

What The Health Professions and Graduate Programs Request in Letters of Recommendation

Medical schools (and other health-related professional schools and programs), and graduate programs in (bio)chemistry increasingly are interested in much more than your GPA and your scores on the MCAT, DAT, or GRE exam. Increasingly, these programs also are interested in softer skills. Medical schools, for example, evaluate applicants in three broad areas: pre-professional competencies, thinking and reasoning competencies, and science competencies. The second and the third of these probe what you know and how you learn; the first—pre-professional competencies—probes who you are and how you interact with others.

As you complete your work in this course, you may find it useful to consider the following questions and ranking categories posed to faculty members writing recommendations for medical schools. *When I write a letter of recommendation for any program—off-campus study, internship programs, summer research opportunities, medical schools, graduate schools, etc.—I draw heavily on these pre-professional competencies. More specifically, I describe specific examples of how your participation in our shared work, both in class and in lab, contributed to creating an effective, positive, and supportive learning environment that was of benefit to all of us.*

Adapted From "Guidelines for Writing a Letter of Evaluation for a Medical School Applicant"

Describe how the applicant has, or has not, demonstrated any of the following [pre-professional] competencies that are necessary for success in medical school.

- Service Orientation: Demonstrates a desire to help others. . .
- Social Skills: Demonstrates an awareness of others' needs, goals, feelings, and the ways that social and behavioral cues affects peoples' interactions and behaviors. . .
- Cultural Competence: . . . shows an appreciation and respect for multiple dimensions of diversity. . .
- Teamwork: Works collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals; shares information and knowledge with others. . . ; puts team goals ahead of individual goals.
- Oral Communication: . . . listens effectively. . .
- Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others: Behaves in an honest and ethical manner; cultivates personal and academic integrity. . .
- Reliability and Dependability: Consistently fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; takes responsibility for personal actions and performance.
- Resilience and Adaptability: Demonstrates tolerance of stressful or changing environments or situations and adapts effectively to them; is persistent, even under difficult situations; recovers from setbacks.
- Capacity for Improvement: Sets goals for continuous improvement and for learning new concepts and ideas; engages in reflective practice for improvement. . .