

July 28, 2020

Dear UWSOM Admissions community stakeholders,

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as well as the events bringing stronger voice to the pervasiveness of systemic racism, inequity and violence across our country have had a profound impact on the Admissions Cycle for 2021, and likely beyond. As the Admissions team and Executive Committee on Admissions gain better understanding of the financial, personal, and psychological impacts experienced by our applicants, and especially our Black applicants, we have been revisiting and revising our policies for the upcoming application cycle. The policy changes were guided by the following principles:

- Safety of applicants as well as committee members, students, staff and faculty
- Equity and fairness of the process
- Consistency across all our regional sites

Since April, we have been posting these changes to our website:

<https://www.uwmedicine.org/school-of-medicine/admissions/covid-19-response>

We acknowledge that there has been national concern raised about this year's medical school application cycle and we have received messages from UWSOM students, faculty, and medical community members with requests for process changes for the 2021 cycle.

It takes a community to train a physician. We heard from, and listened to, our UWSOM/WWAMI community. Our plans for the upcoming Fall 2021 admissions cycle were made with their thoughtful input in mind.

For the Fall 2021 admissions cycle, applicants can expect:

- Optional MCAT for this cycle
- Waiver of secondary application fee
- Class will not be filled until all interviews are completed
- Deadline extension on a case-by-case basis
- Virtual interview season
- Commitment to holistic review

MCAT Test in 2020

Due to the obstacles applicants have encountered in registering for exams, we are flexing the exam dates we will consider for admission. For the entering class of 2021, we will accept 2017 MCAT scores in addition to 2018, 2019, and 2020 MCAT scores. Our current process does not lend itself easily to eliminating the MCAT. While there is no single factor that secures an invitation for interview or a seat in the class, each factor is considered a part of the holistic review approach, including the MCAT (see our [FAQ page here.](#)) We have very seriously considered the impact if we

were to waive the MCAT or make it optional. To help us better understand the impact we have done the following:

- We have polled our Executive and Screening Committee members to better understand the impact of waiving or making optional the MCAT exam for 2021 in admissions decisions. For context we provided them the documents and a link to the website sent to us from Students for Ethical Admissions.
- We have reached out to pre-med and pre-health advisors across the WWAMI region asking for any feedback they have received from their mentees regarding MCAT access or scheduling issues.
- Spoken directly to the Admissions Dean at [Stanford](#), Dr. Iris Gibbs, to better understand the factors taken into consideration of their decision to make the MCAT optional for 2021. She clarified that submitting a score for the 2020 MCAT was optional for this cycle only and that they will still receive scores from previous years but they will not be used in their usual screening process.
- The AAMC has provided us directly an analysis of the number of examinees who have taken or who are scheduled for the MCAT in 2020 as well as the number of available test slots in Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho. Also provided in the analysis are the number of applications currently submitted and the percentage of those that include an MCAT score.
- Reviewed thoroughly the documents provided by Students for Ethical Admissions and individual emails from current students, faculty and community members requesting waiving the MCAT.

While it has been recognized previously that the MCAT has inherent imperfections and bias, [there is evidence that the MCAT can predict students' performance in medical school and on United States Medical Licensing Step exams](#). It also provides an additional data point to evaluate an applicant's academic ability beyond just their GPA and academic trajectory. Concerns with eliminating the MCAT from consideration for admissions include disadvantaging those with lower science grades and/or total GPA due to educational, socioeconomic, health or other disadvantages or obstacles, who will have no other data point to demonstrate academic capability and the waste of time, energy, and resource for those who have already taken it in 2020 (pre- and post-pandemic) or before. After careful consideration, **the UWSOM will make the MCAT optional for those who have not yet taken the MCAT exam for the remainder of 2020 for the UWSOM MD Program**. We will accept and consider applications without MCAT scores. If an applicant has a MCAT score, or pending MCAT score, it will be considered by the Admissions Committee. More details will be posted soon on uwmedicine.org/admissions.

Applicants experiencing challenges or obstacles regarding the MCAT, can contact the Admissions office at askuwsom@uw.edu.

Secondary Application Fee Waiver

For the Fall 2021 application cycle, the \$35 secondary application fee will be automatically waived for all MD applicants.

AAMC has also expanded the [Fee Assistance Program \(FAP\)](#) to help applicants financially impacted by COVID-19. Please see the [FAP webpage](#) for more information about applying. FAP Applicants will also have their [CASPer](#) fee waived.

We recognize that COVID-19 has financially impacted many applicants and their families due to loss of income and/or medical expenses. It is our hope that suspending the secondary application fee will alleviate some of the cost of applying.

Deadlines for the Fall 2021 Applications Cycle

The UWSOM has a rolling admissions process for Washington state and out-of-region applicants, ensuring that the entering class will not be filled until after all interviews have been completed. Interviews begin in October and occur at scheduled times through February. The Executive Committee meets at scheduled intervals to review and make decisions on applications throughout the cycle. For our regional applicants, interviews are scheduled in January and February as cohorts and admissions decisions are made by cohort. Our process could support a measure taken by AAMC to delay to transmission of applications to medical schools until August 1, 2020. At this time, we are holding all other deadlines as we feel there is adequate time for applicants to submit materials and still be considered. As per our usual procedure, we will consider deadline extensions for applicants who experience challenges or obstacles that interfere with their ability to meet the current deadlines on a case-by-case basis. We again will continuously monitor the pandemic impacts and will adjust deadlines as necessary as the situation warrants.

Interviews for the Fall 2021 Application Cycle

The UWSOM will have a virtual interview season for the Fall 2021 application cycle. All applicants interviewing for the MD program can expect a virtual interview.

A virtual interview will allow applicants to interview from their home or location of choice which in turn will reduce the typical cost incurred by traveling to interview. This ensures the safety of the applicants and the interviewers by eliminating the need for interviewers to be together in one room.

The UWSOM is not utilizing the Video Interview Tool for Admissions (VITA) produced by the AAMC in the 2021 Cycle. Interviews will be live, via a Zoom platform, and continue in the 3-person panel interview format only.

Commitment to Holistic Review

The pandemic has resulted in many lost opportunities such as cancelled clinical and service experiences for applicants. Additionally, we recognize that applicants may also be facing:

- Financial stress
- Food insecurity
- Less than ideal study from home situations/Housing Insecurity
- Family members dependent on them for income or assistance
- No or limited Wi-Fi
- Lack of appropriate technology and support to complete Coursework
- Loss of Loved ones and lack of closure due to social distancing
- Mental health issues and stress (*Source: 2021 AMCAS Cycle Opening Webinar 5/14/2020*)

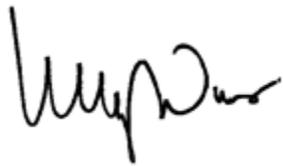
The Admissions Committee will use holistic review to consider applicants' potential through the context of their lived experiences. In addition, value has always been placed on the insight and

reflection that applicants gain from their experiences rather than the number of hours. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, UWSOM was working in conjunction with several Western Region medical schools to de-emphasize shadowing as a specific requirement for acceptance.

Rapidly Changing COVID-19 Landscape

We appreciate all of those involved and vested in the admissions process for the UWSOM. In keeping with the mission of improving the health and well-being of the public and the commitment to building and sustaining a diverse academic community of faculty, staff, fellows, residents and students and to assuring that access to education and training is open to learners from all segments of society, acknowledging a particular responsibility to the diverse populations within our region, the Admissions Team and Executive Committee on Admissions are taking the concerns of premedical students, mentors, advisors and families very seriously. We commit to a safe, equitable and consistent admissions process at the UWSOM/WWAMI and are continually monitoring the impact and outcomes of COVID-19. As the situation changes, often quickly, we will adjust and change our policies as needed. We have long placed high value on transparency and open communication about our process and are fully committed to change and will continue working directly with premedical students and the AAMC to ensure clearer communication and transparency in future admissions cycles.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LeeAnna Muzquiz', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

LeeAnna Muzquiz, MD
Associate Dean for Admissions
Chair, Committee on Admissions