

Social Justice/Advocacy Experience Type Update

What is changing in the AMCAS application?

The 2024 American Medical College Application Service® (AMCAS®) application cycle will include an option for applicants to select a new experience type titled “Social Justice/Advocacy” in the Work/Activities section.

What is a “Social Justice/Advocacy” experience?

A Social Justice/Advocacy experience is one in which the applicant worked to advance the rights, privileges, or opportunities of a person, a group of people, or a cause. It is not tied to any particular ideology and is inclusive of all personal understandings of social justice and advocacy. Possible examples include (but are not limited to): Registering people to vote, climate activism, advocating for civil rights, decreasing health inequities, addressing food deserts, building awareness for a particular cause or health condition, advocating for vulnerable populations (children, homeless, etc.), and assisting with policy change or development. This question is not intended to solicit experiences campaigning for a particular political candidate or party.

Why did the AAMC add the “Social Justice/Advocacy” experience type to the AMCAS application?

The medical community recognizes that social justice/advocacy is a core value for those working and learning in medicine and medical education. Members of the admissions community asked the AAMC to explore ways to incorporate information about applicants’ experience with social justice/advocacy into the AMCAS application. In response, the Social Justice in Medical School Admissions Working Group was formed to study whether social justice/advocacy should be added as an experience type in the AMCAS application. The group conducted surveys with admissions officers, medical school applicants, and first-year students. After reviewing the feedback collected from the surveys, the AMCAS Advisory Committee endorsed the addition of this experience type to the application. *See below for additional background.*

This question is intended to further support schools in identifying applicants whose experiences align with their school’s mission and goals and help signal to applicants the importance of participating in social justice and advocacy work.

Background

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.

In response to evident interest from the admissions community, COA conducted a survey of admissions officers in the fall of 2020 in which the majority of respondents supported adding “Social Justice/Advocacy” experiences as a categorical option within the Work/Activities section of the AMCAS application. COA shared these results with the AMCAS Advisory Committee (AAC).

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 formed the Social Justice in Medical School Admissions Working Group. The working group 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.

The group explored a perceived need by admissions officers for improved/explicit opportunities for applicants to describe these activities and experiences in the AMCAS application, especially as they relate to social justice issues in our society.

Working Group Outcomes and Recommendations

An initial objective of the working group involved developing an AAMC-supported document to assist admissions officers and committee members with creating opportunities for applicants to share how they have helped to address systemic societal inequities and injustice in the secondary application and/or interviews (the document is available here:

<https://www.aamc.org/media/54911/download?attachment>)

The working group then set out to determine if medical school applicants and/or first year medical students shared a similar interest as admissions officers in improving how they share information about their activities and life experiences. Six schools – ranging in class size, institution type, and location – participated in soliciting this information and had significant agreement among the students who were surveyed about adding “Social Justice” as a new activity category to the AMCAS application.

The group supported the AAMC providing explicit opportunities for applicants to share activities and life experiences related to advocacy and social justice in the application. These findings and final recommendations were presented to the AMCAS Advisory Committee, and the committee endorsed adding “Social Justice/Advocacy” as a new categorical experience type to the Work/Activities section of the AMCAS application.

Medical schools are continuing to assess their admissions policies and processes in recruiting a future physician workforce who will help to further address these complex and complicated issues and solutions within their communities.