GUIDE TO OBTAINING A COMMITTEE LETTER, LETTERS OF EVALUATION, AND VECOLLECT

PLEASE READ ALL INFORMATION THOROUGHLY FOR INSTRUCTIONS

PREHEALTH ADVISING
PENN STATE UNIVERSITY
230 Ritenour Building
University Park, PA 16802
814-865-7620
INTRODUCTION

The Health Sciences Pre-Professional Evaluation Committee is designed for undergraduate students at Penn State and Penn State alumni preparing an application to medical, dental, podiatry, or optometry schools. The Committee is comprised of faculty and staff from across the university, as well as currently working or retired physicians.

This guide applies to the following applicants:

- **First Time Applicants**: Applicants (including alumni) applying to professional school for the first time.
  
  *If you have previously applied, withdrawn a previous application, or have interviewed with the committee, but later decided not to apply, please view the reapplicant guide.*

What is a committee letter?

The Committee submits a biographical letter of support for the applicant emphasizing strengths and “distance-traveled” throughout a candidate’s lifetime. *Your other letters of recommendation are appended to our committee letter and submitted directly to the application system as a single, .pdf file.* In the application systems, students only need to enter in the committee letter option in the letters of recommendation section. We forward the rest of your letters with the committee letter.

The goal of the committee letter is to address/establish the following:

- Context in terms of your experience, accomplishments, and our institution
- Provide an additional dimension to your candidacy
- Highlight your personal strengths based on your committee interview and your evaluations
- Provide additional assistance in navigating health professional applications

The final committee letter may include the following:

- Introduction and relevant background information for measuring “distance-traveled.”
- Academics: context for interests, motivations for majors and/or research, resiliency
- Meaningful experiences: how out-of-classroom time was spent and why, skills developed, leadership experiences, strengths and interests
- Exposure to health profession: why that specific health profession, what has been learned from those experiences, demonstrated understanding of patients and underrepresented population needs, connection to skills and interest to the profession
- Final impressions based on experiences, evaluations and interview, including feedback from committee members and other prehealth advisers
Professionalism

It is imperative to your reputation as a candidate (and to the health professional admissions officers) that you adhere to standards of professional behavior. These standards center on your ability to behave in a respectful and organized manner during all aspects of the application process.

This includes approaching evaluators, providing them with information and instructions, and expressing appreciation for their efforts. This extends to all members of the Health Sciences Pre-Professional Evaluation Committee, and all members and staff of the Prehealth Advising Office.

*Please follow-up with your evaluators if/when you have decided which health professional program you plan to attend, so they know the results of their efforts.*

When preparing for the committee interview and medical school interviews, please review standards for professional attire on the Career Services website: [http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/students/interviewing.shtml](http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/students/interviewing.shtml)

Application Systems

AMCAS: American Medical College Application Service (allopathic medicine)

AACOMAS: American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service

AADSAS: Associated American Dental Schools Application Service

OPTOMCAS: Optometry Centralized Application Service
PRE-COMMITTEE INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

An applicant wishing to obtain a committee letter from the Health Sciences Pre-Professional Evaluation Committee will need to complete the following items before scheduling an interview.

1. _______ veCollect account paid and FERPA statement signed ($50 non-refundable fee)
   (*view Step 1 of “2. How to collect your letters of recommendation below”)

2. _______ Evaluator Record established within veCollect and 3 letters of recommendation collected
   (*view Step 2 of “2. How to collect your letters of recommendation below”)

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<th>List of Evaluators</th>
<th>Info in veCollect</th>
<th>Email Sent</th>
<th>Letter Received**</th>
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<td>7. Dr. Ronald Markle</td>
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* required by AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, and OPTOMCAS
** need to receive 3 to schedule committee interview

3. _______ Complete Biographical Sketch (with following items included)
   _______ Headshot photo to upload (.jpg or .png)
   _______ Personal Statement (draft)
   _______ Tentative list of evaluators (.doc, .docx, .pdf)
   _______ Tentative list of schools
   _______ Test score(s) and/or Scheduled Test Date

Medical and Podiatry: [http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-medical/](http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-medical/)
Dental: [http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-dental/](http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-dental/)
Optometry: [http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-optometry/](http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-optometry/)
1: REQUIREMENTS AND STRATEGIES FOR LETTERS

Please note that in veCollect, individuals that write letters of recommendation are referred to as "Evaluators."

How many letters do I need, and from whom?

For your committee letter set, the minimum number of letters required is 3 and the maximum is 6.

Letters should be current, meaning they are written within the academic year of your application submission.

Health professional programs expect strong and enthusiastic letters of support. Choose writers that can speak to a number of positive character traits that they have directly observed. To adhere to standards of ethical practice and give confidence in a candidate’s letter set, applicants should encourage evaluators to submit letters on official letterhead whenever possible.

Most health professional programs, especially medical schools require letters from individuals that have personally taught you in a course. Therefore, you are required/recommended to obtain the following:

- 2 science faculty letters (who have taught you in science courses)
- 1 non-science faculty letter (who has taught you in a non-science course)
- 1-3 additional letters (optional)

If applying to osteopathic medical programs, you should obtain a letter from a current, practicing DO. Other relevant letters can be from lab PI's and letters of support from meaningful college experiences including, but not limited to, part-time work experiences, RA supervisors, LA/TA supervising faculty, volunteer supervisors, athletic coach, etc. If you are not sure which individuals to ask you should consult with a prehealth adviser.

Health professional programs expect that candidates will choose to waive their right to access their letters.

Evaluator Strategies

Faculty members’ availability may vary throughout the year. Speak to evaluators early and see when they are best able to write you a strong letter. Meet with them in person, when possible. Focus on those with whom you’ve developed a strong relationship.

When asking, allow evaluators the option to refuse to write your letter and do not take offense if they refuse. If they do not know you well enough, or if they are too busy, it will be a weak letter. We recommend that you bring the following to a meeting with an evaluator:

- Resumé
- Transcript (optional)
- Personal Statement Draft
- Printout Core Competencies
  - AAMC Core Competencies
  - Dental Core Competencies

Timeline for a request

Give evaluators plenty of time to write you a strong letter of support, a minimum of 1-2 months. Try to have letters submitted by mid-June of the year that you apply, especially since many faculty may not be on campus over the summer. You will need at least 3 letters to be submitted prior to scheduling your committee interview, so you may want to request them to be submitted by April.
2. HOW TO COLLECT YOUR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Step 1: Receiving your veCollect Account

Pay your $50 processing fee to receive a veCollect account. veCollect is a 3rd party service that allows applicants to collect confidential letters of recommendation for health professional programs. Our office will create and activate your account once you have paid the fee and signed the FERPA statement.

Please be sure to enter your name and the cardholder’s name accurately, especially if you are using a credit card that does not match your name. This allows us to match your name to your payments and prevents confusion and delays.

Please wait 1-7 days for account to open. Note that accounts will not be created or activated during official campus closures for holidays and bad weather.

You will receive an e-mail with instructions on how to access your account and change your password.

When you log in for the first time, you will see an evaluator and an evaluator record under Dr. Markle’s name. This is where we will upload your committee letter.

Follow the link below to sign your FERPA statement and pay. Note: we only accept Visa or Mastercard for payments:

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bwk6UhfZl3RCHQh

Step 2: Creating an Evaluator Record

After your account has been activated, log into veCollect.

On the top left, click on “My Evaluators,” then select “Add New Evaluator.”

Required information you will need for each evaluator

- Title
- First Name
- Last Name
- Address
- City
- State
- Postal Code
- E-mail
- Phone Number

You are expected to submit 2 science and 1 non-science letters.

*Be sure you indicate which evaluators are your science and non-science letters. If your research mentor has also taught you in a science, select “Professor/Instructor—Science.” If you already have two science faculty, and your research mentor is serving as an additional letter, then select “Research Mentor/Supervisor.”*
Step 3: Creating a Letter Record

Click on this link, which is located at the bottom of the screen after you create a new evaluator. Indicate the type of health professional program you are applying to. If applying for both MD and DO programs, select “Medical Schools.”

You will then be directed to sign a FERPA statement. Medical schools prefer confidential letters of recommendation; therefore, we advise that you waive your right to access your letters.

Confirm your confidentiality preference by typing in your name as an electronic signature, and then select “Create Letter Record.” Repeat with each evaluator.

Step 4: Requesting Letters

After you have met with your evaluators and they have each agreed to write you a letter, click on the envelope icon (highlighted in red above) to e-mail the electronic request.

Evaluators will receive instructions on how to upload their letters via email. This email will contain a unique link that corresponds directly to you as the applicant. To submit their letter, evaluators will reply to this email with their letter attached as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file. Do not e-mail Dr. Markle for your committee letter.

After evaluators submit their letters, it will take 1-3 business days to appear in veCollect, as the letter will undergo a security check. Please be patient and check regularly for status updates.

When your evaluator has uploaded a letter successfully, you will see a PDF icon that indicates the letter has been uploaded:

On the left, the letter has not been received and is therefore blank. On the right, the letter has been received, and contains a .pdf icon.

Wait for all letters to be added to veCollect to make a quiver.
**Step 5: Make a Quiver Titled: “Committee Letter Set”**

After all letters have been received within veCollect, create a quiver.

1. At the top of the page, go to “My Quiver.”

   ![Create New Quiver](button)

   Click on this button.

2. For “Description,” name it “Committee Letter Set.”

3. Select all the letters you plan to send, including the committee letter.

   The **maximum** number of letters you should have in your quiver, including your committee letter, is 7. The **minimum** letters you should have, including your committee letter is 4.

4. When you are finished, click “Save Quiver.”

   ![Committee Letter Set](image)

   You can make changes by selecting “Add/Delete letters.” Deleting the quiver will not delete the associated letters, just the quiver.

   You can add and delete letters from your quiver by returning to “My Quiver,” and selecting “Add/Delete letters.” You cannot add or delete letters after you have locked your quiver.

**Receiving Your Committee Letter**

After you have had your committee interview and the letter has been written, the adviser that led your interview will upload your committee letter to veCollect into the evaluator spot associated with Dr. Markle. **Do not send the committee an e-mail through veCollect.**

*Please note: committee letters typically take 4-6 weeks to write after your interview.*

During peak interview season in late spring throughout the summer, it may take even longer.

E-mailing the committee to ask when your letter will be uploaded does not speed up the process. E-mails will delay your letter completion if members must redirect their time to answering e-mails from anxious applicants instead of writing letters. Please exercise restraint and patience, and make sure you are **following all instructions carefully.** Please check the post-interview check list for final instructions.
3. HOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR COMMITTEE INTERVIEW

Follow the previous instructions for veCollect. Please use the checklist at the beginning of this packet to determine when you are ready to schedule your committee interview.

Complete the Biographical Sketch associated with your health professional program application and be sure to save a copy for your records BEFORE submitting. Before you begin, you will need the following:

- Headshot photo to upload (.jpg or .png)
- Personal Statement Draft (.doc, .docx, .pdf)
- Tentative List of Schools
- Tentative List of Evaluators
- Test Scores and/or Scheduled Test Date

Links to Biographical Sketches:

Medical and Podiatry: [http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-medical/](http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-medical/)
Dental: [http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-dental/](http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-dental/)
Optometry: [http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-optometry/](http://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/biographical-sketch-optometry/)

When you have received 3 letters (any 3, not necessarily the required faculty letters) in veCollect and you have submitted your Biographical Sketch, you can schedule your committee interview by calling 814-863-3889 or 814-865-7620.

- **January 15, 2020**: veCollect opens (see step 1 on page 5)
- **April 1, 2020**: Scheduling for committee interviews will begin
- **Mid-April 2020**: Committee interviews will begin
- **Mid-September 2020**: Interviews will conclude for the 2020 cycle.

[http://science.psu.edu/premed/applying-to-medical-school/committeeinfo](http://science.psu.edu/premed/applying-to-medical-school/committeeinfo)

Please dress professionally for committee interviews. They will take 30-45 minutes and are conducted on campus. We do not conduct Skype, Zoom, or phone interviews. You can bring updated information at that time, including new personal statements.

Please review guidelines on professional attire on the Career Services website: [http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/students/interviewing.shtml](http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/students/interviewing.shtml)

4. HOW TO ENTER LETTERS INTO AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS AND OPTOMCAS

**By creating the quiver, you will append all of your letters of evaluation to the committee letter as a single .pdf file and we will upload all of your letters into the appropriate application system.**

The only evaluator you will need to enter into AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS and OPTOMCAS will be the committee letter under the heading of Dr. Ronald Markle.

**Do not enter your interviewer's information into the application systems.** Dr. Markle is the Chair of the Health Sciences Pre-Professional Committee and he will review and sign all outgoing committee letters, even when they are written by other members of the committee. Pay close attention to the instructions for your application system(s), as the e-mail addresses are tied to the PSU committee letter accounts.

The Committee will not send an evaluation letter to more than one type of health professional program during an application period. For example, you cannot request that your evaluation letter be sent to both medical school and dental schools during the same year. However, we will send to both allopathic (M.D.) and osteopathic (D.O.) medical programs during the same year.
When applications open, you can submit your primary application even if you have not had your committee interview yet. Do not wait. Submitted applications go through a verification process that can take several weeks—this process can be completed without your letters and/or MCAT score. An early application is a strategic advantage!

AMCAS (MD Schools):

- Committee Letter option should be selected
- Primary Contact: Dr. Ronald Markle
- Primary Contact E-mail: ram29@psu.edu
- Primary Contact Phone: 814-865-7620
- Address: 230 Ritenour Building, University Park, PA 16802

*Note: Please save the unique “AMCAS Letter ID” and your “AMCAS” ID for the committee to use.

AACOMAS (DO Schools):

- Under Supporting Information>Evaluations>Create Evaluation Request
- Under “Are you requesting a committee evaluation” indicate “Yes.”
- List Dr. Ronald Markle as the author.
- Email Address: ram29@psu.edu
- Due Date: September 15 (note: this is NOT binding, letters take 4-6 weeks after your interview)

*Note: Please save your AACOMAS ID for the committee to use.

AADSAS (Dental) and OptomCAS (Optometry):

- Under Supporting Information>Evaluations>Create Evaluation Request
- Under “Are you requesting a committee evaluation” indicate “Yes.” (for OptomCAS, skip this line)
- List Dr. Ronald Markle as the author.
- Email Address: ram29@psu.edu
- Due Date: September 15 (note: this is NOT binding, letters take 4-6 weeks after your interview)

*Note: Please save your AADSAS or OptomCAS ID for the committee to use.
5. AFTER YOUR COMMITTEE INTERVIEW: YOUR FINAL CHECKLIST

1. **veCollect: ID Numbers** Update this in veCollect when applications open. You can do this by logging into veCollect and clicking on “My Account” on the top right, then “Update my Account Details”:
   - ✓ MD Schools: AMCAS ID **AND** the unique AMCAS letter ID tied to your committee letter
   - ✓ DO Schools: AACOMAS ID
   - ✓ Dental: AADSAS ID
   - ✓ Optometry: OptomCAS ID

   **Your ID’s are critical to matching your letters with your application.**

2. **veCollect: Lock your Quiver** When all letters have been received and finalized, including your committee letter, please log into your account and go to the tab “Process My Letters.” Indicate that you will not make ANY changes by signing your name and selecting “Process and Lock this Quiver.” **You will no longer be able to add or remove letters at that point.**

3. **E-mail your lead interviewer** when you have submitted your primary application **AND** the previous two steps have been complete. We will then upload your letters to the application systems if your quiver has been finalized and locked.

4. Please be sure to do the following:
   - ✓ Double-check individual requirements (e.g. prerequisites) for each school
   - ✓ Make sure you have all required documents (e.g. DO letter for osteopathic schools)

5. If you are applying to the following medical schools/programs, please e-mail your lead interviewer the addresses where committee letters should be sent:
   - ✓ Caribbean Medical Schools
   - ✓ LSU-Shreveport (MD)
   - ✓ Health Professions Scholarship Program (Military)

Lead Committee Interviewer E-mail: ____________________________________________
6. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I need to have 2 science and 1 non-science letter to schedule my committee interview?
No. You need at least 3 letters (any 3) plus your completed biographical sketch in order to schedule.

How can I delete a letter from my quiver, or delete the quiver entirely?
Click on the “My Quiver” tab at the top of your veCollect page and once you see the quiver, click on “Add/Remove letters” or “Delete this quiver,” depending on the action you wish to take. You will NOT be able to make this adjustment after you have “locked” and processed your quiver.

What happens if I decide to delay my application, or if I need to reapply?
We delete everyone’s accounts mid-October but save all of your letters electronically in our office. We are billed by veCollect on your behalf in each application cycle. You will need to re-pay the $50 processing fee and follow the instructions for delayed applicants/re-applicants.

Do I need my committee letter prior to submitting my primary application?
No. Do not delay submitting your primary application, as an early submission is a strategic advantage. Committee letters can take up to 6 weeks or longer to write after your interview. During periods of high-volume late spring throughout the summer, it may take even longer. E-mailing the committee to ask when your letter will be uploaded does not speed up the process. E-mails will delay your letter completion if members must redirect their time to answering e-mails from anxious applicants instead of writing letters. Please exercise restraint and patience, and make sure you are following all instructions carefully.

Can I add letters of recommendation after my committee letter packet has been uploaded into my application(s)?
Yes, but you will need to have them uploaded directly through the application service, and not through the committee. We can only upload once to each application service. When your quivers are locked and processed, we cannot make any changes.

What should I do if I have trouble getting an evaluator to submit their letter?
Provide a “gentle reminder” to an evaluator who has not yet submitted a letter for you. Consult a prehealth adviser. If you are missing one or more letters and face the decision of whether or not to create your quiver without the full complement of recommendation letters, we will help you with this decision. Please be sure you have reviewed “1: Requesting Letters of Recommendation” in this guide.

What if I have an evaluator that has not received a veCollect notification e-mail?
This is primarily a result of applicants creating an Evaluator Record but not a Letter Record or forgetting to click on the envelope icon to e-mail the evaluator. Please check with all of your evaluators to make sure they have received the email that is generated when you click on the envelope icon. Please read this guide thoroughly.

If you have e-mailed your evaluator through veCollect and they still have not received the notification, please ask them to check their spam folders.

Can I create customized letter sets?
No. All letters you wish to be sent to every school should be added to your quiver. If you desire that certain letters are sent to a subset of schools, you will need to ask the evaluator writing those letters to upload their letter directly to the application system you are using to apply (AMCAS, ACOMAS, AADSAS, or OPTOMCAS).
7. APPLICATION CYCLE AND RESOURCES

As you move forward through the application cycle, please utilize the Prehealth Advising Office with questions and concerns. We are here as a resource to all current and former Penn State students.

Our office enjoys hearing from candidates that we have interviewed, so please keep us up-to-date on the interview offers you receive as well as the schools that have made admission offers.

If you have not heard back from any schools by November (or by December for Optometry), you can reach out to the Prehealth Advising Office to discuss next steps, and how to proceed with updates and letters of intent/interest.

In January-February, we will contact all applicants for updates. Please take time to respond to our survey, as it helps us gather data to assist candidates in the future.

Throughout the year we regularly offer group advising sessions relevant to applicants. The current schedule of sessions are posted on our website: http://science.psu.edu/premed/advising

- Medical Applicants
- Medical School Interviewing
- Personal Statement Workshop
- Gap/Glide Year

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<tr>
<td>Ronald Markle, Ph.D</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kimberly Johnson, M.A.</td>
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<td>Melissa Krajcovic, Ph.D.</td>
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<td>John Moses, M.Ed.</td>
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<td>Sharon Fong, M.Ed.</td>
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<td>Lucais Wallen, M.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luann Auman</td>
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<td>Lori Lauck</td>
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Other members of the Committee are comprised of the following:

- Academic Advisers from across the university
- Faculty members and researchers
- Retired or currently practicing physicians