LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Why do medical schools/professional schools require letters of recommendation?

Put yourself in the shoes of someone on Creighton's medical school admissions committee. From each applicant you have an AMCAS application containing the applicant's 1) academic record (with overall and science/math GPAs calculated), 2) MCAT scores, 3) listing of extracurricular activities, honors, etc., and 4) a personal statement (the applicant's motivation and readiness to enter medical school, in the applicant's own words).

After reading an application, questions arise in the mind of the admissions committee member. Were these "easy" A grades, or were these challenging courses? Was the applicant truly engaged intellectually, or just doing what was required in order to get the grade? Did the applicant develop skills in listening, writing, speaking, problem solving, critical thinking, etc.? How did the applicant interact with other people? Did the applicant seem self-centered, or genuinely interested in helping others? Did the applicant come to class on-time and prepared to learn? Did the applicant persevere when the going got tough? Did the applicant seem happy in class, on the job, etc.?

Your professors, and certain other individuals, are able to provide some of the information needed by an admissions committee member seeking a more complete, accurate "picture" of who you are. Good letters of recommendation, from people who know your many important strengths as well as your relatively minor weaknesses, will ensure that you are given every possible consideration for admission.

Whom should I ask to write letters?

If at all possible, your evaluators should be people who know you well and support your interest in medicine. Normally evaluators should not be relatives, nor any one else who might be unable to provide an "unbiased" evaluation.

Creighton (like many other medical schools) wants at least three letters from professors, two natural science professors and one non-science professor. If you have any questions concerning whether a professor would be considered "science" or "non-science," feel free to call the medical admissions office and ask. An additional (fourth) letter is often helpful, particularly if a supervisor of your work or research (volunteer or paid) is able to write it. If you have had a strong clinical or shadowing experience this might be another source for a letter, if needed.

Sometimes students feel that they don't know any of their science professors well enough. As long as the other letters are from professors who know you pretty well, it's ok to have a letter from a science professor who taught you in a large class. If nothing else, professors can always describe the level and content of the course, and comment on how thoughtful and well-organized you were in providing them information.

How and when should I arrange for letters of recommendation?

If you are currently a Junior, NOW is the time!

Get the process started as soon as possible, preferably by January in the spring semester of your junior year (or about 19 months before the August in which you want to start medical school). Don't count on being able to contact faculty in the summer or during vacation periods.

NOTE: Communication between you and a Pre-Health Advisor is essential from this point on, especially if you have not been in contact with a Pre-Health advisor before now. If you need help locating a Pre-Health Advisor, check with the Advising Resource Center for further assistance. But, don't forget – SEE AN ADVISOR SOON!