



PennState
Eberly College of Science

2021

FOR 2022 MATRICULATION

GUIDE TO OBTAINING A LETTER PACKET, LETTERS OF EVALUATION, AND VECOLLECT

PLEASE READ ALL INFORMATION THOROUGHLY FOR
INSTRUCTIONS

PREHEALTH ADVISING

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INTRODUCTION

The Health Pre-professions Advising Committee is designed to assist Penn State undergraduate students and alumni in the process of preparing for application to medical, dental, podiatry, and optometry schools. The committee, composed of numerous faculty and advisors from various colleges within the University, conduct Comprehensive Interviews for students applying to health profession schools and offer students feedback on their application materials.

What is a comprehensive interview?

Within this interview, applicants can expect to receive valuable and specific feedback on their candidacy. The interviewer will work with the student to understand and present their weaknesses and highlight their strengths. This interview will also serve as a mock interview for health professions programs. It is not required by Penn State that students complete a comprehensive interview, but most students find the process helpful to developing a competitive application.

The goals of the comprehensive interview are the following:

- Help you provide context in terms of your experience, accomplishments, and our institution
- Discuss ways to address weaknesses of your application
- Help you tell your story to add an additional dimension to your candidacy
- Identify your personal strengths and help you highlight them in your application
- Provide additional assistance in navigating health professional applications
- Provide comprehensive prehealth advising to support strong decision making in relation to the application process

Professionalism

It is imperative to your reputation as a candidate (and to the health professional admissions officers) that you adhere to standards of professional behavior. These standards center on your ability to behave in a respectful and organized manner during all aspects of the application process.

This includes approaching evaluators, providing them with information and instructions, and expressing appreciation for their efforts. This extends to all members of the Health Pre-Professions Advising Committee, and all members and staff of the Prehealth Advising Office.

Please follow-up with your evaluators if/when you have decided which health professional program you plan to attend, so they know the results of their efforts.

When preparing for the comprehensive interview and medical school interviews, please review standards for professional attire on the Career Services website: <http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/students/interviewing.shtml>

Application Systems

AMCAS: American Medical College Application Service (allopathic medicine)

AACOMAS: American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service

AADSAS: Associated American Dental Schools Application Service

OPTOMCAS: Optometry Centralized Application Service

AACPMAS: American Association of Colleges of Podiatric Medicine Application Service

TMDSAS: Texas Medical & Dental Schools Application Services

Timeline

January 22, 2021 – Priority Portfolio Deadline

- Applicants completing the Health Professions Portfolio prior to this deadline will be given first priority in scheduling a Comprehensive Interview before they submit their application.
- Applicants must have any 3 letters of recommendation submitted in veCollect. Students are encouraged to have 2 science faculty letters and 1 non-science faculty letter.*

April 15, 2021 – Regular Portfolio Deadline

- Applicants completing the Health Professions Portfolio prior to this deadline will be scheduled for a Comprehensive Interview before June 10.
- Applicants must have any 2 letters of recommendation submitted in veCollect. At least one of these letters should be from a science faculty member.*

June 1, 2021 – Final Portfolio Deadline

- Applicants completing the Health Professions Portfolio prior to this deadline will be scheduled for a Comprehensive Interview before August 15, but not necessarily before they submit their application.
- Applicants must have at least 2 science faculty, 1 non-science faculty letter submitted in veCollect.*

**For a final application, candidates must have 2 science faculty letters, 1 non-science faculty letter and up to 3 additional letters. Please see the portfolio for further suggestions.*

PRE- COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

An applicant wishing to obtain a cover letter and comprehensive interview from the Health Sciences Pre-Professional Evaluation Committee will need to complete the following items before scheduling an interview.

- _____ veCollect account paid and FERPA statement signed (\$50 non-refundable fee)**
 (*view Step 1 of “2. How to collect your letters of recommendation below”)
Chrome cannot be used to make the payment. Please use an alternate browser – FireFox works well.
- _____ Evaluator Record established within veCollect and letters of recommendation collected****
 (*view Step 2 of “2. How to collect your letters of recommendation below”)

List of Evaluators	Info in veCollect	Email Sent	Letter Received**
1. _____ <i>*Science Faculty # 1</i>			
2. _____ <i>*Science Faculty # 2</i>			
3. _____ <i>*Non-Science Faculty</i>			
4. _____ <i>*must be dentist if applying to dental school; DO if applying to osteopathic school</i>			
5. _____ <i>other</i>			
6. _____ <i>other</i>			
7. <u>Dr. Ronald Markle</u> <i>Cover Letter, do NOT send email requesting letter</i>	✓	✗	

* required by AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS, AACPMAS, and OPTOMCAS

** see timeline for number of letters needed to schedule comprehensive interview, as this number changes throughout the process

- _____ Complete Health Professions Portfolio**

Portfolio is completed in One Note. Please visit the following websites to request a portfolio and submit your portfolio checklist respectively. A tentative checklist can also be found within the “Content Library: Group Content” area of your Health Professions Portfolio.

Request Portfolio: <https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/health-professions-portfolio-access/>

Submit Portfolio Checklist: <https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/health-professions-comprehensive-interview-checklist/>

1: REQUIREMENTS AND STRATEGIES FOR LETTERS

Please note that in veCollect, individuals that write letters of recommendation are referred to as “Evaluators.”

How many letters do I need, and from whom?

For your letter packet, the minimum number of letters required is 3 and the maximum is 6.

Letters should be **current**, meaning they are written within the academic year of your application submission.

Health professional programs expect strong and enthusiastic letters of support. Choose writers that can speak to a number of positive character traits that the evaluator has directly observed. To adhere to standards of ethical practice and give confidence in a candidate’s letter set, applicants should encourage evaluators to submit letters on official letterhead whenever possible.

Most health professional programs, especially medical schools require letters from individuals that have *personally taught you in a course*. Therefore, you are required/recommended to obtain the following:

- 2 science faculty letters (who have taught you in science courses)
- 1 non-science faculty letter (who has taught you in a non-science course)
- 1-3 additional letters (optional)

If applying to osteopathic medical programs, you should obtain a letter from a current, practicing DO. Other relevant letters can be from a lab PI and letters of support from meaningful college experiences including, but not limited to, part-time work experiences, RA supervisors, LA/TA supervising faculty, volunteer supervisors, athletic coach, etc. If you are not sure which individuals to ask you should consult with a prehealth adviser.

Health professional programs expect that candidates will choose to **waive their right to access their letters**.

Evaluator Strategies

Faculty members’ availability may vary throughout the year. Speak to evaluators early and see when they are best able to write you a strong letter. Meet with them in person, when possible. Focus on those with whom you’ve developed a strong relationship.

When asking, **allow evaluators the option to refuse to write your letter** and do not take offense if they refuse. If they do not know you well enough, or if they are too busy, it will be a weak letter. We recommend that you bring the following to a meeting with an evaluator:

- Resumé
- Transcript (optional)
- Headshot (professional photo)
- Biosketch (Personal Statement Draft + Reasons for selecting evaluator as letter writer)
- [AAMC Guide for Letter Writers](#)
- Printout Core Competencies
 - [AAMC Core Competencies](#)
 - [Dental Core Competencies](#)

Timeline for a request

Give evaluators plenty of time to write you a strong letter of support, a minimum of 1-2 months. Aim to submit letters before June of the year that you apply, especially since many faculty may not be on campus over the summer. **You will need at least 3 letters to be submitted prior to scheduling your comprehensive interview, so you may want to request them to be submitted by the appropriate deadline (see Timeline on page 2).**

2. HOW TO COLLECT YOUR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Step 1: Receiving your veCollect Account

Pay the \$50 processing fee to receive a veCollect account. veCollect is a 3rd party service that allows applicants to collect confidential letters of recommendation for health professional programs. Our office will create your account once you have paid the fee and signed the FERPA statement.

Follow the link to sign your FERPA statement and pay. Note: **we only accept Visa or Mastercard for payments. Chrome DOES NOT work - you will need to use an alternative browser (FireFox works well!):**

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bwk6UhfZI3RCHQh


Please enter your name and the cardholder's name accurately, especially if you are using a credit card that does not match your name. This helps us match your name to your payment and prevents confusion/ delays.

Your account will be opened within 7 days of payment. Accounts will not be created/activated during official campus closures. You will receive an e-mail with instructions on how to access your account and change your password.

When you log in for the first time, you will see an evaluator and an evaluator record under Dr. Markle's name. This is where we will upload your cover letter.

Step 2: Creating an Evaluator Record

After your account has been activated, log into veCollect.

On the top left, click on "My Evaluators," then select "[Add New Evaluator.](#)" 

Required information you will need for each evaluator

- Title
 - First Name
 - Last Name
 - Address
 - City
 - State
 - Postal Code
 - E-mail
 - Phone Number

You are expected to submit 2 science and 1 non-science letter.

**Be sure you indicate which evaluators are your science and non-science letters. If your research mentor has also taught you in a science, select "Professor/Instructor—Science." If you already have two science faculty, and your research mentor is serving as an additional letter, then select "Research Mentor/Supervisor."*

Step 3: Creating a Letter Record

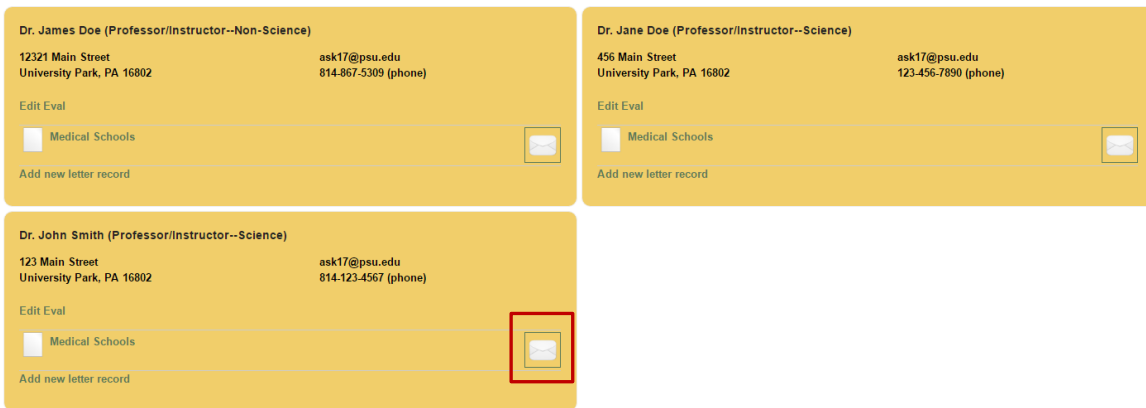
[Create New Letter Record](#)

Click on this link, which is located at the bottom of the screen after you create a new evaluator. Indicate the type of health professional program you are applying to. *If applying for both MD and DO programs, select "Medical Schools."*

You will then be directed to sign a FERPA statement. Medical schools prefer confidential letters of recommendation; therefore, we advise that you waive your right to access your letters.

Confirm your confidentiality preference by typing in your name as an electronic signature, and then select "Create Letter Record." Repeat with each evaluator.

Step 4: Requesting Letters

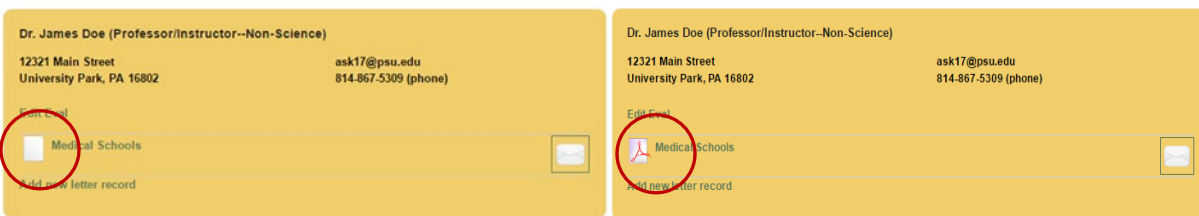


After you have met with your evaluators and they have each agreed to write you a letter, click on the envelope icon (highlighted in red above) to e-mail the electronic request.

Evaluators will receive instructions on how to upload their letters via email. This email will contain a unique link that corresponds directly to you as the applicant. To submit their letter, evaluators will reply to this email with their letter attached as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf file. **Do not e-mail Dr. Markle for your cover letter.**

After evaluators submit their letters, *it will take 1-3 business days to appear in veCollect*, as the letter will undergo a security check. Please be patient and check regularly for status updates.

When your evaluator has uploaded a letter successfully, you will see a PDF icon that indicates the letter has been uploaded:



On the left, the letter has not been received and is therefore blank. On the right, the letter has been received, and contains a .pdf icon.

Wait for all letters to be added to veCollect to make a quiver.

Step 5: Make a Quiver Titled: “Letter Packet Set”

After all letters have been received within veCollect, create a quiver.

1. At the top of the page, go to “My Quiver.”

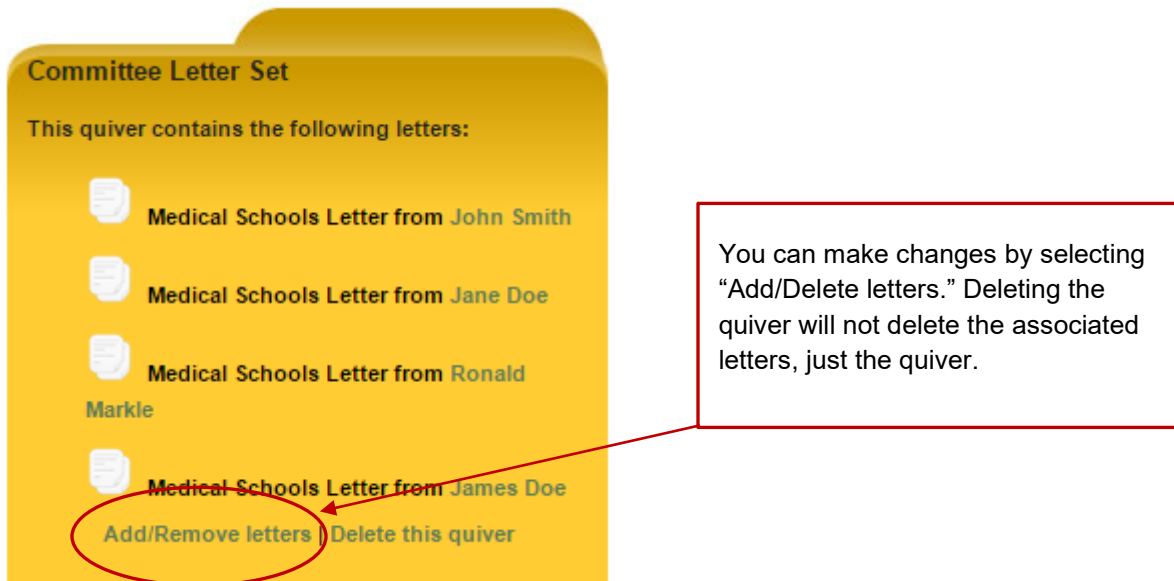
Create New Quiver

Click on this button.

2. For “Description,” name it “Letter Packet Set.”
3. Select all the letters you plan to send, including the cover letter.

The **maximum** number of letters you should have in your quiver, including your cover letter, is 7.
The **minimum** letters you should have, including your cover letter is 4.

4. When you are finished, click “Save Quiver.”



You can add and delete letters from your quiver by returning to “My Quiver,” and selecting “Add/Delete letters.” You cannot add or delete letters after you have locked your quiver.

Receiving Your Cover Letter

After you have had your comprehensive interview, the adviser that led your interview will upload your cover letter to veCollect into the evaluator spot associated with Dr. Markle. **Do not send the committee an e-mail through veCollect.**

If you do not see your cover within veCollect 3 days after your interview, please email the prehealth adviser that led your interview to remind them to upload your letter. Please exercise restraint and patience, and make sure you are **following all instructions carefully**. Please check the post-interview check list for final instructions.

3. HOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW

Follow the previous instructions for veCollect. Please use the checklist at the beginning of this packet to determine when you are ready to schedule your comprehensive interview.

Complete the Health Professions Portfolio by the dates below. **You can submit your completed Portfolio Checklist here:** <https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvicing/health-professions-comprehensive-interview-checklist/>

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Please dress professionally for comprehensive interviews. They will take 1-2 hours and will likely be conducted remotely over Zoom for the 2021-2022 application cycle. You can submit updated information at that time, including new personal statements.

Consider joining our [Health Professions Applicant Networking Canvas Page](#) to review tips on virtual interviewing within our Interview Tool Kit Module. We have offer advice on the interview itself, along with virtual professionalism, and free Penn State virtual backgrounds.

Please review guidelines on professional attire on the Career Services website:

<http://studentaffairs.psu.edu/career/students/interviewing.shtml>

4. HOW TO ENTER LETTERS INTO AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS AND OPTOMCAS

By creating the quiver, you will append all of your letters of evaluation to the cover letter as a single .pdf file and we will upload all of your letters into the appropriate application system.

The only evaluator you will need to enter into AMCAS, AACOMAS, AADSAS and OPTOMCAS will be the letter packet under the heading of Dr. Ronald Markle.

Do not enter your interviewer's information into the application systems.

Dr. Markle is the Chair of the Health Pre-Professional Advising Committee and he will review and sign all outgoing cover letters, even when they are written by other members of the committee. Pay close attention to the instructions for your application system(s), as the e-mail addresses are tied to the PSU letter packet accounts.

When applications open, you can submit your primary application even if you have not yet had your comprehensive interview. Consult a prehealth adviser to determine the best time to submit your application if you have not yet interviewed, and it is after the application is able to be submitted. *Submitted applications go through a verification process that can take several weeks—this process can be completed without your letters and/or MCAT score. An early application is a strategic advantage, but we also want it to be as strong as possible before submitting.*

AMCAS (MD Schools):

- “Letters of Evaluation” section, “Add Letter of Evaluation/Recommendation”
- Letter Packer option should be selected
- Primary Contact: Dr. Ronald Markle
- Primary Contact E-mail: ram29@psu.edu
- Primary Contact Phone: 814-865-7620
- Address: 230 Ritenour Building, University Park, PA 16802

*Note: Please save the unique “AMCAS Letter ID” and your “AMCAS” ID for the committee to use.

AACOMAS (DO Schools):

- Under Supporting Information>Evaluations>Create Evaluation Request
- Under “Are you requesting a committee evaluation” indicate “No.”
- List Dr. Ronald Markle as the author.
- Email Address: ram29@psu.edu
- Due Date: September 15 (note: this is NOT binding)

*Note: Please save your AACOMAS ID for the committee to use.

AADSAS (Dental) and OptomCAS (Optometry):

- Under Supporting Information>Evaluations>Create Evaluation Request
- Under “Are you requesting a committee evaluation” indicate “No.” (for OptomCAS, skip this line)
- List Dr. Ronald Markle as the author.
- Email Address: ram29@psu.edu
- Due Date: September 15 (note: this is NOT binding)

*Note: Please save your AADSAS or OptomCAS ID for the committee to use.

5. AFTER YOUR COMPREHENSIVE INTERVIEW: YOUR FINAL CHECKLIST

1. **veCollect: ID Numbers** Update this in veCollect when applications open. You can do this by logging into veCollect and clicking on “My Account” on the top right, then “Update my Account Details”:
 - ✓ MD Schools: AMCAS ID **AND** the unique AMCAS letter ID tied to your letter packet
 - ✓ DO Schools: AACOMAS ID
 - ✓ Dental: AADSAS ID
 - ✓ Optometry: OptomCAS ID

Your ID's are critical to matching your letters with your application.

2. **veCollect: Lock your Quiver** When all letters have been received and finalized, including your cover letter, please log into your account and go to the tab “Process My Letters.” Indicate that you will not make ANY changes by signing your name and selecting “Process and Lock this Quiver.” **You will no longer be able to add or remove letters at that point.**
3. **E-mail your lead interviewer** when you have submitted your primary application AND the previous two steps have been complete. We will then upload your letters to the application systems if your quiver has been finalized and locked.
4. Please be sure to do the following:
 - ✓ Double-check individual requirements (e.g. prerequisites) for each school
 - ✓ Make sure you have all required documents (e.g. DO letter for osteopathic schools)
5. If you are applying to the following medical schools/programs, please e-mail your lead interviewer the addresses where letter packet should be sent:
 - ✓ Caribbean Medical Schools
 - ✓ LSU-Shreveport (MD)
 - ✓ Health Professions Scholarship Program (Military)

Lead Comprehensive Interviewer E-mail: _____

6. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Do I need to have 2 science and 1 non-science letter to schedule my comprehensive interview?

Not necessarily, see timeline for what types of letters are needed at the appropriate time. You will also need your completed Health Professions Portfolio in order to schedule.

How can I delete a letter from my quiver, or delete the quiver entirely?

Click on the “My Quiver” tab at the top of your veCollect page and once you see the quiver, click on “Add/Remove letters” or “Delete this quiver,” depending on the action you wish to take. You will NOT be able to make this adjustment after you have “locked” and processed your quiver.

What happens if I decide to delay my application, or if I need to reapply?

We delete everyone’s account mid-October but save all of your letters electronically in our office. We are billed by veCollect on your behalf in each application cycle, so you will need to re-pay the \$50 processing fee and follow the instructions for delayed applicants/re-applicants.

Do I need my letter packet prior to submitting my primary application?

No. Do not delay submitting your primary application, as an early submission is a strategic advantage. Letters can take some time to write and are not always delivered early. It is important to speak with letter writers to determine a realistic timeline of when you can expect to receive a letter from them when selecting your evaluators.

Can I add letters of recommendation after my letter packet has been uploaded into my application(s)?

Yes, but you will need to have them uploaded directly through the application service, and not through the committee. You will need to identify these letter writers within the application service itself. We can only upload once to each application service. When your quivers are locked and processed, we cannot make any changes.

What should I do if I have trouble getting an evaluator to submit their letter?

Provide a “gentle reminder” to an evaluator who has not yet submitted a letter for you. Consult a prehealth adviser. If you are missing one or more letters and face the decision of whether or not to create your quiver without the full complement of recommendation letters, we will help you with this decision. Please be sure you have reviewed “1: Requesting Letters of Recommendation” in this guide.

What if I have an evaluator that has not received a veCollect notification e-mail?

This is primarily a result of applicants creating an Evaluator Record but not a Letter Record or forgetting to click on the envelope icon to e-mail the evaluator. Please check with all of your evaluators to make sure they have received the email that is generated when you click on the envelope icon. Please read this guide thoroughly.

If you have e-mailed your evaluator through veCollect and they still have not received the notification, please ask them to check their spam folders. If they are still having trouble submitting their letter, please have them email the letter to prehealthadvising@psu.edu to be manually uploaded to veCollect.

Can I create customized letter sets?

No. With the exception of designating two quivers for MD and DO programs, all letters you wish to be sent to every school should be added to your quiver. If you desire that certain letters are sent to a subset of schools, you will need to ask the evaluator writing those letters to upload their letter directly to the application system you are using to apply.

Can I use my letter packet for other purposes, such as a job, or post-baccalaureate graduate program?

Sorry, our office is no longer doing this. Why? Because all Post-baccalaureate programs utilize various on-line submission systems with required, embedded questions that must be addressed. The questions can be addressed by your letter writers but cannot be legitimately addressed by your Comprehensive Interviewer.

7. APPLICATION CYCLE AND RESOURCES

As you move forward through the application cycle, please utilize the Prehealth Advising Office for questions and concerns. We are here as a resource to all current and former Penn State students.

Our office enjoys hearing from candidates that we have interviewed, so please keep us up-to-date on the interview offers you receive as well as the schools that have made admission offers.

If you have not heard back from any schools by November (or by December for Optometry), you can reach out to the Prehealth Advising Office to discuss next steps, and how to proceed with updates and letters of intent/interest.

In January-February, we will contact all applicants for updates. Please take time to respond to our survey, as it helps us gather data to assist candidates in the future.

Throughout the year we regularly offer group advising sessions relevant to applicants. The current schedule is posted on our website: <http://science.psu.edu/premed/advising>

Canvas Modules Available

Prehealth Group Advising: <https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/prehealth-advising/pre-health-group-advising-canvas-module-access/>

Health Professions School Applicants Networking Space: <https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/prehealth-advising/canvas-health-professions-school-applicants-networking-space-access/>

Personal Statement Review: <https://sites.psu.edu/sciadvising/prehealth-advising/personalstatement/>

Health Pre-Professional Advising Committee	
Ronald Markle, Ph.D	Chair of the Health Pre-Professional Advising Committee
Kimberly Johnson, M.A.	Lead Interviewer, Prehealth Adviser
Melissa Krajcovic, Ph.D.	Lead Interviewer, Prehealth Adviser
John Moses, M.Ed.	Lead Interviewer, Prehealth Adviser
First and Second-Year Prehealth Advisers	
Beth Johnson, Ph.D.	Warning and Early Prehealth Advising
Lucais Wallen, M.S.	Warning and Early Prehealth Advising
Support Staff	
Luann Auman	Administrative Assistant
Lori Lauck	Administrative Assistant

Other members of the Committee are comprised of the following:

- Academic Advisers from across the university
- Faculty members and researchers
- Retired or currently practicing physicians