most do not. It is worth mentioning here, however, that many other graduate programs in the sciences generally require calculus. Physics 131 & 132 is calculus based and Physics 121 & 122 is algebra based. The algebra based Physics sequence is sufficient for fulfilling the requirements for medical school and by presenting a broader survey of the field may prepare you better for the MCAT exam. **It is always best to take Physics before or during the year that you anticipate taking your entrance exams. Most students complete Physics II the same semester they take their MCAT or GRE.** Taking the MCAT before taking Physics nearly always results in taking the entrance exam a second time.

*IMPORTANT: These notes are intended to be a starting point of conversation for you and your academic advisor. Program requirements may differ among graduate institutions. For example, veterinary schools and physical therapy programs often have many institution-specific requirements. To be sure you fulfill the requirements for your program of interest it is best to check directly with each school.*

## **JUNIOR YEAR: When things start to get busy.**

**It's time to get organized.**

**Medical School Applicants:** If you are planning to go directly to medical school the fall following graduation from St. Mary's College, you will be applying through the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) the June following this (your junior) academic year.

**Dental/Vet /Optometry School Applicants:** If your plans are for vet school or early decision dental school you will be applying the September of your senior year. Regardless of your chosen path, it is time to start planning. Students applying to most dental and optometry programs will have their committee interview and apply to their programs in the fall of their senior year.

Please note that for students who wish to take a year off after graduation before entering their chosen program, this schedule will shift to their senior year. Whether you are applying after your Junior or during your Senior year, it is wise to get your file and committee established during your Junior year and begin collecting information and writing your personal statement.

**Important:** You should be able to answer the questions from the previous page and you should have had, or plan to get soon, some practical experience in your chosen health care field.

**A few comments about volunteering:** Volunteer experiences in your field of interest strengthen your application to any graduate program and must not be considered an elective activity. Keep in mind that you will be competing for seats in your graduate programs with students who have this type of experience and who, therefore, stand out from those who do not. Many St. Mary's College students gain valuable experience through volunteering at St. Mary's Hospital in Leonardtown, MD, or through the local Hospice Program. Volunteering near your home over summers or during other vacation breaks is also a fine way to gain this type of experience. A little experience is better than none at all.

## **SEPTEMBER:**

**It's time to establish a file** with the chair of the Health Science Advisory Committee. Submit the "HSAC Application Form" if you have not already done so to Dr. Sabine Dillingham, [hsac@smcm.edu](mailto:hsac@smcm.edu), 191 Glendening Annex, 240-895-4192.

If you have not attended any 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday Health Sciences Advisory Committee meetings up until now, it is not too late to get started.

**It's time to begin to request letters of recommendation** from professors at St. Mary's College, as well as professionals who have supervised your volunteer work in the health care field. A *minimum of 4 letters* should be requested. These letters should come from faculty who know you well. Copies of letters written

by faculty for other opportunities, fellowships or internships for example, may also be forwarded to the chair of the HSAC for your file. Letters of support within your file are confidential and will not be forwarded for any purpose. A few medical schools require copies of all letters within your file and only in those instances, with your consent, will the letters written to the chair of the HSAC be sent upon your request. When requesting letters from volunteer experiences, please consider that Hospital Volunteer Coordinators don't usually know you as well as the health care professionals who work with you directly. A letter from someone on staff who can speak to your potential in medicine can truly strengthen your committee letter.

Recommendation forms are available on the HSAC website.

### **JANUARY Break:**

**It's time to start writing your personal statement.** This essay is often difficult to write and usually requires multiple drafts. **IMPORTANT:** Each student who wishes to interview with their committee in the spring for a summer or early fall application process must present **without exception** a strong working draft of their personal statement by the Friday following Spring Break. These statements should be submitted directly to the HSAC Committee member assigned to you as your HSAC mentor.

**JANUARY:** After returning to campus.

**It's time to request that a copy of your transcript** be sent to your assigned HSAC mentor/advisor. Transcripts from coursework taken at other institutions should also be requested at this time.

**It's time to choose a faculty member who will serve on your committee and tell your HSAC advisor/mentor this individual's name.** Please ask a faculty member who you feel knows you well to serve on your HSAC. Selecting faculty from departments other than the sciences often enhances your interview experience. Your final committee will consist of your chosen faculty member, your HSAC advisor/mentor, and perhaps another HSAC committee member who will be assigned to your team.

**It's time to ask for help with your personal statement.**

**It's time to prepare a résumé highlighting your activities and accomplishments; submit this to your HSAC advisor/mentor.**

### **The Home Stretch**

**During the first week of MARCH:**

**It's time to check on your file** with the HSAC advisor/mentor to see what has come in and catch up with what is missing.

**MARCH, by the Friday following Spring Break:**

**It's time to add a polished working draft of your personal statement to your file.**

At this time your file should contain:

1. Letters of recommendation from professors and supervisors. *Two from faculty within your major, one from outside your major, and at least one from a supervisor of practical experience in health care.*
2. A current St. Mary's College transcript, and transcripts from classes taken outside of St. Mary's College.
3. A draft of your personal statement.
4. A résumé highlighting your activities and accomplishments.
5. Previous MCAT/VCAT/GRE/DAT/OAT test scores.

### **Mid-MARCH through APRIL:**

**It's time to schedule your interview and meet with your committee.** You should contact your HSAC advisor/mentor and other committee members to schedule your HSAC interview. At that time, please provide a copy of your schedule and the name of your committee members. A meeting will be scheduled for you. Due to the growing number of students applying to graduate programs in the health sciences, committee meetings are scheduled soon after Spring Break and continue throughout April. All meetings should take place before May. Meetings will not be planned during finals or Senior Week.

### **Also in the Spring, usually in APRIL:**

**It's time to take your MCAT/GRE! Please note: The VCAT is no longer administered, and is not required by any Veterinary School ([http://www.aavmc.org/Applicant-Responsibilities/Applicant-Responsibilities\\_Requirements.aspx](http://www.aavmc.org/Applicant-Responsibilities/Applicant-Responsibilities_Requirements.aspx))**

If you apply during the summer following your junior year (medical school) or in the early fall of your Senior year for vet or dental school early admission, you need these scores; without these scores, you may be passed over for consideration until your August or fall test scores are processed and sent to your selected schools, usually about two months from the exam date. Since most medical schools begin interviews in the early fall and may begin to accept students on a rolling basis, postponing the completion of your file and its evaluation reduces your chances of acceptance.

Dental admission tests, DAT's and optometry admission tests OAT's are given in the fall and taking these exams at this time during the senior year has worked out for our students in the past. However, if you have taken physics during your sophomore year, it might be advisable to take these exams in the fall of your junior year.

**REMINDER:** Please forward or provide a copy of your test scores to your HSAC advisor/mentor for your file.

### **MAY/JUNE: Following Junior year for medical school applicants.**

**It's time to prepare your application and apply to medical school!** AMCAS begins accepting applications June 1st.

**It's time to forward a complete list of schools and their addresses, exactly as they should appear on envelope, to the chair of the HSAC: Sabine Dillingham, Chair Health Sciences Advisory Committee, 191 Glendening Annex. Please be very careful and complete – we simply copy and paste the information you provide to mailing labels when we send out your materials; if you make an error, your materials may go astray.**

After your secondary applications are completed and mailed, please notify the chair of the HSAC so that your HSAC letter of support may be sent.

### **SEPTEMBER through DECEMBER: Senior year for vet and dental applicants.**

**It's time to apply to vet and early decision dental programs!** VMCAS, the application process for vet school, has a deadline of October 1<sup>st</sup>. AADAS, the application process for dental school, has a deadline later in the Fall but some schools begin accepting applications in October and have a rolling admission policy.