

A GUIDE TO THE RECOMMENDATION SERVICE FOR MEDICAL AND HEALTH PROFESSION SCHOOL APPLICANTS

THE NINE STEPS OF THE RECOMMENDATION PROCESS:

Step 1: Read this Guide.

Step 2: Open a file.

Step 3: Select people who know you well to write evaluations.

Step 4: Obtain the evaluation forms from the Health Professions and Prelaw Center (HPPLC) and check the correct box for the appropriate type of evaluator (faculty or personal). These forms can be downloaded from the HPPLC Web site: <http://www.hpplc.indiana.edu/rs-forms.shtml>.

Step 5: Ask recommenders to write the evaluations and send them to HPPLC.

Step 6: Med applicants: if you would like a faculty composite submit the request to HPPLC by the Priority Deadline.

Step 7: Check to make sure all evaluations you have requested have arrived to HPPLC. If you are requesting a composite check to make sure it has been completed.

Step 8: Request HPPLC to send recommendations/composite to schools. You should allow up to ten (10) business days for the processing of the request to send your letters/composite.

Step 9: Check with schools to be sure recommendations were received.

STEP 1: READ THIS GUIDE

Please read this Guide completely before opening your file. If you have additional questions, call HPPLC at 812.855.1873 and make an appointment to see an advisor.

The following requirements are necessary for the HPPLC service to maintain the credibility and integrity that is required by the professional schools:

1. In accordance with Indiana University policy, the contents of your file, including all recommendation letters, **become the exclusive property of HPPLC** and can only be forwarded as provided herein.
2. This service is primarily designed for IUB students applying to professional schools. Letters may not be forwarded or otherwise released to individuals, **or you**, *even if you have an open file and have not waived your right to read the letters.*
3. While every effort is made by HPPLC to send your letters out ASAP, *we officially require ten business days notice.*

4. This service allows you to avoid asking professors to send multiple copies of letters to multiple schools; instead the faculty member can send one letter to our office and copies of it may be sent to multiple schools.

STEP 2: OPEN A RECOMMENDATION FILE

To open a LOR file, complete the "Graduate and Professional School Recommendation File" form and submit it to HPPLC. Upon opening your file you will be charged \$25.00, which will be billed through the Office of the Bursar. To process this billing, you will need your IU 10-digit ID number. If you do not have one, please contact the registrar.

The Recommendation Service Fees

- \$25.00 to open a file and to send the first six packets
- \$10.00 to send the next three packets
- \$ 5.00 to send each additional packet

STEP 3: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL RECOMMENDERS

All professional schools require academic evaluations from instructors, and some may also require personal letters of recommendation from someone who has observed you in a professional setting outside the classroom. Faculty evaluations can be from professors or associate instructors (although some medical schools will prefer that letters be submitted from professors). Evaluations should be from those who can comment in detail about such attributes as reasoning abilities, research skill, originality and creativity, communication skills, class performance, motivation, judgment, leadership and maturity.

HOW MANY RECOMMENDATIONS WILL YOU NEED?

DENTAL SCHOOL:

Dental school requirements for letters of recommendation vary, but most common is a minimum of three faculty recommendations, two of which must be science. See the Supplemental Materials listing on the AADSAS application or individual school websites.

Specific requirements for Indiana University School of Dentistry: Minimum of three faculty recommendations, two of which must be from the sciences. Personal recommendations are optional.

MEDICAL SCHOOL:

Medical school requirements for letters of recommendation vary. Many medical schools will request a premedical committee/composite letter (see Step 6). We would recommend that you plan to obtain at minimum three faculty letters, two of which should be science and one of which should be nonscience, and one personal recommendation, as this combination tends to meet the requirements of the vast majority of medical schools. Check the guidelines for the individual schools where you plan to apply.

Specific requirements for Indiana University School of Medicine: one science faculty recommendation (biology, chemistry, or physics), one non-science faculty recommendation, one personal recommendation (someone with personal knowledge of the applicant as an employee, as a participant in an extracurricular activity, as a volunteer in medical service or community projects, etc.), and one Dean of Student's Evaluation form (you will receive this form from IU School of Medicine; you need to submit it to the Student Ethics Office and they will return it to the school). You may submit individual letters or the Premedical Composite Letter to the IU School of Medicine.

HOW SHOULD FACULTY EVALUATORS BE SELECTED?

You should select the faculty members who you feel know you the best and will be able to comment in the greatest detail about your abilities. Make an effort to get to know your professors and request a letter soon after the conclusion of the class. If you take subsequent courses, do lab research, or serve as a UTI with the recommender you may wish to ask him/her to update and resubmit the letter to HPPLC. An evaluation from a junior professor who makes perceptive personal comments about your abilities and achievements provides the committee with much more valuable information than a general letter from a famous professor who barely knows you. Do not ask for a recommendation from a particular person just because he or she is prominent. For many programs, it is helpful to have a mix of science and non-science faculty members, who can comment on different aspects of your abilities.

HOW SHOULD PERSONAL RECOMMENDERS BE SELECTED?

Although academic evaluations are the most important evaluations for professional school, some health professions schools, including the IU School of Medicine, require a personal recommendation. Personal recommendations should be from people who have observed your performance in a non-classroom setting and can comment on personal characteristics relevant to the professional program you are pursuing: a supervisor at an agency where you have volunteered; an advisor who has mentored you; a professor in whose research lab you worked for pay rather than as part of your college coursework; an employer under whom you gained experience and developed skills that are relevant for the type of professional program for which you are applying. Choose evaluators who know you well and who can write in detail. "Character references" from family friends are generally not beneficial. Personal recommendations from people who know you well carry more weight than those from people in prominent positions who do not know you.

STEP 4: CHECK THE CORRECT BOXES ON THE EVALUATION FORM AND SIGN IT

Many schools provide their own recommendation forms with the application. If you are using the HPPLC recommendation service, you will use the HPPLC recommendation form rather than the form from the schools. All dental and medical schools accept the HPPLC forms in lieu of these individual forms. Students applying to other programs need to check the schools' websites for instructions as to which forms are appropriate.

On the HPPLC recommendation form, please fill out your name and student ID number, indicate whether you waive your right of access to the letter (see below), and sign the form. You **MUST** also make sure that you check the correct box according to the type of recommendation for which the form is being used. There are two categories of recommenders:

Personal Evaluator: A personal evaluator is anyone other than an instructor with whom you have earned college credit. If the recommender has not taught you in a course or given you research credit, please check the "Personal Evaluation" box on the HPPLC recommendation form. **You should not check the "Personal Evaluator" box if the recommendation is being written by anyone with whom you have taken a course or earned college credit.** If you have any question about the suitability of a potential personal recommender, please consult your HPPLC advisor.

Faculty Evaluator: A faculty evaluator must be an instructor with whom you have taken a college course or received research credit and has given you a grade that appears on your transcript. If you took a course with or received research credit from your recommender, please check the "Faculty Evaluation" box. **You should not check the "Personal Evaluation" box if the recommender taught you in a course, even if you feel the recommender will comment on your personal characteristics** (typically faculty recommenders will comment on personal characteristics of the applicant).

In addition, you may need to use one of the following types of forms used by the application processing services:

1. **MED SCHOOL ONLY: AMCAS Letter Request form.** For medical schools receiving letters through the AMCAS Letters Program you will need to fill out the Letters of Evaluation section on the AMCAS application, print out the AMCAS Letter Request form, and provide it to HPPLC.
2. **DENTAL SCHOOL ONLY: AADSAS Letter of Evaluation Matching Form.** Letters may be transmitted to AADSAS either electronically or by paper. If you would like to have your letters sent by postal mail you will need to print out a Letter of Evaluation Matching Form from your AADSAS application and turn it in to HPPLC. You only need to give HPPLC one copy of this form and you do not need to provide your individual evaluators with a copy of it.
3. **OPTOMETRY SCHOOL ONLY: OPTOMCAS Recommendation Request Form.** Recommendations are sent to optometry schools through the OPTOMCAS application. Many optometry school applicants currently choose to have their recommenders submit their recommendations electronically directly through the OPTOMCAS application system, rather than using the HPPLC recommendation service. If you have recommendations in your HPPLC file that you would like us to send to OPTOMCAS for you, then you will need to provide each of your recommenders a copy of the OPTOMCAS form printed out from your OPTOMCAS application, ask the recommender to complete Part I (the ranking section), and send the OPTOMCAS paper form to HPPLC. We can then include the OPTOMCAS paper forms along with the recommendations when we send them to OPTOMCAS. Please consult with a HPPLC advisor for more information.
4. **PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAMS ONLY:** Requirements vary with each program. Please refer to the HPPLC handout, "Additional Letter of Recommendation Information For Physician Assistant Programs." In addition, check the specific website for each individual program for the latest requirements, and be sure to make an appointment to meet with a HPPLC advisor to make sure you apply correctly.
5. **PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAMS ONLY:** Requirements vary with each program. Please check the specific website for each individual program for the latest requirements, review the relevant HPPLC publication concerning appropriate procedures, and be sure to make an appointment to meet with a HPPLC advisor to make sure you apply correctly.

CHOOSING WHETHER OR NOT TO WAIVE YOUR RIGHT TO READ YOUR LETTERS:

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 gives you the right of access to an evaluation written about you; it also allows you to give up that right. You alone must make the decision. The advisors at HPPLC generally recommend that you consider waiving your right of access to your recommendations. Two factors support this suggestion. First, some admission committee members believe that a recommendation from an open file may not be candidly written and therefore give less credence to such recommendations. Second, some recommenders also prefer that their letters remain confidential, even when they are filled with glowing praise. However, the decision is entirely yours. If you would like to retain your right to read your letters, we suggest that you speak with a HPPLC advisor.

Open file: If you **do not waive your right**, you have chosen to exercise your legal right to see your recommendations. This may be done only **in person** in the HPPLC office. We cannot provide you with hard copies, faxes, or read the letter to you over the phone.

Closed file: If you **waive your legal right** to see your recommendations, you may never legally gain access to the letters from your HPPLC file.

You should make your decision before the recommender writes the recommendation. Each form has a place for you to indicate whether you waive your right of access or not. If you intend to waive your right, you should indicate so on the form and complete that section before giving the form to your recommenders.

KNOWING WHICH RECOMMENDATIONS TO SEND FROM A CLOSED FILE:

The law requires that we preserve the confidentiality of letters from a closed file. Therefore, if you have waived your right the advisors at the Center cannot tell you if any recommendation, in whole or in part, is positive or negative, “good” or “bad.” They may tell you, however, which recommendations contain information appropriate to your application; i.e., the recommender has commented on relevant characteristics and is an appropriate recommender. They may advise you on whether your file contains the appropriate number and type of recommendations for the schools to which you are applying. In light of the confidentiality requirement, you should select your recommenders carefully and only choose those who you think will write strong letters of support. Therefore, when asking for a letter, consider asking your recommenders something on the order of: “Do you feel you could write a letter to support my application?” or “Do you think my performance in class warrants a strong letter of recommendation?” **Remember, if you are using a faculty composite it must include all faculty letters in your file, and so you will not be able to exclude faculty letters from your composite. You should consider this when deciding on evaluators to ask to write recommendations.**

Do not obtain a faculty recommendation that you anticipate that you will not want to send to professional schools.

STEP 5: ASK RECOMMENDERS TO WRITE EVALUATIONS AND SEND THEM TO HPPLC

HOW TO REQUEST RECOMMENDATIONS:

We recommend that you schedule an appointment with your professor in order to discuss your request for a letter in person (it is neither polite nor wise to drop off a form without making a formal request). It is often helpful to explain to the professor your reasons for asking him or her for a recommendation (you learned a lot in the course; you excelled in the course; you enjoyed writing the paper that he/she really liked, etc.). If you are not sure about whether to rely on the professor for a letter, you may wish to ask, “Do you feel you could write a letter to support my application?” Provide an opening for your professor to give you feedback or politely decline. It is often a good idea to speak to the professors you have gotten to know and are considering for recommendations before the end of the class. If by midterms you have excelled in a class and you are considering asking a professor you have gotten to know for a recommendation, you may wish to go to him/her and say, “I may be interested in asking you to write a letter of recommendation at the end of the class, if you would be willing.” That way the professor will know that you may be asking for a letter at the end of the class and he/she can make more effort to get to know you further. You could also ask a professor at any time, “Professor, what would be your expectations before you would write a letter of recommendation for a student?” This is a good way to open up the topic and find out the professor’s general expectations and policy on writing recommendations for students.

Once a professor has agreed to write a letter of recommendation, you should provide a packet of information about yourself. You may wish to include a draft of your personal statement, a resume, and exemplary examples of your papers or project reports. HPPLC provides a "Recommendation Request Letter" document that provides guidelines on what kind of information to provide for your recommenders.

Your recommenders should compose a generic letter that can be sent to all schools where you are applying. They should use a generic salutation in the letter such as “To Whom It May Concern” and avoid reference to any specific school (for instance, they should not address the letter to the “IU School of Medicine” so that the letter may be sent to other medical schools).

Finally, make sure to send your professor a thank you note (hardcopy or e-mail) for taking the time to support your professional endeavors.

On-Campus Recommenders: If your recommenders are on an Indiana University campus, provide them with HPPLC's preaddressed Campus Mail envelopes.

Off-Campus Recommenders: If your recommenders are not on an Indiana University campus, provide them with a stamped, pre-addressed business size envelope.

AVOID PROBLEMS: GIVE YOUR EVALUATORS SUFFICIENT TIME TO WRITE

One of the most consistent problems applicants encounter is a delay in sending their letters to the schools because HPPLC has not yet received them. Begin accumulating recommendations long before you actually need them. Many recommenders have heavy course and workloads and will not be able to write your recommendation immediately. **Please read the section on Priority Deadlines for Composite Letters for Applicants to Medical and Dental Schools and plan accordingly.** *Allow one to six months or more for the recommendation to arrive in your file.* Double-check your file to make sure all letters have arrived. If not, a *tactful reminder* to the recommender can be quite helpful. If an evaluator cannot fulfill your request in a timely manner you may need to consider a different evaluator.

STEP 6: MED AND DENTAL APPLICANTS: IF YOU WOULD LIKE A FACULTY COMPOSITE SUBMIT A REQUEST TO HPPLC BY THE PRIORITY DEADLINE

FACULTY COMPOSITE (The IU version of the PREDENTAL or PREMEDICAL COMMITTEE LETTER):

Many medical schools will request a premedical faculty committee or premedical advisors' letter. Indiana University Bloomington satisfies this requirement by creating the premedical faculty composite. A composite is a compilation of all your faculty recommendations into one document. Predental students may also request a faculty composite from HPPLC, although fewer dental schools may request it.

The Premedical Composite consists of a compilation of all of the faculty recommendations in your file. **ALL faculty letters in the student's file are included.** Faculty comments are not edited and all comments of the recommenders are included. This format sometimes provides a better overview of the applicant's abilities, interests, and commitments because it reflects the perspectives of more individuals. Some of the individual letters of recommendation obtained from science classes at large universities tend to be general and brief, but in the composite a greater number of perspectives is provided to fill out a fuller picture of the applicant. The applicant needs enough letters to make the composite worthwhile and not so many as to have comments become redundant. The minimum number of letters for a composite is three; it can sometimes be helpful to have from four to six letters. At the student's request personal recommendations may be included in the same mailing as the faculty composite.

PRIORITY DEADLINE FOR FACULTY COMPOSITE LETTER REQUESTS: 4:00 PM, June 15, 2011

To meet the priority deadline, you must submit a "Request to Create Faculty Composite" form to the HPPLC office by 4:00 PM, June 15.

Before you can submit the "Request to Create Faculty Composite" form, you have to be sure of the following:

1. All faculty letters (minimum of 3 required) that you wish to include in the composite have arrived at HPPLC. (Remember, the composite must contain ALL faculty letters in your file!)
2. EACH faculty letter must be accompanied by a signed HPPLC waiver form.

3. EACH faculty letter must also be signed by the recommender.

When your file is complete as specified in 1-3 above, you may then submit the form "Request to Create Faculty Composite Letter." To meet the priority deadline, this form must be received at the HPPLC office by 4:00 PM, June 15.

The form may be dropped off in person or sent by fax at 812.856.2770. Note: we cannot hold the request form pending the future receipt of letters, waiver forms, or signatures.

While the recommendation service does its best to process all requests ASAP, please realize that due to summer scheduling requirements we are at times forced to operate with less than a full staff. If you fail to meet the deadline for whatever reason your letters will not be processed until after all composite requests that did meet the deadline are processed. This means that if you do not meet the deadline your letters may not be processed until fall semester (depending on the total volume of requests we receive).

PLEASE give your writers at least six to eight weeks' notice. This means that ideally you should initiate discussions with your professors about writing recommendations by mid-April. Note that even if your letters arrive on time but are unsigned, or are not accompanied by a signed waiver form, the deadline has NOT been met. Do not wait until the last minute – please allow sufficient time to detect and correct such errors **by June 15.**

*HPPLC tries to catch all errors and omissions as letters and waivers are received. However, due to the volume of mail this is not always possible. **It is your responsibility to make sure that your file is complete by June 15.***

You may request that the faculty composite be sent to your schools only AFTER you have been notified that the faculty composite has been created (by submitting a separate "Request for Letters to be Sent" form).

STEP 7: MAKE SURE YOUR LETTERS/COMPOSITE ARE READY TO BE SENT

CHECKING YOUR HPPLC FILE:

You must monitor your file to keep track of letters received. It is HPPLC policy to attempt to email you to let you know when a letter is received for your file or your composite has been prepared (assuming you have a valid email address). **It is your responsibility to contact us to determine if a letter is in your file.** You should check on the status of your file by either sending an email message to **recserve@indiana.edu**, calling HPPLC at 812.855.1873, or coming to the office in person. You may also meet with an advisor to review your file once it is complete to receive some advice about your letters and application submission.

STEP 8: REQUEST TO SEND RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCHOOLS

WHEN SHOULD YOU REQUEST YOUR LETTERS TO BE SENT TO THE SCHOOLS?

Recommendation letters for most health professions schools are sent as part of a supplemental or secondary application after you complete your primary application through the appropriate processing service. **You must refer to the specific instructions in the appropriate HPPLC document for your area for more information about when and how to submit your letters for your specific area of interest.** Please do not request that HPPLC send your letters to professional schools until you have reviewed these instructions, as many schools do not want you to send letters until they invite you to do so along with their secondary application.

HOW DO YOU REQUEST THAT LETTERS BE SENT TO THE SCHOOLS/APPLICATION PROCESSING SERVICES?

HPPLC will NOT automatically send your letters where they need to go. Your signed authorization is required to do that. After you have made sure that your letters/composite are in your file and are ready to be sent, you should then submit the "Request for Recommendations to be Sent" form to HPPLC. This form can be hand delivered, mailed, or faxed to the HPPLC office. To preserve your legal rights and for our records, telephone and email requests to send out letters will not be accepted.

Fill out one request form for each mailing (whether through an electronic system or by postal mail). If you are requesting that we send your letters to a school, give the complete name and address of the school. Specify which recommendations (by writers' names) you want sent, even when requesting a faculty composite. Please write a current address or telephone number on your request, so we will be able to reach you if necessary.

If you are requesting letters to be sent through an application processing service you may also need to submit a form from the service or follow additional procedures (please refer to "Step 4" in this guide and the application instructions in the HPPLC guide for your professional area).

Warning: Requests to send letters can only be made for letters actually in your file at the time the request is made. ***HPPLC cannot hold your request pending the future receipt of a letter, waiver form, or signature. If you submit a "Request Form" to send letters that are not in your file, in whole or in part, the entire request will be considered void and the form will be destroyed. It is your responsibility to make sure that your file is complete before the request is made.***

It can take up to 10 business days to process your request and send your letters at peak processing times. In addition, special priority deadlines pertain to composites. You should allow time for your composite to be prepared and then up to an additional 10 business days for it to be sent after you submit your request to have it sent.

PLEASE REMEMBER: We only send recommendations to professional schools and specific scholarship internship or research addresses. We do not send recommendations to individuals or personal addresses. A copy of the scholarship announcement and a telephone number of the organization must accompany any off-campus scholarship requests. **All letters remain the property of HPPLC and cannot be released to students at any time, under any circumstances.**

STEP 9: VERIFY WITH SCHOOLS THAT RECOMMENDATIONS WERE RECEIVED

Approximately two weeks after HPPLC has sent your letters call the school to be sure the school received them. Professional schools consider it to be your responsibility to make sure that your letters have been received and your application is complete.

MAINTENANCE OF FILES: HPPLC retains original recommendations in your file for ten (10) years after the file is opened, unless you request that they be kept longer. If you wish to have a recommendation letter removed from your file, you must make a written request. The letter will be returned to the original author.

RECOMMENDATION POLICY UPDATES: Information of immediate importance (deadlines to submit requests before holidays, changes in policy, etc.) will be communicated through email. Students with a recommendation file **MUST** maintain a current subscription to the relevant HPPLC email listserv. Please be sure we have your **current** email address and that you keep your e-mail account under quota.

This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.
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