**HEALTH SCIENCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE (HSAC)**

**Advising Information and Time-line**

**Revised, September 2019**

**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 physician’s assistant, 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 as well as special topic meetings are held each semester, and special office hours are also available each week with Dr. Andrew Koch, Professor of Chemistry and chair of HSAC. Before meeting with Dr. Koch it is best to fill out the “[Getting Started Worksheet](http://www.smcm.edu/preprofessional/health-careers-advising/hsac-forms/)” and email it to him at askoch@smcm.edu. Students are encouraged to attend a general information meeting early in their career at St. Mary’s College and to attend any special topic meetings that pertain to their interests.

Once you have started to build your HSAC file, certainly by your junior year, you will be assigned to a member of the HSAC Committee, who will serve as your HSAC advisor and 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 or higher?

            \*     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:**

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| --- | --- |
| **What medical school programs require:** 2 semesters of Biology **(First year)**      BIOL 103 & 1062 semesters of Chemistry **(First year)**  CHEM 103 & 1062 semesters of Organic Chem. **(So.)** CHEM 311 & 3122 semesters of Physics  **(So./Jr.)**  PHSY 121/122 (Biology majors) PHSY 141/142 (Chem/Biochem) PHYS 151/152 (Physics majors)English literature                          ENGL 106  | **What medical programs may require** **and to prepare for the MCAT 2015:**Calculus  MATH 151 &152Psychology PSYCH 101Sociology SOCI 101Biochemistry CHEM 420**What schools like to see:**\* Liberal arts students just like you!\* Breadth in course selection and student interests\* People of service active in their communities\* High achievers and improvement |

***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. To be sure you fulfill the requirements for your program of interest it is best to check directly with each school on your list. Also, ask Dr. Koch for more information regarding your intended field.*Notes on Calculus and Physics:** 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 I and II. ***Physics 121 & 122 is algebra based*** ***and is sufficient for fulfilling the requirements for medical school.*** Indeed, by presenting a broader survey of the field ***this course may prepare you best for success on the MCAT exam. Physics 141 & 142 is calculus based and required for Chemistry and Biochemistry majors.*** Biology majors also may take this course sequence if it fits their schedule better. ***Physics 151 and 152 is the entry series for Physics majors,*** *is not recommended for Biology, Chemistry or Biochemistry majors, but along with Physics 153 can prepare physics majors for the MCAT if they* choose to pursue medicine. ***It is always best to take Physics before or during the year that you anticipate taking your entrance exams.  Many students complete Physics II the same semester they take their MCAT or GRE****.****Do not***take the MCAT until you have taken or nearly completed physics.

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

**It’s time to get organized.** You should be able to answer the questions from the previous page and you should have, or plan to get soon, some practical experience in your chosen health care field.

 **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 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 over the summer and by 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.

**Gap 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. **About 50% of the applicants to medical school have taken gap years or longer, from this group, many have completed post-baccalaureate programs in biomedicine or have masters degrees in biomedical science or biology, in addition to paid experience in medicine working as scribes or clinical nursing assistants, or extensive volunteer work as EMTs or paramedics.** 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. HSAC meeting sessions on preparing your personal statement often start in November (the fall before you apply) and continue into February and March of your application year.

**A few comments about volunteering:**  Volunteer experiences in your field of interest strengthen your application to any graduate program and can 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 or paid service as scribes 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.  Students interested in dental and veterinary medicine (large and small animal experience if possible) should also plan to get experience. The HSAC chair can recommend sites to students for practical experience in our area.

**SEPTEMBER:**

**It’s time to establish a file** with the chair of the Health Science Advisory Committee. Submit the “HSAC Getting Started Application Form” if you have not already done so to Dr. Andrew Koch, [askoch@smcm.edu](http://askoch@smcm.edu), 227 Goodpaster Hall, x 4905.

If you have not attended any Health Sciences Advisory Committee meetings up until now, it is not too late to get started. Flyers will be posted and all student emails will be sent out a week before meetings.

**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; more letters in your file is always better.  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.*** HSAC is not a letter repository for other applications beyond your medical interests. A few medical schools require copies of all letters within your file and only in those instances 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.  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 tostart 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 to serve on your committee and tell your HSAC advisor this individual’s name.**  Please invite a faculty member to serve on your HSAC who you feel knows you well.  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 and submit 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:

Letters of recommendation from professors and supervisors.  **At least** **two from faculty within your major, one from outside your major, and at minimum one from a supervisor of practical experience in health care.** More letters gives your advisor more information to work from.

A current St. Mary’s College transcript, and transcripts from classes taken outside of St. Mary's College.

A draft of your personal statement.

A résumé highlighting your activities and accomplishments.

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 member.  A meeting will be scheduled for you.  Due to the growing number of students applying to graduate programs in the health sciences, committee meetings must begin 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 or MAY:**

**It’s time to take your** **MCAT/VCAT/GRE!**  If you apply during the summer following your junior year (medical school) or by the early fall of your senior year for vet or dental school, 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 in early June.

**It’s time to forward a complete list of schools and their addresses, as you wish them to be sent, to the chair of the HSAC: Andy Koch, Ph.D. Professor and Chair Health Sciences Advisory Committee, 227 Goodpaster Hall. *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 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 1st.  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.