



RICE UNIVERSITY

Academic Advising

A close-up photograph of a hand wearing a brown nitrile glove. The hand is holding a white respirator mask with a yellow circular filter in the center. A silver stethoscope is draped over the mask and the hand. The background is a blurred white lab coat.

Health Professions Advising
Open File Guide:
Getting Started

2026 Admissions Cycle



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Part I: Getting Started

Welcome to Open File!

The purpose of the documents on the Open File website is to provide details and guidance about the application process to medical and dental school. Rice submits a Health Professions Advising Committee (HPAC) letter to formally introduce you to schools and provide a narrative on your candidacy. This is an optional service but a Rice tradition for over 30 years. Students are welcome to apply to schools directly, but most medical schools across the country have come to expect the HPAC letter from Rice applicants.

For students who would like to have an HPAC letter, we require that all applicants read the documents on the Open File website carefully, follow instructions, consider guidelines and suggestions, and adhere to all deadlines. This will significantly enhance your chance for acceptance to medical or dental school and reduce inefficiencies in the process. Throughout the documents, we provide context and explanations as to why the required materials and information are necessary to your finalized application. **At the bottom of the Open File website, you will find a [timeline](#) for each step in the process that you must follow.**

The Strong Candidate

If you are planning to apply for Fall 2026 admission, we recommend that you reflect and determine if you meet all the components for a strong applicant, which include:

- Academic Foundation (overall GPA and science GPA)
- Standardized Test Scores (MCAT/DAT)
- Healthcare Experiences
- Community Service (Altruism/Empathy)
- Uniqueness: Interests, Perspectives, and Experiences
- Leadership and Teamwork
- Research (Intellectual Curiosity)
- Interpersonal/Communication Skills
- Character: Ethics, Integrity, Honesty, Responsibility
- Letters of Evaluation

If you are unsure, please review the Assessing Your Candidacy [presentation](#) and use the accession [worksheets](#) to assess your preparedness. It is best to apply when you are ready and feel your application is at its strongest.

Importance of Deadlines


As part of the Open File process, we will need significant information from you. Without sufficient information in an organized and timely manner, our ability to best represent your candidacy is hindered, so we encourage you to commit the time and energy necessary for each task. Please also consider that most health professions schools operate on rolling admissions, so delays in submitted materials may



significantly impact your admission. Our office is typically well ahead of the timelines, but we need your help to maintain this standard.

Step 1: Opening your HPA Applicant File

Opening your Health Professions Applicant File is a two-step process. **(1)** Pay the \$150 registration fee: <https://signup.rice.edu/openfile26/> and **(2)** fill out the Health Professions Applicant Information [Form](#). Completion of **BOTH** steps is required for registration. It is entirely your responsibility to make sure both steps have been done; the Health Professions Advising Committee will not contact you if your registration is incomplete. Both the **payment portal and Health Professions Applicant Information Form will close at 10:00 am on Friday, January 17, 2025**; anyone who misses the deadline and wishes to register will need to reach out to hpa@rice.edu. Late first-time applicants will receive a cover letter and will be ineligible for the pre-application appointment with an advisor.

When submitting payment for the \$150 registration fee, please make sure to sign up using the email you want added to the HPA 2025  Box folders. If you already have a Box account through your Rice email, then you will need to use your Rice email when submitting payment. If you are a Rice alum, you will need to use a non-Rice email, as your Rice email may be deactivated in the middle of the Open File process, and you will lose access to Box. If you have concerns regarding your ability to pay the \$100 registration fee, please reach out to hpa@rice.edu.

The Health Profession Applicant Information Form asks for comprehensive details, including contact information, health profession program of interest, academic record (major, minor, etc.), and admission test scores. All of this information is crucial to our office's records and organization, and is required for us to know how to advise you and prepare your Health Professions Advising Committee letter. In addition, you will provide the following:

- Required waiver to your right to access your confidential Health Professions Advising Committee (HPAC) letter of evaluation from the Office of Academic Advising (OAA)
- Required waiver to your right to access your letters of evaluation from faculty and community members
- Required authorization for the Office of Student Judicial Programs (SJP) to release your disciplinary record information to the Office of Academic Advising
- Recommended authorization to release basic information to the Rice Alumni in Medicine group
- Recommended authorization to release basic information to future applicants
 - o The OAA is creating a directory of students who matriculate to medical school that can be shared with future applicants by request, including name and email address. By sharing your contact information, you give permission for the OAA/future applicants to reach out to you.

Confirmed receipt of your registration fee and completion of your Health Profession Applicant Information Form officially opens your Health Professions applicant file for the 2026 cycle. Upon confirmation, you will be provided access to your own individual Box folder labeled **Last Name, First Name (HPA 2026)** and the **HPA - 2026 Resources** Box folder. If you already have a Box account associated with the email provided at the submission of payment, then the invitations to the two Box



folders will be automatically accepted. If you do not already have a Box account associated with the email provided to us, then you will need to accept the invitations manually. **If you do not accept the invitations within 30 days, Box will revoke your access to the folders.** Please accept the invitations as soon as you receive them, and check your spam/junk folders in case you do not see them.

Step 2: Completing Your File

Completing your file with the OAA includes several steps. All are necessary prior to our completion of your Health Professions Advising Committee letter and subsequent submission to the appropriate application services.

- **Submit 4 documents** to your individual Box folder labeled **Last Name, First Name (HPA 2026)** by **January 31st, 2025**:
 - SJP Disciplinary Waiver Request
 - Detailed curriculum vitae (CV) using the template found in the HPA - 2026 Resources folder.
 - Completed personal statement
 - Completed Pre-Application Form. All responses should be completed and thoroughly answered. The information you provide assists the HPAC with creating your committee or cover letter.
- Activate your **PrivateFolio** accounts using our [Rice-specific link](#) and **begin requesting letters of evaluation** from your evaluators. Accounts are free using this link. If you already have an account or sign up without using our link, please email hpa@rice.edu to connect to the Rice University list. Connecting to our list allows the HPAC and health professions coordinator access your letter of recommendations to be used in the creation of your cover or committee letter and be compiled in your committee letter packet to be submitted to the application portals.
- Schedule and complete a pre-application appointment to discuss the content of the Pre-Application Appointment Form (optional, but **strongly** suggested). This is for applicants who meet the materials deadline and provide sufficient materials.
- Submit your application to:
 - [American Medical Colleges Application Service \(AMCAS\)](#)
 - [Texas Medical and Dental School Application Service \(TMDSAS\)](#)
 - [American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Application Service \(AACOMAS\)](#)
 - [American Association of Dental Schools Application Service \(AADSAS\)](#)
 - [Or other appropriate application service](#)

Please recognize that the Health Professions Advising Committee will draft and complete ~230 letters for medical and dental applicants in Spring/early Summer 2025. This is an enormous undertaking and is not possible without complying with deadlines. Each letter contains considerable detail specific to the candidate and requires personalization. For this reason, non-compliance with deadlines will result in a shorter and less descriptive HPAC letter. Immediately following the materials submission deadline on January 31 at 10:00 am, we will check applicant's individual Box folders for the requested materials. **Applicants who do not follow the material requirements and deadlines will receive a cover letter**



as opposed to the full-length committee letter and are ineligible for the pre-application appointment with an advisor. Additionally, they are not eligible for the medical mock interviews hosted by the Rice Pre-Medical Society (RPMS) and the dental mock interviews hosted by the OAA.

The following sections provide some basic guidelines regarding the required submissions listed above, and more details are available in the HPA 2025 Applicant Resources Box folder.

SJP Disciplinary Waiver

The [SJP Disciplinary Waiver](#) allows communication between Student Judicial Programs (SJP) and the OAA regarding your disciplinary record. If an applicant has any honor code or conduct violations, please review the [SJP Website](#) for additional information. Please release your record to the “Office of Academic Advising” and sign the bottom of the form. You **do not need** to upload a copy of your ID.

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

The HPA 2026 Applicant Resources Box folder includes the [CV template](#) all applicants are **required** to use for their CV submission. **You must use the CV template we have provided.** Its design allows you to provide us with relevant, specific information regarding your candidacy for health professional school. Therefore, we look for academic achievement, research experience, clinical exposure, leadership experience, volunteerism and other altruistic activities, extracurricular involvement, honors and awards, etc. Be sure to list every activity you have done since graduating high school (not just medically related activities). While the OAA provides this CV template for use during Open File, note that you will not need to provide a CV to the application services. If you would like assistance with using your CV for other endeavors, please contact the Center for Career Development (CCD).

Personal Statement

You will find [prompts, resources, and guidelines](#) about personal statements from a variety of perspectives, including those of medical school admissions deans, in the HPA 2026 Applicant Resources Box folder. RPMS will host personal statement workshops in the coming months. In addition, the Center for Academic and Professional Communication (CAPC) provides consultations regarding personal statements for those applying to various professional schools. As a starting point, reflect on the experiences listed in your CV and describe how they have shaped your motivation to pursue medicine. For CAPC consultations, it is recommended you provide a copy of your pre-application appointment form. We strongly suggest that you start with a draft of your personal statement as soon as possible, as the process takes several iterations and significant revisions following feedback from a variety of individuals. Additionally, we suggest that you avoid topics of a nature about which you are not willing or able to answer specific questions.



Pre-Application Appointment Form

This [form](#) asks specific questions which allow you to expand upon elements of your CV, reflect on your motivations for pursuing health professional school, and articulate your views about the profession. We have designed this form to mimic the questions that admissions committees ask on their secondary applications, so treat this form like an actual application. **You are required to provide thorough and complete answers and descriptions for the applicable questions and each of your activities. If you do not, your Pre-Application Appointment Form will be deemed incomplete and you will be ineligible for a Pre-Application Appointment, and will receive a cover letter as opposed to the full-length committee letter.**

Reapplicants who have completed a medical school application cycle are required to complete the [reapplicant form](#). Completing the pre-application form in addition to the reapplicant form is optional. If a significant amount of time has passed since the last time you applied for medical school, we recommend completing the pre-application form as well.

Requesting Letters of Evaluation

Requesting supporting letters of evaluation from professors and other community members is a critical aspect of your application. To successfully obtain strong letters of evaluation from evaluators, you need to consider the following:

- Number of letters
- Who, how, and when to ask
- Guidelines and deadlines for evaluators
- Relinquishing your right to see letters

We typically encourage students to **request evaluations from three or four individuals**, as **less than three is too few**, and there is often **no additional benefit from more than four letters unless a specific program makes this request**. MD/PhD applicants must request evaluations from a supervisor from each research project in which the applicant has participated.

Although the ideal set of evaluators is highly dependent on the applicant, carefully consider how you select your evaluators. We suggest the following letters if possible:

- Professor of a science course (could overlap with major professor)
- Professor in your academic major
- Supervising research professor or someone related to your clinical activities
- Letter from an individual who can provide a strong character reference

Most schools accept the HPAC letter in lieu of a second letter of evaluation from a professor of science or engineering. A small number of schools still require two letters from science/engineering professors in addition to the HPAC letter. Please consult specific schools' instructions to be certain you are adhering to their requirements.

There could be overlap among these individuals. The character reference could come from a wide range of evaluators who you know well through your research, health-related positions, volunteer work,



or other Rice or non-Rice related programs. The most important factors are familiarity and commitment to providing a strong letter of evaluation.

Timing is critical, so you will need to ask early. Faculty members receive many requests for letters of evaluation, and writing a thoughtful, quality letter takes time. Providing your prospective letter writers with adequate notification and appropriate supporting documents is absolutely essential.

Be sure to provide an evaluator the option of saying no. If an evaluator does not have time or is uncomfortable writing on your behalf, it will likely result in a shorter, less effective letter. It is best to have honesty from an evaluator, which will allow you to find another who is enthusiastic to support your application.

Waiving your right to see your evaluations provides greater credibility. Non-confidential requests can make it more difficult for your evaluators to write honest, candid, and objective letters. Likewise, schools are informed if evaluation letters are non-confidential, and whether correctly or incorrectly, perceive them with less credibility. In order to participate in Open File, you are required to waive your access to both the committee letter and all individual letters of evaluation.

All applicants should **have all letters of recommendation requested by February 10th** to allow evaluators adequate time to write a strong letter of evaluation and guarantee most or all letters are **uploaded to PrivateFolio by May 23rd**. A checklist, email templates for letter requests and instructions for your letter writers are available [here](#). **Make sure your evaluator is aware that letters are due to the HPAC by Friday, May 23, 2025.**

Reapplicants - It is advised that you request at least one additional new letter or request to have your letters updated. Updating your letter means the letter writer updates the date and/ or includes additional information. In the case a letter writer no longer has your letters on file, have them email hpa@rice.edu for a copy. Letter writers can send updated letters to hpa@rice.edu.

Once all your letters have been submitted you will email your Locked Letter Form to hpa@rice.edu. Your Locked Letter Form should be titled Last Name, First Name - Locked Letter Form (ex. Doe, Jane - Locked Letter Form). PrivateFolio will show you which of the letters have been uploaded and approved.

Letter Collection with PrivateFolio

Rice applicants' letters of evaluation from faculty, staff, and individuals on-campus and off-campus are submitted through the web-based system, PrivateFolio. It is a secure, online service where applicants can manage their letters of evaluation including requesting letters, tracking if they have been received and informing the OAA that they are ready to be transmitted to medical and dental programs.

The service allows evaluators to submit letters of evaluation electronically to PrivateFolio.

All applicants are required to activate a PrivateFolio account using the Rice-specific link [here](#).

Please make sure to send them the [Instructions to Writers of Letters of Evaluation document](#), as it provides important information on letter requirements and detailed instructions on how to submit their letter through the PrivateFolio portal.



Before beginning to request letters through PrivateFolio, please be sure to speak with your evaluators to confirm their participation and to let them know that they will receive an email from PrivateFolio on your behalf.

The PrivateFolio process is as follows:

1. After creating your PrivateFolio account, you will enter the contact information for your individual evaluators including their email.
2. You will send an email request to your evaluator via PrivateFolio.
3. Evaluators will send their completed letters to PrivateFolio via email. As individual letters are received, PrivateFolio will process the letter and send confirmation to your writer and update your account to reflect submission receipt.
4. After all letters are received, you will inform the OAA they are ready to be transmitted to medical or dental programs by sending us the Locked Letter form.
5. If you have any questions regarding the status of a letter please reach out to help@privatefolio.com.

Reapplicants are to contact hpa@rice.edu about their PrivateFolio accounts. In your email, include the email used to sign up and the letters that will be updated.

Additional Resources in HPA 2026 Applicant Resources Box Folder

There are more resources in the [HPA 2026 Applicant Resources Box folder](#) to assist with your application processing. These resources include but are not limited to:

- This Health Professions Open File Information guide
- Guidelines (and **required** template) for health professions applicants' Curricula Vitae (CV)
- Guidelines for personal statements and optional essays
- Pre-Application Appointment Form
- Interview resources
- Information for re-applicants

Step 3: Pre-Application Appointment

Immediately following the document submission deadline (February 2 at 10:00 am), the HPAC will lock applicant individual Box folders to verify that all the required materials were submitted and that they are complete and thorough. **Students who do not follow the material requirements and deadlines will be notified via email that they will receive a cover letter as opposed to the full-length committee letter and are ineligible for the pre-application appointment with an advisor.**

From February 12, 2024, students who meet all requirements and deadlines can schedule a Pre-Application Appointment with an OAA advisor to clarify or expand on any aspect of your materials. This 45-minute appointment also allows us to get to know you better and offers perspective about the steps you have taken to prepare for that opportunity. Current Rice undergraduates will receive emails to schedule meetings via Navigate. Alumni will need to email hpa@rice.edu or call 713-348-4060 to set an appointment.



While the office will always support our candidates to medical and dental school, we will also try to provide constructive feedback about the steps the candidate has already taken and additional steps they might continue to take to improve their candidacy. The tone of the meeting is relatively informal, but it is an opportunity to practice your interviewing skills. **Please dress business casual.** We expect professional demeanor and communication style from you. Keep in mind that every interaction is an opportunity to provide an impression. You have until April 5, 2024 to schedule the Pre-application Appointment, and until April 12, 2024 to complete the appointment.

Appointments can be rescheduled as long as rescheduling takes place at least a week in advance. Only one last-minute reschedule is allowed. Missed/no-call no-show appointments will not be rescheduled.

Research Schools

Deciding where to apply is critical to your application yet challenging and time-consuming. Several important factors to consider include:

- Public school residency requirements (public institutions in your home state are typically a good place to start)
- Curricular approach (such as traditional lecture vs. problem-based learning, block scheduling, grading system, research focus vs. primary care focus, etc.)
- School's mission and vision, as well as school culture
- Location and cost of attendance: tuition and living expenses

In addition, it is costly to apply to health profession programs. Consider all costs including the primary application fee, secondary application fees, cost of sending transcripts, transportation to/from interviews, lodging, meals, etc. If you have concerns about the associated costs, make sure to check out the [Association of American Medical Colleges Fee Assistance Program](#), [American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Fee Waiver Program](#), as well as the [Rice University Access and Opportunity Portal](#).

There are several resources to assist applicants with their research including the [Medical School Admission Requirements \(MSAR\)](#), [Texas and Medical Dental School Application Service](#), and [Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine \(AACOM\) Choose DO Explorer](#). While the MSAR requires a subscription, the OAA allows students to access the database through our office. If you would like to use the MSAR, please email us at hpa@rice.edu.

For medical school applicants, please keep in mind that you may apply to both MD and DO programs; MD graduates and DO graduates can practice in any medical specialty anywhere in the country. As of 2020, both MD and DO graduates participate in the same residency matching process. Acceptance to either type of school will allow you to reach your career goals in medicine.