

# LAMEIRE COLLEGE CONSULTING



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## Addressing COVID-19 In College Essays

*By Shirley Young*

New changes to the typical college application process continue to roll out due to COVID-19, and the newest area affected by this is that of the college essays.

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The Common Application has recently announced that, on the 2020-2021 application, students who need it will be provided with "a dedicated space to elaborate on the impact of the pandemic, both personally and academically." This change was made in an attempt to help relieve anxiety for students affected by COVID-19 and to provide them with a way to share their experiences with colleges and universities.

The optional essay, which will be limited to a response length of 250 words, is as follows:

*Community disruptions such as COVID-19 and natural disasters can have deep and long-lasting impacts. If you need it, this space is yours to describe those impacts. Colleges care about the effects on your health and well-being, safety, family circumstances, future plans, and education, including access to reliable technology and quiet study spaces. Please use this space to describe how these events have impacted you.*

Students can use this space to speak about any impacts they wish to report, such as illness and loss, housing and employment disruptions, and shifting family obligations. Additionally, counselors will also be given space to speak about changes made by their schools – such as shifting from a graded system to a Pass/Fail system – in their uploaded school profiles.

Other major applications have not yet announced a similar essay section allowing students to address the impact of COVID-19 on their lives, although this may change as colleges start finalizing their essay prompts for next year's application cycle.

In regards to whether or not you should address COVID-19 in an application's regular essay section, the rule of thumb should be this: only if it is truly unique. Although this pandemic is something that has drastically affected plans and had a profound impact on the lives of many, the reality is that it will be a very common topic. Unless you feel that you have some extraordinary circumstances or experiences to speak about regarding this, we would suggest focusing on other aspects of your profile for the standard essay sections, such as your leadership experiences, extracurricular opportunities, moments of personal growth, and so on.





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## **Path to Being Pre-med: Article 2 of 3**

*By: Belinda Tang*

Previously on Path to Being Pre-Med, we discussed how campus location can shape your pre-med experience. At an urban school, you will most likely get the opportunity to be exposed to various healthcare systems as well as healthcare specialties. Though rural colleges will probably not offer you the same experiences, we learned that going to a rural college can expose you to rural medicine, a field of medicine that is currently facing a shortage of doctors. This shortage is such a big problem that some medical schools have started specifically recruiting students who are interested in going into this field! Therefore, going to a rural college can give students an edge when applying for medical schools that have a focus on rural medicine.

Pre-Med Research Opportunities:

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Why does everyone keep talking about research opportunities for pre-meds in college? What does research even have to do with medicine?

Well, research is closely intertwined with medicine on multiple levels. On the skillset level, both require strong critical thinking skills. By participating in research, applicants improve their ability to think logically while demonstrating to medical schools their ability to think critically. On the advancement level, research paves the future of medicine. Without research we wouldn't be able to find the next vaccine for the coronavirus or understand the biological pathways of Alzheimer's. Therefore, for top research medical schools that are interested in finding the next Noble Laureate of Medicine and discovering the cure to diseases such as cancer, applicants with strong research backgrounds will be viewed upon more favorably.

That being said, is research the only way to demonstrate critical thinking skills? No.

Is research really all that necessary if I want to be a family doctor? Not really.

So, after understanding more about the role research plays in the medical school admissions process, what should you keep in mind when picking a college for your pre-med journey? First off, don't choose your college solely based on research opportunities. Meaningful research can exist outside of large research institutions. In fact, sometimes going to a smaller college may be advantageous to pre-meds. At less research focused schools, students may have more opportunities to play larger roles in research projects because of fewer graduate students.

Secondly, try to think of the type of research experience you would be interested in and tailor your college decision accordingly. From evolutionary biology to the economics of healthcare, there are many disciplines to do research in. Additionally, within each discipline there are also many ways to go about answering the same question. Some labs work with microscopic organisms while others work with animal models that include fish, rats, and even owls. There are labs that are focused on applying different interventions in communities to understand the real-world impacts while other labs focus more on the theoretical aspect of the unknown.

There's no type of research subject or method that is better than the other. Instead, explore the field based off your interests. Like always, find your passion and see where your passion will lead you. Maybe you'll end up at a large research university and work with a prestigious professor or you might end up at a small liberal arts college in a one-person lab and publish your findings. Who knows? Just be open to the possibilities!

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Next month on Path to Being Pre-Med, we will flash forward to the end of your pre-med journey and talk about committee letters. A committee letter is a letter written by a pre-health committee or pre-health advisor. The letter highlights your accomplishments, delves into your background, and advocates for your admission into medical school. This letter is not offered at every college and even within colleges that do offer committee letters, not all students may qualify to get one. So, is it necessary to go to a school that offers a committee letter to get accepted into medical school? Read the article next month to find out!



## **FYI: Have you heard about Virtual College Fairs?**

The National Association for College Admission Counseling's inaugural season of virtual college fairs launches on August 19 from 2 p.m – 6 p.m. EST with a Counselors Preview for high school counselors and advisers. Registration for this free event is now open at [www.virtualcollegefairs.org](http://www.virtualcollegefairs.org). Following the Counselors Preview, four NACAC Virtual College Fairs for students will be held on **Sept. 13, Oct. 12, Oct. 18, and Nov. 8.**



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## Gap Year: What To Consider

By: Devric Kiyota

With the possibility of another semester spent online, the semester in question being one of the most formative of their lives, an unprecedented amount of would-be college freshmen are considering a gap year. A poll by the Arts & Sciences Group of college-bound high school seniors reported that 17% doubted they will attend a four year institution this fall. Of those students, 35% said they have decided to take a gap year instead.

It should be noted, however, that declaring a gap year is not a unilateral decision made by the student - colleges also have to be willing to accept students' proposals to take a gap year. If a student's request is denied, and he or she still decides a gap year is necessary, that student would need to reapply the following year as an incoming freshman. The UC system, for example, does not allow students to take gap years and we expect this to be the case with many other schools this year.

More than ever, it will be difficult to get a gap year request approved simply because it will be hard to prove that this is going to be more beneficial for students than staying home, staying healthy, and taking classes. In the limited number of cases where a request has been approved, the students have had to prove that taking a gap year was highly beneficial to their academic trajectory. For example, if the student lands an impressive year-long internship that just can't wait, then this would of course be highly beneficial. With COVID-19 restrictions in place, however, students' options are severely limited and it will be harder than ever before to justify a request for a gap year. It has been speculated as well that if deferrals occur at a higher percentage than years past, universities budgets nationwide will take a seismic hit, adding to their reluctance to grant widespread gap year requests.

Prior to COVID-19, the gap year was a functionally-rare occurrence for students graduating high school, an occurrence with an insignificant effect on enrollment numbers and admissions decisions. This is the first year a correlation between low enrollment numbers at colleges and high interest in gap years could be drawn, if deferrals match the numbers of those considering them. So far, applications to defer have not been astronomically higher than in previous years, as students seem tepid about committing to a year outside academia. A surge of interest has not yet transformed into an unprecedented amount of deferrals, so university admissions offices have not widely released information on how they're handling the situation. We expect more information to come in the following months.