

# Preparing for the Upcoming Medical School Application Cycle

Information and Advising from the  
**Medical Careers Advisory Committee**

- **What does the MCAC do?**
- **Do I need the MCAC?**
- How do I get to medical (dental, optometry, etc.) school?
- How do I become pre-med?
- **Where do I get reliable information?**
- What do I need to apply?
- Am I a good candidate for medical school?
- What courses do I need?
- Do I have to be a biology major?
- Do minors help?
- Do I need to shadow more than one doctor?
- Do I need research?
- When should I get started?
- What are my chances of getting in?
- How important is the MCAT?
- Is the GPA more important than the MCAT?
- Does my major matter at all?
- Is my C in Orgo going to keep me out of medical school?
- What is the minimum GPA to apply? Is there a minimum MCAT to apply?


- **Can you talk to my parents?\***
- How long should I study for the MCAT?
- Should I take an MCAT prep course?
- When should I take the MCAT?
- I want to stay (or leave) NJ?
- Which schools? How many?
- Does it help to be in state?
- **When should I apply?**
- Is it better to apply early?
- **How many letters of recommendation?**
- **Who get a composite letter?**
- **What happens if I don't get a composite letter?**
- What are my chances of getting in?
- Should I take the MCAT again?
- Should I apply to MD, MD and DO, or DO only?
- **What happens if I apply later in the cycle?**
- When should I think about a gap year(s)?
- **When will I know if I get in?**
- If I'm on the waitlist does it mean I'll get in?
- What happens if I don't get in?
- Are post-bac programs worth it?

# Medical Careers Advisory Committee (**MCAC**)

## **MCAC Chair**

- Sudhir Nayak, PhD
- Professor of Biology
- >15 years at TCNJ

## **MCAC Administrative Support**

- Ms. Helen Kull 
- General Advisor, Program Assistant, and Knower of (MCAC) Things
- Department of Biology
- >15 years at TCNJ

## **Ad Hoc MCAC Members (examples):**

Biology: Dr. Jeffery Erickson, Dr. Tracy Kress, Dr. Keith Pecor

Chemistry: Dr. Benny Chan

Engineering: Dr. Christopher Wagner

Kinesiology and Public Health: Dr. Anne Farrell

Psychology: Dr. David Blake in HSS

# Who are you?



# Who Are YOU?

Year?

Major?

# MCAC

- Assist **TCNJ students and alumni** applying to medical school and other health professional schools
  - Help students **from any major**
- Provide validated resources and information
- Data-driven advising and mentoring
- Presentations like this one
- Generate the **committee (or composite) letter**

# Help us help you

- We are invested in your long term success
  - **We want you to get in!**
- The TCNJ MCAC is different
  - We work with you to present the best version of yourself
  - We are open and honest with you about your chances
  - We make data driven recommendations and offer alternatives
- Use our resources to help you get started, stay on track, **invest time wisely** , and be awesome

# HEalth PRofessions Student Group

- **HEPR Group affiliation in PAWS**

- Open to TCNJ Students from any major
- **Contact Ms. Helen Kull at [mcac@tcnj.edu](mailto:mcac@tcnj.edu) to be added**

- Receive email newsletter with notices of events

- Webinars, professions opportunities, information from MCAC, etc.

- Noted in PAWS - your advisor can see it as well

- Remember the following:

- It **does not** provide automatic preferential treatment for enrollment
- It **does not** negate the need for individual advisement by your advisor
- It **does not** guarantee successful application or admission
- It **does not** alone provide all resources, deadlines, and information required
- Each student must seek out **validated** information and opportunities on their own



# HEPR example

- Optometrist who is interested in **hiring a pre-optometry, pre-med, or pre-dental student for a part-time position**
- **Dr. Amy Treski "Optique Boutique 20/20"**
  - Lawrenceville, NJ (about ten minutes from TCNJ)
  - Hours are flexible
  - No experience is necessary and training is provided
  - Interested students can contact her at: **ameetres@aol.com or 609-882-2020**
  - Check out her website [here](#)
- Literally perfect you are interested in optometry or just looking for clinical hours of any kind

# Today: For those who are ready to apply

- If you're not there yet you stay can enjoy the show!
  - Avoid mistakes in the process
- Cover what's involved in working with the MCAC
- Provide access to the “Seeking MCAC Support” Canvas MCAC 201 (later in the presentation)
- **Ask questions!**
  - It's why we exist

# You will be engaging in TWO parallel processes:

1. Submitting the materials and completing the steps for your **program application** (AMCAS, AACOMAS, ADEA AADSAS, OptomCAS, etc.)
2. Submitting the materials and completing the steps to seek the **MCAC support** of that application

# “Open a File” with the MCAC to submit those documents

- You will add yourself to our database (Intake Form)
- We will collect the documents we need to determine our support for your applications(s) (Cmte Letter or Packet)
  - Transcript
  - Test score(s)
  - List of evaluators
  - List of schools/programs
  - Letters of rec by your evaluators
  - Copy of your application(s)
  - Links/etc to upload our support to the app portal

# “Opening a File” with the MCAC (and Everything Beyond...)

- How to obtain a **Committee Letter** (aka Composite Letter)
  - Do you need a letter?
  - Why would you want one?
- Are you planning to apply to med / dental / optometry / podiatry school?
- **MCAC advising is for everyone**
  - The Committee Letter is for students that are strong candidates
  - **We still work with students who are not granted a committee letter!**

# 18 months, 18 months, 18 months, 18 months

- **Work with MCAC 18 months** before you want to enter medical school
  - If you want to matriculate DIRECTLY to medical school after senior year
  - You start the process **mid-February of your junior year**
    - **Take MCAT May/June of your junior year**

# 18 months, 18 months, 18 months, 18 months

- Considerations
  - Received a competitive MCAT/DAT/OAT/**PA-CAT** score
    - Where are you applying?
  - GPA and transcript
  - Letters of recommendation
  - Clinical experiences
  - Volunteering experiences

# The “hidden curriculum”

- Must complete all pre-medical requirements **by the end of junior year AND prepare for the MCAT**
  - **DO NOT take the MCAT “early”**
  - Take it when you completed the coursework and have prepared
    - MCAT prep ( $\approx$ 300-1000 hours)
  - Grades and **challenging courses**
- This is why **60% of students take a gap year**
  - Have a plan but be flexible



# Letters of recommendation - Types

- Committee letter
  - Committee / composite letter + all individual letters
  - **“Letter of letters”**
- Letter packets
  - You did not receive committee support
  - We upload your letter packet (all letters)\*
- Individual letters - two different situations:
  - You are just applying on your own; evaluators send them directly to AMCAS, AACOMAS, etc; MCAC is not involved; **OR**
  - A “late eval” is received AFTER we have uploaded your Committee Letter. Letter may be sent to [mcac@tcnj.edu](mailto:mcac@tcnj.edu) **with the request form** and we can upload it to the letter portal on behalf of the evaluator

# Letters of recommendation - Issues

- Common issue with applications
  - **Strong letters** > more letters > letters from specific people
  - Not getting positive letter from a professional in the field
  - **Careful who you ask!**
    - Were you professional?
    - Did you show up on time?
    - Were you a positive influence?
    - Demonstrate a concerns for others?
- Use the **MCAC Letter Request Form** or we cant use it
  - Letters should be sent directly to **mcac@tcnj.edu**, NOT to you!

# Letters of recommendation - How many?

- General guidelines (about 4-5 letter, no more than 6)
  - **Academic letters (X2 or 3)**
    - STEM -vs- non-STEM courses
    - Research, internship, etc.
    - Professors that know you\*
  - **Letter from a medical professional (X1)**
    - MD -> MD programs, DO -> DO programs, etc.
  - **Character letters (X1)**
    - Volunteering coordinators
    - Clinic coordinators

# Letters of recommendation - The other side

- Accurate assessment of the applicant's suitability for medical school rather than advocate for the applicant
  - How long you have known the applicant?
    - **What capacity you have interacted?**
  - Direct or indirect observations
- Focus on the **details of the applicant**
  - The situation or context of the **behaviors**
  - The actual **behaviors** you observed
  - Any consequences of the **behaviors**

# Letters of recommendation - The other side

- **Focus on behaviors** that impact suitability of the applicant for medical school
- Comparison to groups and rationale
  - Obstacles - **attitude, resilience, adaption**
    - Reaction to setbacks
  - Background, attributes, experiences, commitment
- **Only include information on grades/GPA if they require context**

# How to ask for letters of recommendation

- Ask **early** (>1-2 months before you need it. MCAC deadline is 6/30)
  - Remind the writer 2-4 weeks before it is due
- DO NOT feel awkward about asking or reminding
  - You should know the person well
  - Examples
    - Multiple courses where you performed well **AND** had a positive impact in the classroom
    - Extensive shadowing or research experience
    - Volunteering
    - Work experience

# How to ask for letters of recommendation

- Be **polite** but direct about what you need
  - E.g. letter for medical school, masters, graduate, etc.
- Wording matters - Which one is better?
  - “I need a letter of recommendation from you for medical school.”
  - “Would you be willing to write me a strong letter of recommendation for medical school?”
- Always follow up!
  - If you demonstrate gratitude then you can use that person again

# How to ask for letters of recommendation

- Keep it short but **provide context**
- Include why you are asking that faculty member, professional, or other recommender
  - Example: “I really enjoyed taking your Genetics, Genomics and Bioinformatics, and Genetics of Human Disease courses over the last three years. I know I struggled in genetics for a while but everything you taught me about studying, time management, making decisions consistent with my long-term goals really paid off over over the last year. <Some personal stuff removed>. Would you be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for medical school?”
  - **Critical for alumni**



# How to ask for letters of recommendation

- Provide the following
  - **1 page** resume with major, awards, GPA, relevant coursework, work experience, shadowing/volunteering, other interests
    - This does not need to include EVERYTHING
    - Should include what programs your are applying to (MD, DO, OD, DDS/DMD, PA, PT, OT, etc.)
  - Link to instructions [AAMC instructions for letter writers](#)
  - Can include your personal statement if it is relevant
- DO NOT include
  - Your complete AMCAS application
  - Transcript unless requested
- **Should you include your MCAT score?**

# Who gets a committee letter?

- MCAT/DAT/OAT
  - Is it competitive **at the schools you are applying to?**
- GPA
  - Transcript - What courses?, DFW?, repeated courses, STEM grades
  - Is the GPA **consistent** with the standardized test and path?
- Letters of recommendation
  - STEM, non-STEM, professional letters
- Clinical experience
  - Shadowing, hands-on, licenced (EMS, MT, CNA, etc.)
- Volunteering toward the greater good
- “Other”
  - PELL eligible, first generation college, NCAA athlete, extensive research
  - **Academic integrity violations**

# “Grading” - It’s not just one thing

- Thinking and Reasoning Competencies
  - Critical Thinking, Quantitative Reasoning, Scientific Inquiry, Written Communication
  - **MCAT, GPA, courses, personal statement, letters**
- Science Competencies
  - Living Systems, Human Behavior
  - **MCAT, GPA, courses**
- Pre-professional Competencies
  - Service Orientation, Social Skills, Cultural Competence, Teamwork, Oral Communication, Ethical Responsibility, Reliability and Dependability, Resilience and Adaptability, Capacity for Improvement
  - **Experiences, personal statement, letters**
- Consistency\*
  - **High GPA = high MCAT**

# Timeline - 18 months

- **Spring (Feb through April)**
  - 18 months prior to start at med school
  - Inform MCAC of your intent to apply at [mcac@tcnj.edu](mailto:mcac@tcnj.edu)
- **Complete the MCAC Self-Assessment form (found in MCAC 201)**
- Schedule appointment with MCAC Chair to discuss process and preparedness
  - You must complete the Self-Assessment first!
- Open file with MCAC
  - Collect transcript, MCAT/DAT/OAT etc. score, copy of completed application(s), list of intended schools, list of letter writers, and other materials we request
- **Register online to take the MCAT or other admissions examination (ideally in May/June)**

# Timeline

- ~ **May 1**
  - AMCAS application portal opens
- ~ **June 1**
  - AMCAS applications can be submitted to (similar situation with aacomas, aadsas, etc)
    - **Ideally within 2 weeks of opening or soon thereafter**
- **June 30**
  - MCAC File completion date for Early Decision (ED) applicants
  - Suggested target date for the MCAC to receive Letters of Recommendation

# Timeline cont.

- **Summer (after MCAT scores are received)**
  - **Target date for completion of your MCAC file (ideally June/July)**
  - Target date for the MCAC to receive your Letters of Recommendation
- **August 1 (one year prior to start at med school)**
  - AMCAS Early Decision application deadline
- **~ September 1**
  - **Final date for all applicant materials to be submitted to the MCAC**
  - After this date, the probability of admission decreases significantly
- **October 1**
  - Date by which all ED acceptances will be announced

# Timeline cont.

- ~ **November 1**
  - Deadline for Letters of Recommendation to arrive at med schools
- **October through March**
  - **Student invited to interview**
  - Admissions Committees are filling class rosters
- **April through mid-May**
  - Offers are made
- **June – July**
  - Some wait-listed students may be offered seats as class rosters are finalized
  - Make arrangements for housing, loans, roommates, etc
- **August**
  - Most medical/dental/etc schools begin in August

# Resources

- **MCAC Website - [mcac.tcnj.edu](https://mcac.tcnj.edu)**
  - Lots of information about preparing and applying
- **MCAC Newsletter**
  - Delivered to students coded as HEPR in PAWS
  - Info on Open Houses, virtual opportunities, shadow and job opportunities
- **MCAC People**
- **MCAC 201 - Canvas Advising info for students ready to apply**



~~TCNJ  
CANVAS~~



# “Free for Teachers” CANVAS



Does NOT directly  
connect to PAWS  
like the regular  
TCNJ Canvas does!

# **“Free for Teachers” CANVAS**



**You can log in  
with your tcnj email,  
or another  
(gmail, etc)  
email address**



# “Free for Teachers” CANVAS



You can log in  
with your tcnj email,  
or another  
(gmail, etc)  
email address



You must create a  
**NEW ACCOUNT** with  
a different password  
- NOT YOUR TCNJ  
ONE

# “Free for Teachers” CANVAS



- We will ask for the names and emails of those who wish enroll
- **MCAC 101:** What's Up, Doc? - Exploring and Preparing for Health Careers
  - Freshmen/sophomores
- **MCAC 201:** Seeking the Support of the MCAC
  - Juniors/seniors/alumni
  - Updated each cycle

# MCAC 201

## Topics...

### ⋮ ▼ Getting Started with the MCAC

⋮  Do I Need the MCAC?

⋮  Overall Application Process and Timeline


⋮  The Committee Process

⋮  Core Competencies

⋮  What About...?: Early Decision

⋮  What About...?: Reapplicants

⋮  What About...?: Gap Year(s)

⋮  Are You Really Ready? (w Self Assessment Form)

⋮  Schedule Appointment with MCAC Chair

# MCAC 201

## More Topics...

### ▼ Preparing and Submitting Documents for your MCAC File

Applicant Intake Form

My List of Evaluators and LORs

My List of Schools

Transcripts

Score (MCAT, DAT, OAT) Reports

Copy of Completed Application(s)

Links/Forms for Uploading Letters

### ▼ After You've Submitted Your Application....

More Stuff To Do!

Pathway to Medical Practice in US.pdf

About the AAMC PREview test.pdf

(Go to Canvas!)

...



Scan code on the next slide;  
then complete and submit form  
to be enrolled in **MCAC 201 v.2026**

If the QR Code  
doesn't work for you,  
send an email to [mcac@tcnj.edu](mailto:mcac@tcnj.edu)  
and say “201 - Enroll me!”

- You will soon receive an invitation from Instructure to enroll in MCAC 201 in Free for Teachers Canvas

MCAC  
201 v. 2026



If you are **NOT** ready to apply,  
and wish to be added  
to the **HEPR** group in PAWS,

Or to access the “basics”  
pre-med advising class **MCAC 101**,  
Please scan, complete  
and submit this form:

**MCAC 101 and HEPR**



# Questions?



This slide deck will be placed on the MCAC website on the Events and Workshops page in the near future.