



PennState
Eberly College of Science

2023

FOR 2024 MATRICULATION

COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW AND LETTER PACKET GUIDE

*****PLEASE READ ALL INFO THOROUGHLY FOR INSTRUCTIONS*****

PREHEALTH ADVISING

PENN STATE UNIVERSITY

230 Ritenour Building

University Park, PA 16802

814-865-7620

INTRODUCTION

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

Throughout the year we regularly offer group advising sessions relevant to applicants under the “Level UP” section. The current schedule is posted on [our website](#).

Canvas Modules Available

- [PreHealth Group Advising and Candidacy Development](#)
- [Health Professions School Applicants Networking Space](#)

PreHealth Advising Team	
Melissa Krajcovic, Ph.D.	Director of Science Premedicine Major & PreHealth Advising
Marc Counterman, M.Ed.	Lead Interviewer, PreHealth Adviser
Kimberly Johnson, M.A.	Lead Interviewer, PreHealth Adviser
John R. Moses-Brownson, M.Ed.	Lead Interviewer, PreHealth Adviser
Support Staff	
Carolyn Jensen, Ph.D.	Director of the Science Advising Center
Lori Lauck	Administrative Assistant

Other supporting interviews may comprise of the following:

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

1. COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The comprehensive interview process is designed to assist Penn State undergraduate students and alumni in preparing their application materials to medical, dental, podiatry, and optometry schools. PreHealth Advising staff conduct Comprehensive Interviews for students applying to health profession schools and offer students feedback on their application materials.

What is a comprehensive interview?

Within this interview, applicants can expect to receive valuable and specific feedback on their candidacy. The interviewer will work with the student to understand and present their weaknesses and highlight their strengths. This interview will also serve as a mock interview for health professions programs. **It is not required by Penn State that students complete a comprehensive interview, but most students find the process helpful to developing a competitive application.** For the 2021-2022 cycle, students applying to allopathic medical school who interviewed had an acceptance rate 20.4% higher than students who did not interview.

The goals of the comprehensive interview are the following:

- Help you provide context in terms of your experience, accomplishments, and our institution
- Discuss ways to address weaknesses of your application
- Help you tell your story to add an additional dimension to your candidacy
- Identify your personal strengths and help you highlight them in your application
- Provide additional assistance in navigating health professional applications

- Provide comprehensive PreHealth advising to support strong decision-making in relation to the application process

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. A [Group Advising Session on Professionalism](#) can be found in Canvas.

This includes approaching evaluators, providing them with information and instructions, and expressing appreciation for their efforts. This extends to all members and staff of PreHealth Advising. **Please do not email multiple members of the team with similar questions.**

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 comprehensive interview and medical school interviews, please review standards for professional attire on the [Career Services website](#).

Application Services

- 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
- AACPMAS: American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine Application Service
- TMDSAS: Texas Medical & Dental Schools Application Services

Timeline Overview

- September 21, 2022 – Application Year Kickoff & Intent to Apply Form Opens
- October 2, 2022 – veCollect Opens
- January 3, 2023 – Comprehensive Interview Scheduling Opens
- June 15, 2023 – Comprehensive Interview Scheduling Closes at 5 PM

Letter of Recommendation Expectations for Applications

Letters of recommendation **are not required** to schedule a comprehensive interview. Letters of recommendation should be transmitted to your application service by the time you submit your secondary applications. Watch the [Group Advising](#) session on Letters of Recommendation for more details.

IMPORTANT NOTE: For a final application, candidates should plan to have 2 science faculty letters, 1 non-science faculty letter, and up to 3 additional letters. Students can deviate from this norm but should discuss this with a PreHealth Adviser. Please see the portfolio for further suggestions/information regarding Letters of Recommendation.

2. INTENT TO APPLY FORM AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS PORTFOLIO

The [Intent to Apply](#) form indicates that you are planning on applying to professional school in the upcoming cycle (2023-2024). On this form you will identify your applicant type (first type/reapplicant); your previous experiences with PreHealth advising; your initial thoughts on academic science and non-science letter writers; and ranking your preparation in six common areas of your application.

After submitting the Intent to Apply form, you will be added to the [2024 Health Professions Portfolio Canvas Page](#). Alumni can [reactivate their access account here](#).

After completing the *Are You Ready* Assessment, you will gain access to your Mock Application and other comprehensive interview materials.

[Submit Intent to Apply Form](#)

[Submit Comprehensive Interview Materials](#)

3. SCHEDULING YOUR COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW

To schedule a comprehensive interview, you must submit a completed comprehensive interview checklist in the 2024 Health Professions Portfolio Canvas Page.

Your comprehensive interview materials will include:

- Mock Application Document
- Personal Statement
- Autobiography
- School List/GPA Calculator (*Excel Spreadsheet*)
- Experiences Section (*Excel Spreadsheet*)
- (Reapplicants): Previous Application

Comprehensive Interview scheduling will open January 3rd, 2023, for the 2024 Matriculation Cycle.

You can submit your completed Comprehensive Interview Materials [here](#). These materials may not be your **final application materials** that are submitted. After submitting your materials, please call the PreHealth Advising office at (814) 865 7620 to schedule your interview. **You must call the office to schedule a comprehensive interview.**

Interview Preparation

Please dress professionally for comprehensive interviews. They will be scheduled for 2 hours and will be conducted either remotely or in person. **You cannot edit your documents after submitting your comprehensive interview.** Following your interview, you can work with your PreHealth Adviser to refine your application materials.

Consider joining our [Health Professions Applicant Networking Canvas Page](#) to review tips on virtual interviewing within our Interview Tool Kit module. We offer advice on the interview itself, along with virtual professionalism, and provide free Penn State virtual backgrounds.

Please review guidelines on professional attire on the Career Services website [here](#).

4. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Penn State PreHealth Advising collects and sends letters written by your evaluators together with a cover letter written by our office as a letter packet. **Professional programs that require committee letters will accept the letter packet.** The cover letter/ letter packet will not take the place of a committee letter in terms of substituting for letters from science faculty. The cover letter also does not count toward the total letter number. It is your responsibility to ensure your letter packet contains the letters requested by health professions programs. Following the guidelines below should guarantee you will have met the requirements for most schools.

How many letters do I need, and from whom?

For your letter packet, 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 several positive character traits that the evaluator has 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 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. Dental applicants should have a letter from a dental professional. Other relevant letters can be from a lab PI 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)
- Headshot (professional photo)
- Personal Statement draft & reasons for selecting evaluator as a letter writer
- [Information for Evaluators about Prehealth Advising and Letter Packets](#)
- [AAMC Guide for Letter Writers](#)
- 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. Aim to have your letters submitted to veCollect before June 2023, especially since many faculty may not be on campus over the summer.

5. HOW TO COLLECT YOUR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Step 1: Establishing your veCollect Account

Follow [the link](#) to sign your FERPA statement. There is a \$50 processing fee to establish a veCollect account. If a student demonstrates a financial hardship, this fee may be waived upon consulting with PreHealth Advising. veCollect is a 3rd party service that allows applicants to collect confidential letters of recommendation for health professional programs. Our office will create your account once you have paid the fee and signed the FERPA statement.

Note: *We only accept Visa or Mastercard for payments. Chrome DOES NOT work - you will need to use an alternative browser. Please enter your name and the cardholder's name accurately, especially if you are using a credit card that does not match your name. This helps us match your name to your payment and prevents confusion/ delays.*

Your account will be opened within 7 days of payment. Accounts will not be created/activated during official campus closures. 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. Krajcovic's name. This is where we will upload your cover letter.

Step 2: Creating an Evaluator Record

After your account has been activated, log into [veCollect](#). Click on "My Evaluators," then select "[Add New Evaluator](#)."

The following information is required for each evaluator:

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

**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 the link to create a new letter record (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. Health professions programs 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 in veCollect

The screenshot displays three evaluator records in a grid. Each record is a yellow box containing the following information:

- Dr. James Doe (Professor/Instructor--Non-Science)**: 12321 Main Street, University Park, PA 16802. Contact: ask17@psu.edu, 814-867-5309 (phone). Includes "Edit Eval" link, "Medical Schools" radio button, and "Add new letter record" link.
- Dr. Jane Doe (Professor/Instructor--Science)**: 456 Main Street, University Park, PA 16802. Contact: ask17@psu.edu, 123-456-7890 (phone). Includes "Edit Eval" link, "Medical Schools" radio button, and "Add new letter record" link.
- Dr. John Smith (Professor/Instructor--Science)**: 123 Main Street, University Park, PA 16802. Contact: ask17@psu.edu, 814-123-4567 (phone). Includes "Edit Eval" link, "Medical Schools" radio button, and "Add new letter record" link. The envelope icon next to the "Add new letter record" link is highlighted with a red box.

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. Krajcovic for your cover 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: “Letter Packet Set”

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

1. At the top of the page, go to “My Quiver.” Click on **Create New Quiver**.
2. For “Description,” name it “Letter Packet Set.”
3. Select all the letters you plan to send, including the cover letter.

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

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



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 Cover Letter

After you have established your veCollect account, the PreHealth Advising team will add the cover letter to your quiver. **Do not send PreHealth Advising an e-mail through veCollect.**

If you do not see your cover within veCollect locking your quiver, please email the PreHealth Advising team to ask them to upload your letter. Please exercise restraint and patience, and make sure you are **following all instructions carefully**.

6. ENTERING YOUR LETTER PACKET REQUEST INTO THE APPLICATION SERVICE

By creating the quiver, you will append all of your letters of evaluation to the cover 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 add to AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS and OPTOMCAS will be the letter packet under the heading of Penn State PreHealth Advising.

Do not enter your interviewer's information into the application systems.

Pay close attention to the instructions for your application system(s), as the e-mail addresses are tied to the PSU letter packet accounts.

When applications open, you can submit your primary application even if you have not yet had your comprehensive interview or have your letters of recommendation in veCollect. Consult a PreHealth adviser to determine the best time to submit your application if you have not yet interviewed, and it is after the application is able to be submitted. *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, but we also want it to be as strong as possible before submitting.*

AMCAS (MD Schools):

- “Letters of Evaluation” section, “Add Letter of Evaluation/Recommendation”
- Letter Packet option should be selected
- Primary Contact: Penn State Prehealth Advising
- Primary Contact E-mail: prehealthadvising@psu.edu
- Primary Contact Phone: 814-865-7620
- Address: 230 Ritenour Building, University Park, PA 16802
- Enter the names of your evaluators from your packet (not including the cover letter)

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

AACOMAS (DO Schools):

- Under Supporting Information>Evaluations>Create Evaluation Request
- Under “Are you requesting a committee evaluation” indicate “Yes.”
- Author: Penn State Prehealth Advising
- Due Date: September 15
- Primary Contact E-mail: prehealthadvising@psu.edu
- Primary Contact Phone: 814-865-7620

Note: Please save your AACOMAS ID for PreHealth Advising 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)
- Author: Penn State Prehealth Advising
- Due Date: September 15
- Primary Contact E-mail: prehealthadvising@psu.edu
- Primary Contact Phone: 814-865-7620

Note: Please save your AADSAS or OptomCAS ID for Prehealth Advising to use.

7. SENDING YOUR LETTER PACKET

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 letter packet
 - ✓ DO Schools: AACOMAS ID
 - ✓ Dental: AADSAS ID
 - ✓ Optometry: OptomCAS ID

Your ID numbers are critical to matching your letters with your application.
2. **veCollect: Lock your Quiver** When all letters have been received and finalized, including your cover 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. **Complete the Letter Packet Request Form.** When you have submitted your primary application, have entered your ID numbers into veCollect, and locked your quiver you can [submit the letter packet request form](#). You will be asked to submit a pdf of your primary application.
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 PreHealth Advising the addresses where letter packet should be sent:
 - ✓ Caribbean Medical Schools
 - ✓ LSU-Shreveport (MD)
 - ✓ Health Professions Scholarship Program (Military)

8. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I need to have 2 science and 1 non-science letter to schedule my comprehensive interview?

No. PreHealth Advising is not requiring letters of recommendation to schedule your comprehensive interview.

Should I wait to schedule my comprehensive interview until closer to the application cycle?

No! The advantage of interviewing early allows you to refine your application materials and be ready to submit earlier in the cycle. We cannot guarantee there will be interview slots available if you wait until closer to the application cycle. Our office recommends scheduling your comprehensive interview once you have completed your comprehensive interview materials and submitted them to the canvas page.

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 account mid-October but save all of your letters electronically in our office. We are billed by veCollect on your behalf in each application cycle, so you will need to re-pay the \$50 processing fee to re-establish a veCollect account. We will then add letters back to your account upon your request. You can continue to utilize our advising services regardless of your decision or whether you have graduated. Penn State continues to serve students post-graduation.

Do I need my letter packet prior to submitting my primary application?

No. Do not delay submitting your primary application, as an early submission is a strategic advantage. Letters can take some time to write and are not always delivered early. It is important to speak with letter writers to determine a realistic timeline of when you can expect to receive a letter from them when selecting your evaluators.

Can I add letters of recommendation after my letter packet has been uploaded into my application(s)?

Yes, but you will need to have them uploaded directly through the application service as an individual letter, and not through our office. You will need to identify these letter writers within the application service itself. 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 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. To strategize, always consult with a PreHealth Adviser.

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 evaluators to make sure they have received the email that is generated when you click on the envelope icon.

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. If they are still having trouble submitting their letter, please have them email the letter to PreHealthAdvising@psu.edu to be manually uploaded to veCollect.

Can I create customized letter sets?

No. Except for designating two quivers for MD and DO programs, 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.

Can I use my letter packet for other purposes, such as a job, or post-baccalaureate graduate program?

Sorry, our office is no longer doing this. Why? Because all Post-baccalaureate programs utilize various on-line submission systems with required, embedded questions that must be addressed. The questions can be addressed by your letter writers but cannot be legitimately addressed by your Comprehensive Interviewer.

9. CLOSING REMARKS

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, after submitting your application, 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.