

PreMed Advising Looking in The Mirror

CNS Advising houses the Pre-med/Pre-health advising office. Under the new leadership of Prof. Wilmore Webley, the office has been modernized and is working to serve students more effectively using online tools, group advising, and increased outreach. One-on-one advising is also available by making appointments with Wilmore Webley, Cathy Eden, Doug Smith, or Libbie Kohler. These advising sessions can be in person, on the phone or through Skype.

Scope of service: Pre-health advising serves not only students in CNS, but any and all students on campus pursuing post-baccalaureate health programs. This is a large number of students who are difficult to track because they have other declared majors. Serving these students includes providing detailed, web-based curriculum information and advice and helping students understand the curriculum as well as the extra-curricular requirements for successful applications. Pre-med advisors work with students in one-on-one appointments as well as group advising/workshop settings. Starting in April 2016, the advising office will start offering a workshop on developing a strong personal essay for all interested students in collaboration with Ludmila Tyler in the Biochemistry department.

The Pre-med/Pre-health Advising Office participates fully in Open House and NSO events, workshops (5/yr) and information sessions (3/yr). The advising office maintains an up-to-date website with relevant content. It sends out targeted emails and runs announcements on the CNS as well as the PreMed display screen, as it strives to inform students about what will make them a competitive candidate for graduate study in medicine and other health professions. The Advising Office regularly invites admissions professionals from graduate programs in the health professions such as pharmacy (MCPHS), optometry (NECO), physician assistant (MCPHS), and medicine (UMMS, University of Chicago Pritzker). Advisors work closely with admissions professionals at many medical schools. The advisors stay current with new advising and admissions trends through personal communications and attendance to regional and national conferences for advisors in the health professions.

The advising office maintains regular contact with and offers support to the executive boards of the Pre-Med Society, Pre-Dent Society, and the Vision Care Club.

Monthly Newsletter: Frequent email newsletters are also sent to all students who register on a pre-med mailing list. Newsletters include advice and announcements such as MCAT prep or registration dates. The newsletter informs students on important issues and trends in graduate level study in medicine and other health professions, announces important events and opportunities, and highlights careers in the health professions including and beyond nursing and medicine. It also features the profile of a UMass alum who has matriculated into a health profession school.

Committee Letter: A very important component of pre-health advising is writing letters of recommendation for students applying to programs. In a short summer season, each year two advisors write approximately 250 letters for both currently enrolled as well as alumni applicants to medical, dental, and other health programs. This herculean effort requires collecting and summarizing faculty and other letters of recommendation as well as including their personal recommendations about students with whom they have developed a relationship.

Support for students in underrepresented groups: The advising office support students from underrepresented groups in medicine by working closely with the CNS Director of Student Success and Diversity, CMASS, and UMass Medical School. Every year we recruit students for the **Baccalaureate MD Pathway Program**, which accepts approximately 12 students each year from the UMass system for a summer enrichment program on the medical school campus. For the last 2 years, nearly half of the program has been filled with students from UMass Amherst. This year four of our students were granted provisional acceptance to the Medical School for matriculation in 2017.

Efficient Handling of Letters of Recommendation: PreMed Advising now utilize the services of Virtual Evals (VeCollect) to handle letters of recommendations. This has streamlined the process where each student is able to create a validated account, input the information for each of their evaluators and an email is sent to the evaluator with a link to upload the letter of recommendation. The student is able to see which evaluators have already submitted letters although they cannot read the letters submitted. At the time writing the students committee letter, an advisor can just log in and download all the letters as a packet and add the committee letter to complete the letter packet which is transmitted to the relevant health professions portal. This system has significantly streamlined the process which previously consisted of letters being mailed to the office or submitted to the advisors through email.

Looking Ahead:

As we continue to explore new avenues to better serve our students, PreMed advising has two three major program initiatives:

1. **PreMed/PreHealth Seminar:** designed to strengthen the candidacy of UMass students as they prepare for the medical school application process. We plan to develop a 1 credit seminar course for sophomore and Junior students. This course will be designed to better inform students about the process of pre-professional school application – including academic requirements, clinical experience needed, extracurricular leadership activities and strategies to improve study habits.

The course will provide students with information about the application process, resources to prepare them to apply, and hands-on workshops and activities to refine their application materials. The expectation is that sophomore students will mostly be presented with health career choices and prerequisite courses while junior students will focus more on the application process, writing a personal statement, critical reading assessment and strategic plans to improve them, MCAT/DAT preparation and school selections.

Students will participate in personal statement writing workshops, Medical/Dental school interview preparation, peer review communication workshops and formatting narratives to effectively communicate their volunteer and clinical experiences.

2. **PreMed/PreHealth Advising MCAT Prep Course.** Medical school is a costly investment for any student and their families. Tuition averages around \$50K per year and it is no secret that the wallets of perspective students start taking a hit simply from preparing to enter medical school. A quick online survey reveals that test preparation courses range from \$2K to 12K! In many instances, students who have not given themselves enough time to prepare for the exam are not aware of the resources available to them and therefore pay exorbitant sums of money for prep courses at the last moments prior to taking the test.

Our goal is to create prep courses designed to review the key concepts needed to master the MCAT exam content. To be successful we would hire an instructor for each of the major disciplines represented on the MCAT exam: Biology, Chemistry, Biochemistry, Physics and Psychology/Sociology.

3. **Hiring a Part-time Letter Writer.** Each year over 200 students from UMass apply to medical and dental schools. A major part of the workload associated with these applications is writing a committee letter for each student. With only two advisors writing letters while simultaneously advising students and running NSO, this is a monumental task. The advising office would therefore benefit significantly from the assistance of a professional letter writer over these summer months when we are at the height of the application season to assist with drafting letters. These letters would be completed and signed by the advisors.