

Admissions Research: Using your Secondary Application and/or Interviews to Assess a Motivational Relationship Between Applicant Experiences and Attributes and Systemic Societal Inequities and Injustices



Background

Many people would agree that our society faces a historical moment addressing a multitude of systemic injustices and inequities, especially as it affects communities identified by race/ethnicity, religion, gender identification, and sexual orientation. Many examples involve violence instigated by those who internalize extreme conscious/unconscious biases. Other examples are less obvious, but in many ways equally harmful, based on laws and accepted systemic values imposed by our society on these communities. And with our recent pandemic, inequities in health care are more publicly evident and pronounced.

Early in 2020, several admissions deans contacted the GSA Committee on Admissions (COA) to request a community conversation about the role of social justice, advocacy, and civic engagement in medical school admissions processes. Per the United Nations, “three critical domains make up the philosophical tenets of social justice: 1) equality of rights, 2) equality of opportunities, and 3) equity in living conditions for all.” As defined by the Merriam Webster, advocacy is “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.” And per the American Psychological Society, civic engagement is defined as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.” In response to evident interest in the admissions community, COA surveyed medical school admissions deans and shared the results with the AMCAS Advisory Committee. According to survey results, 45% of respondents indicated their admissions processes place a high level of importance on applicant involvement, engagement, and experience in advocacy and social justice issues, and 69% supported the addition of “Advocacy and Social Justice Experiences” as a categorical option within the activities sections of the AMCAS application. As health care-driven institutions continue to assess the impact of societal injustices, medical schools may look to their admissions policies and processes to help address complex and complicated solutions within their respective communities.

After a workshop at the 2021 AAMC GSA-OSR Spring Meeting, an ad hoc working group of U.S. medical school admissions and diversity deans was convened to further explore the value medical schools place on advocacy and social justice and how this is ascertained and assessed during the admissions process. In support of this initiative, this resource is intended to enable schools to develop secondary application and/or interview questions for assessing a motivational relationship between 1) applicant experiences and attributes and 2) systemic societal inequities and injustices.

Request from the Ad Hoc Working Group to the Admissions Community

In the aforementioned survey, 58% of respondents were unsure if their admissions process would change to provide additional (new or existing) weighted consideration to applicants with whom these issues play a prominent role in pursuing medicine. We hope the following questions will help admissions officers determine if they can and want to pursue these issues within their institutions. The questions are broad and enable applicants to share information with relevant self-reflection and self-awareness within a context of motivation

towards improved equity of health care in our society. We are interested in hearing about your experience and insights using these questions. If you choose to ask a question from or inspired by this list, look for an opportunity to share your thoughts (pros/cons/unanticipated outcomes) with our working group later in the fall of 2021. Additionally, if you have any questions or feedback in the interim, please contact coa@aamc.org.

Example Questions

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified systemic societal inequities and injustices starting in February of 2020. It affected applicants in a variety of ways, including one's motivation and vision towards a more equitable delivery of health care in our society. As such, we would encourage them to tell their stories as they would in any other area of the application and in consultation with pre-health advisors and other experienced mentors. The following are examples of questions that could be added to secondary applications and/or interview to help facilitate their narratives. We hope they are helpful as you consider and create your question(s) for the upcoming 2022 application cycle. As always, we advise consulting with your institutional general counsel before formalizing your plans.

- Describe a personal activity that addresses advocacy, social justice, and/or civic engagement as it relates to improving health and/or related social inequities.
- Describe a personal activity involving advocacy, social justice, and/or civic engagement that has impacted your personal values about delivering equitable patient care.
- Describe how contemporary issues involving advocacy and/or social justice have impacted your motivation to attend medical school.
- Tell us about any personal experiences related to advocacy, social justice, and/or civic engagement that could help us understand you better.
- What are some ways that race and racism can impact health? What personal experiences helped you to formulate this view?
- How would you incorporate cultural humility when interacting with a patient or a team member?
- Use the space below for anything you might wish to discuss related to advocacy and/or social justice addressing social inequities. Possible topics might include, for example: your biggest lessons and insights on the relationship between disease and disparities, ways in which you've been able to advocate for marginalized communities in the face of health inequities, or hardships you've seen or experienced in public health.
- Reflecting upon recent events in American society over the last five years, what did you learn most about yourself? How has that affected your outlook on the role of medicine?
- Share with us your reflections on, experiences with, and greatest lessons learned about systemic racism.
- Describe a conversation you have had with someone regarding COVID-19 and racial injustices.
- Clinical outcomes are often the downstream outcome of broader policies that impact health inequities. How can public health policy impact a community- for better or worse?
- Considering recent American societal events, what adjustments would you see as necessary and beneficial to the delivery of health care?
- Describe an experience you've had engaging in advocacy, social justice, or civic engagement.
- Black and brown mothers have significantly higher rates of maternal mortality than other races, regardless of income or education. What responsibilities, if any, do you believe medical schools have in addressing these disparities?