LETTERS PACKET PREPARATION

PREPARATION OF THE LETTERS PACKET

Following the completion/submission of all components contained in the Letters Packet application forms (i.e., Introduction, Background Information and Headshot Photo Upload, the required reading of the Letters Packet Instructions and Application Guidelines, Statement of Agreement, Waiver/Non-Waiver Indication, Letters of Evaluation (LOE) Request List, Schools and Application Service ID Number(s), and optional Autobiography), followed by the eventual receipt of all of your individual letters of evaluation, the resulting completed Letters Packet will be electronically submitted as one .pdf document to your application service (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, and/or AACPMAS).

ELIGIBILITY

An Overall GPA of 3.0 or better is needed to qualify for the Letters Packet service. One additional important eligibility requirement for the Letters Packet is that an applicant must have completed or will complete at least 30 credit hours of academic credit at UCF by Spring 2019.

DUE DATES

Your goal is to submit your Letters Packet application forms to PHPL Advising ASAP. Again this year, we staggered the due dates in an effort to help you aim for an early submission date. The Gold Zone submission deadline is May 15th, the Silver Zone submission deadline is June 17th, and the final Bronze Zone submission deadline is August 1st. Any applicant unable to complete the Letters Packet application forms by August 1st must apply independently. Your actual letters of evaluation from your letter writers do not need to be received by August 1st, but you should encourage them to submit their letters as early as they possibly can. Remember, your Letters Packet will not be uploaded to your application service until ALL of your letters are received in PHPL Advising.

RE-APPLICANTS

If you have previously submitted a Letters Packet to PHPL Advising, and therefore have existing letters of evaluation on file with us that you may wish to reuse, it is still required that you complete a new set of Letters Packet application forms for the current application cycle. The final deadline of August 1st for the Letters Packet application forms applies to all re-applicants, as well.

To submit a Letters Packet as a reapplicant, go to PHPL Advising’s website (phpladvising.ucf.edu) and complete the current Letters Packet application. The only portion that you will not have to fill out in its entirety is the Letters of Evaluation (LOE) Request List, unless you are going to have PHPL Advising request a new evaluation on your behalf. It is your choice whether to reuse or replace any or all of your letters, but keep in mind the maximum number that PHPL Advising is able to include in your completed Letters Packet is five (5). Some reapplicants choose to replace a letter writer depending on additional coursework they’ve taken over the past year. If this is not the case for you, and you choose to use the same letter(s) from a previous cycle, simply type the evaluator’s name on the Letters of Evaluation (LOE) Request List and indicate that you will be “USING LETTER ON FILE.”
If you have questions about this, contact Chauntrice at (407) 823-0101 or criley@ucf.edu.

FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA)

FERPA provides you with an interesting choice/tradeoff decision regarding your letters of evaluation in your Letters Packet. First, it provides you with the **right of access** to your evaluation letters and complete applicant file (housed in PHPL Advising, in this case). On the surface, **RETAINING** your right to view your letters might seem appealing because it would eliminate any suspense or uncertainty of what your letter writers wrote about you. However, you need to realize that your choice (which must be indicated to all parties contributing letters to your Letters Packet) may invite an abbreviated or shallower letter by your letter writer in order to avoid any possible conflict, emotional confrontation, blame, or accusations should you be rejected.

On the other hand, by **WAIVING** your right, you surrender your access and will not be permitted to examine the content of your Letters Packet. You now must live with the uncertainty, curiosity, etc. All authors of letters of evaluation forwarded for your file are free to express their feelings about your strengths and weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, mannerisms, personality traits, work ethic, maturity, integrity, emotional stability, etc., without the threat of possible challenge to their observations and opinions. You should, therefore, know your evaluators well, and vice versa, before asking for their letters of support.

In general, 99% of the content of letters is benign-to-positive. It is seldom that damaging information is recorded in this manner. Occasionally, a letter of evaluation writer will write a less than supportive letter. In the final analysis, the choice is yours! However, when you make the choice, you must be consistent. You can expect to see forms addressing this issue in all of your application materials. While rare, some institutions will not offer you a choice.

One final note...admissions committees have rights, also. Some may choose not to deal with letters and inputs that are not confidential.

**LETTERS OF EVALUATION WRITERS**

We suggest that you solicit letters from three (3) populations for five (5) total letters to be used in PHPL Advising’s Letters Packet:

- **2 Science Faculty Members** (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics)
- **1 Non-Science Member** (All Other Disciplines Not Listed Above)
- **2 Other/Character References**

The three (3) faculty (2 Science, 1 Non-Science) letters of evaluation must be completed in a letter format written on institutional letterhead, signed, and mailed/ emailed/delivered to PHPL Advising when completed. The two (2) other/character letters of evaluation may be obtained from a broad variety of sources (e.g., employers, research supervisors, health professionals, etc.) and are to be completed on their letterhead, signed, and mailed/ emailed/delivered to PHPL Advising as well. In order for the letters to avoid contact with you, the applicant, all
letters of evaluation will be officially requested from the letter writers by PHPL Advising and submitted directly from the letter writers to PHPL Advising.

As the applicant, you identify your letter writers on the Letters of Evaluation (LOE) Request List (after you have discussed with them and they have agreed to write you a letter), and we will send them a standardized cover letter either via email (or regular mail, if needed) to solicit their letter of evaluation for you. In this cover letter, we will address some of the qualities we would like them to comment on, and with an open invitation, to describe you as they see fit. The received letters of evaluation will be scanned and will become a part of the Letters Packet sent to your designated list of schools.

Remember, it is your responsibility to follow-up on your letters of evaluation and to ensure your Letters Packet is completed in a timely fashion. Checking regularly on the return of completed letters of evaluation in PHPL Advising (preferably through our webcourse) is encouraged. If needed, inquiries by phone or in-person should not exceed once per week, but are also acceptable.

The individuals who will be writing letters on your behalf will be made aware of your choice about whether to waive or retain your right of access (regarding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA]) in our cover letter to them, so they will be aware of your choice before submitting their letter to us.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY (OPTIONAL)**

PHPL Advising suggests that the Autobiography section of the Letters Packet should be used to describe yourself in a “uniquely you” style. Please remember that the Autobiography is about three pages (11,000 characters with spaces). You must be concise, yet accurate and sufficiently detailed. Your Autobiography may be single or double-spaced (your preference).

If you have any questions about the preparation of your Autobiography, please contact PHPL Advising at (407) 823-0101 or phpladvising@ucf.edu for editing assistance.

We would like to share a quote from a few recently-accepted applicants to medical school who used PHPL Advising’s Letters Packet and chose to write the optional Autobiography.

“I think doing the autobiography on my letters packet was an excellent decision and highly recommend other students to do it even though it is more work. Two out of three of my interviews asked me about things I mentioned in my autobiography and it helped them get to know me better.”
- J. Rodriguez, 2016

“During my first medical school interview, the first question asked of me during my actual interview was about information that I included in my Autobiography and nowhere else in my application – The interviewer asked about my father’s profession (he is a professional guitar player in a band in Puerto Rico). Because of my interviewer’s interest in music, it was a great way to connect with him on a personal level! Without writing and including the Autobiography, I would not have been able to share this meaningful information about my upbringing.”
- E. Blanco, 2018
“One of my interviewers brought up my autobiography, and she said it was a very unique piece that is not commonly seen in applications and that allowed her to know me better. In fact, during the interview she asked a couple of questions about it. She also mentioned that it was well put together and that the presentation was really nice, and for that I have to thank you.”
- A. Guevara, 2018

Differences: Autobiography vs. Personal Statement

It is imperative to note that the Autobiography is NOT simply an expansion of your personal statement. Therefore, you should avoid overlapping the exact same information in the exact same way in both the personal statement and autobiography; you want two, separate, individual works. In general, the following guidelines will help to differentiate the purpose of the two and will give a basic idea of what to include (you are not restricted to the information and topics):

**Autobiography:**

- **Prompt:** Basically, the Autobiography asks you to “Tell the story of your life.” *This document has a very broad scope.*
- **What to consider:**
  - Create a timeline. (What stands out to you during each of these time periods?)
    - When/where were you born? And to whom?
    - Early childhood events
    - Middle childhood
    - College years
- Your life story: hobbies, childhood, school, influences/inspirations
- Demonstrate, with events, the person you have become.
- Focus on experiences up until entering college, though you can include some college experiences as well.
- If you choose to include information in your Autobiography that is also in your application or personal statement, be sure it is presented differently in your Autobiography. In other words, do not copy and paste, or repeat the same experiences in the same exact way, in each.
- Often times, applicants use the Autobiography to elaborate in more depth on their journey from birth to now.

**Personal Statement (General):**

- **Prompt:** In general, why do you want to become a doctor (for AMCAS and ACOMAS), dentist (for AADSAS), or podiatrist (for AACPMAS)? *This document has a narrow scope.*
- Which of your experiences (academic, extracurricular, or life experiences) will best demonstrate that you are well prepared to become a doctor/dentist/podiatrist?
- Choose your 2-3 most significant reasons/experiences and elaborate
- Choose characteristics/experiences that will highlight that you are a good candidate
- Make the reader feel your passion through your characteristics, qualities, and your drive for continuous learning
- Read through the documents about writing a personal statement on the PHPL Advising Personal Statements webpage
• Do NOT:
  o Simply list your experiences as you would on a resume
  o Try to include everything you have done; be thoughtful with what you choose to write about

PHOTOGRAPH

To help us put your name with your face, you are asked to upload a photograph of yourself on the appropriate page within the Letters Packet application forms. This photograph will not be forwarded to any schools, but is simply for our use in recalling your identity. The photo should be mainly of your head and face and your appearance should be professional. Appropriate “selfies” are acceptable because it is just for our use.

AMCAS LETTERS PACKET DESIGNATION INSTRUCTIONS
(Disregard if NOT applying via AMCAS to M.D. programs)

In the AMCAS Letters of Evaluation section:

STEP 1: Select “Add Letter of Evaluation/Recommendation”

STEP 2: Choose “Letter Packet” as the type of letter being forwarded to AMCAS.

STEP 3: Enter Letter Title: UCF Letters Packet

STEP 4: Select School: University of Central Florida

STEP 5: Primary Contact/Author:
  a) Prefix: Dr.
     First Name: Erin
     Last Name: Myszkowski
     Title: Director, Pre-Health & Pre-Law Advising
     Organization Name: University of Central Florida
     Address: 12796 Aquarius Agora Drive
     Address 2: Trevor Colbourn Hall 205
     Country: United States
     State: Florida
     City: Orlando
     Zip Code: 32816
     Phone: 407-823-0101
     Email: ErinM@ucf.edu
     Select “Save”

  b) Do you want to generate the Letters Request Form now? Select “Yes”

STEP 6: Either 1) Save the Letter Request Form and E-mail it to criley@ucf.edu or 2) Print the Letter Request Form and turn it in to Chauntrice Riley-Stanford in PHPL Advising. NOTE: This step is ESSENTIAL in order for the letters we send to be matched properly to your AMCAS application.

STEP 7: Assign letters of evaluation to medical schools. Before you can designate letters to be received by medical schools, you must first add the medical schools to your AMCAS Application.
AACOMAS LETTERS PACKET DESIGNATION INSTRUCTIONS
(Disregard if NOT applying via AACOMAS to osteopathic medical schools)

In the AACOMAS “Supporting Information” section:

STEP 1: Select “Evaluations”

STEP 2: Select “Create Evaluation Request”

STEP 3: Fill in Evaluator’s Information as follows:

Are you requesting a committee evaluation: YES
(Note: we know UCF has a Letters Packet and not a committee evaluation, but our Letters Packet is closer to a committee evaluation than to an individual letter, so it makes sense to select “Yes”)

First Name: Erin
Last Name: Myszkowski
Email Address: ErinM@ucf.edu
Due Date: Enter an arbitrary date 4-8 weeks in the future, but know that this date is not a firm deadline for letter submission. Because you are using the UCF Letters Packet, Chauntrice will upload your letters to AACOMAS after all of your letters are received in PHPL Advising.

Personal Message to Your Evaluator: Type in “Letters Packet Request”

Waiver of Evaluation: “I waive my right of access to this evaluation”: Click the appropriate box. (99.9% of you will select “Yes”).
(Note: This choice must match your selection on the Waiver/Non-Waiver Indication form in your Letters Packet application that you submitted to PHPL Advising).

Permission to Contact Reference: Click on the box to allow

Permission for Schools to Contact Reference: Click on the box to allow

AADSAS LETTERS PACKET DESIGNATION INSTRUCTIONS
(Disregard if NOT applying via AADSAS to dental programs)

In the AADSAS “Supporting Information” section:

STEP 1: Select “Evaluations”

STEP 2: Select “Request an Evaluation”

STEP 3: Fill in Evaluator’s Information as follows:

Are you requesting a committee evaluation: YES
(Note: we know UCF has a Letters Packet and not a committee evaluation, but our Letters Packet is closer to a committee evaluation than to an individual letter, so it makes sense to select “Yes”)
First Name: Erin

Last Name: Myszkowski

Email Address: ErinM@ucf.edu

Due Date: Enter an arbitrary date 4-8 weeks in the future, but know that this date is not a firm deadline for letter submission. Because you are using the UCF Letters Packet, Chauntrice will upload your letters to AADSAS after all of your letters are received in PHPL Advising.

Personal Message to Your Evaluator: Type in “Letters Packet Request”

Waiver of Evaluation: “I waive my right of access to this evaluation”: Click the appropriate box. (99.9% of you will select “Yes”).
(Note: This choice must match your selection on the Waiver/Non-Waiver Indication form in your Letters Packet application that you submitted to PHPL Advising).

Permission to Contact Reference: Click on the box to allow

Permission for Schools to Contact Reference: Click on the box to allow

PLEASE NOTE: For ALL centralized application services (AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS and ACPMAS), the applicant may, and are often encouraged to, submit their application PRIOR to their letters of evaluation being fully received and submitted to your application service by PHPL Advising.