PREHEALTH ADVISING PROGRAM
INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS REQUESTING A COMPOSITE LETTER
Prehealth Website: https://www.clarku.edu/departments/prehealth/
Email address: premed@clarku.edu

GETTING STARTED:

Complete the "Basic Information" form and return it to Wendy Praisner (Sackler, S228) well before you even consider applying.

Have transcripts from all other colleges that you have attended sent to Wendy Praisner, Chemistry Department, Clark University, 950 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610.

PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING INDIVIDUAL LETTERS:

The intent of the composite letter is to speak to your experience at Clark University, and consequently should be composed of individual letters from the Clark community. Letters from external recommenders can be uploaded directly from the writer to the centralized application service as independent letters. They will have a larger impact as independent letters and will allow us to focus the composite letter on you as a Clark student. Our preferred formula is to have letters from **five Clark faculty members**, including **three from STEM and two from non-STEM.** You may request additional letters from coaches, and supervisors of jobs, internships, volunteer work, extracurricular activities, etc., but remember that these should be Clark-related. It is a good idea to cultivate strong relationships with your professors while in their classes so that when it comes time to ask them for a letter of recommendation they have more to write about you than simply what grade you earned in their course(s).

Complete and sign a "Faculty Appraisal of Applicant" form for each individual from whom you wish us to request a letter of recommendation. Please supply email addresses of all references. The purpose of all recommendations is to enable the Prehealth Advising Program Director to write the most effective personal evaluation. When filling out this form we strongly urge that you waive your right to see these appraisals since, in our experience, this leads to more meaningful evaluations. Although the composite letter of evaluation is confidential, it is not our intention to do anything without your knowledge. Many medical/dental/other health professional schools place greater value on letters if they are confidential; if not, the schools feel that the letters are compromised. We will honor the confidentiality of the information that we receive on your behalf, but we will tell you your level of recommendation and will convey as best we can the tenor of the letter so that you can accurately judge the level of support in your evaluation.

It is both good practice and common courtesy to contact recommenders prior to submitting their names. When asking a person to write a letter on your behalf it is best to do so in person, where you can let them know your career aspirations and provide them with an up-to-date CV or résumé. It is a good idea to obtain letters of recommendation from faculty soon after you have completed course work or research with them since they will remember you better. If you anticipate taking additional courses or continuing research with a particular faculty member then it is best to delay requesting a letter until completion of that. **Please note that all signed "Faculty Appraisal of Applicant" forms must be returned to Wendy Praisner (Sackler, S228) who will distribute them to the designated writers from whom you are requesting an evaluation. (You must not distribute these forms yourself.)** If you feel that you cannot obtain enough letters, please consult with Dr. Larochelle, Director of the Prehealth Advising Program.

FINAL STEPS:

It is your responsibility and in your best interest to make sure that all individual letters are submitted to our office by **May 15**, or as soon thereafter as possible. A polite reminder to your letter writers can be a good idea and is often appreciated by the writers. The composite letter cannot be written until all requested individual letters are submitted to our office. Lastly, the composite letter is not written until you send us a PDF of your common application, with the date it was submitted to the appropriate centralized application service (AMCAS, AACOMAS, ADEA AADSAS, CASPA, OptomCAS, PharmCAS, PTCAS, etc.). We will then complete your composite letter, review the non-confidential parts with you, and upload your letter pending your submission of a signed approval form. This typically takes less than two weeks from when we receive the PDF and does not impede the processing of your application by the respective service. We strongly encourage you to attend to this as early in the application cycle as possible to maximize your chances of a successful outcome.

BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE COMPOSITE LETTER:

Cover page:
This is attached to each letter and describes the rankings used by the Prehealth Advising Program (Superior Candidate, Highly Qualified Candidate, Qualified Candidate, Candidate Presented For Consideration, and Special Letter), supplemental information (including cumulative GPA data for the university), and the evaluation procedure.

Opening paragraph:
This begins with the ranking, as determined by the Prehealth Advising Program, and is followed by a summary of you as a student and member of the Clark community. It includes any degrees awarded, or to be awarded, your overall academic performance, your major(s), the various activities you have participated in, any awards or honors received, and any additional attributes.

Individual letters submitted on your behalf:
The entirety of each letter we receive is included in this part of the composite letter. We do not just select the best parts. Each letter is preceded by a brief sentence or two introducing the letter writer (name, department, relationship to you, etc.) and the general tenor of their comments.

Summary:
The composite letter concludes with a summary divided into 4 sections:

> Professional competencies – here we point out how you have demonstrated a desire and ability to work with others, along with any other relevant personality traits.
>
> Science competencies – this section summarizes your academic achievements.
>
> Thinking and reasoning competencies – we address your critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, scientific inquiry, and written communication skills.
>
> Commitment to _____ (insert chosen professional career path) – this section summarizes your activities demonstrating a commitment to your chosen career path.

Each of these sections typically consists of 2-4 sentences based upon the comments provided by your letter writers and our own interactions with you. (The full list of the AAMC "Premed Competencies for Entering Medical Students" is linked here.)

PREHEALTH ADVISING PROGRAM:
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Wendy Praisner, Program Coordinator, Sackler Sciences Center, Room S228, 508-793-7119, premed@clarku.edu and wpraisner@clarku.edu