

Best Practice Guide

PRE-HEALTH ADVISORS



Pre-Health Advisors



Overview

Pre-health advisors serve as critical gatekeepers and influencers in the medical school application process, guiding undergraduate students through career exploration and professional school preparation. They represent one of the most significant external influences on prospective students' decisions to pursue osteopathic medicine.

Based on insights gathered during listening sessions with the Council of Osteopathic Medical Admissions Officers (COMAO) and the Marketing and Communications Advisory Council (MAC), this guide outlines strategies to develop, nurture, and leverage these important relationships to attract qualified applicants to osteopathic medical education.

Executive Summary

Pre-health advisors significantly shape prospective students' perceptions and understanding of osteopathic medicine. When these advisors possess accurate knowledge about osteopathic medical education and have positive relationships with COMs, they can serve as powerful advocates who direct well-suited candidates toward osteopathic programs. Conversely, uninformed or biased advisors may steer qualified applicants away from considering osteopathic medicine as a primary pathway.

The most successful relationships with pre-health advisors:



Build personal connections through regular, meaningful interactions that familiarize advisors with your institution's distinctive qualities



Educate advisors about osteopathic medicine's philosophy, outcomes, and benefits to help them properly guide interested students



Demonstrate program value by showcasing residency match rates, specialty placements, and alumni success stories



Provide practical resources advisors can use when counseling students about osteopathic medical education



Create meaningful campus experiences that give advisors first-hand exposure to your COM's culture, facilities, and approach

Guiding Principles for Successful Relationships

When developing and nurturing relationships with pre-health advisors, consider these foundational principles:

- 1.** **Prioritize Relationship Building:** Invest in personalized connections with advisors from key feeder schools, recognizing that these relationships often yield the highest returns in qualified applicants.
- 2.** **Position Osteopathic Medicine as a Primary Choice:** Present osteopathic medicine as a distinctive, valuable medical education pathway rather than a backup option, emphasizing its unique philosophical approach to healthcare.
- 3.** **Provide Compelling Outcomes Data:** Share concrete evidence of graduate success through residency placements, board pass rates, and alumni achievements across all specialties.
- 4.** **Address Misconceptions Proactively:** Acknowledge and respectfully correct lingering misconceptions about osteopathic medicine without disparaging allopathic pathways.
- 5.** **Offer Practical, Ready-to-Use Resources:** Develop clear, informative materials that advisors can easily share with their students about osteopathic medicine and your COM.
- 6.** **Maintain Consistent Communication:** Establish regular touchpoints through newsletters, events, and personal outreach to keep your COM top-of-mind for advisors.

Building and Nurturing Advisor Relationships

Implement a strategic approach to cultivating meaningful connections with pre-health advisors that positions your COM as a trusted educational partner.

Strategic Targeting

Identify key feeder institutions that historically provide quality applicants to your COM and prioritize building deep relationships with their advisors

Map regional schools within your state or nearby areas, especially if your COM has in-state admission requirements or preferences

Research advisor backgrounds to understand their familiarity with osteopathic medicine and tailor your approach accordingly

Track relationship history to identify which advisors have previously referred successful students to your program

Personalized Outreach Strategies

Schedule in-person meetings when traveling near advisor campuses, offering to present to pre-med clubs or meet individually with interested students

Invite advisors to campus for special events, tours, or dedicated advisor days that showcase your facilities and student experience

Recognize advisors who consistently refer qualified students with appreciation notes, acknowledgments, or special access to COM resources



IMPLEMENTATION TIP:

"We reach out to advisors with presentations... I take them to lunch if they want to go... because they are probably, in my opinion, the most important people that we have, because they talk to so many students. And they have such a big influence on their students. So we really try to cultivate those relationships as much as possible, especially with those programs that are our big pathways into our school."

Educating Advisors About Osteopathic Medicine

Focus on providing advisors with accurate, compelling information about osteopathic medicine that addresses common misconceptions and highlights distinctive benefits.

Key Educational Topics

Osteopathic Philosophy and Distinctive Approach

- Emphasize whole-person care and the integration of mind, body, and spirit
- Explain how the osteopathic approach translates to enhanced patient relationships and outcomes
- Highlight hands-on diagnosis and treatment through Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine (OMM)

Residency Placement and Career Outcomes

- Share comprehensive match statistics and residency placement rates
- Provide examples of DO graduates across various specialties to counter the "primary care only" misconception
- Showcase notable alumni achievements and leadership positions

COM-Specific Advantages

- Describe the supportive, collaborative learning environment that characterizes many osteopathic programs
- Highlight faculty accessibility and mentorship opportunities
- Outline distinctive curriculum features or specialized tracks

Effective Educational Approaches

Create advisor-specific information packets that include key data points, talking points, and FAQs about osteopathic medicine

Develop digital resources that advisors can easily share with students interested in osteopathic medicine

Offer advisor training sessions or webinars about osteopathic medical education fundamentals

Provide quarterly newsletters with updates on your COM, student achievements, and relevant osteopathic news



IMPLEMENTATION TIP:

"Helping them see at least some of the similarities [between osteopathic and allopathic medicine] is really important... helping them understand that this is a great pathway that we have exceptional placement rate into residencies... They're going to have more hands-on faculty involvement, because the faculty are there first and foremost to teach, especially for schools that are smaller schools."

Creating Compelling Communications

Develop a systematic communications approach that maintains consistent engagement with pre-health advisors throughout the year.

Communication Vehicles

Quarterly newsletters containing program updates, application tips, student success stories, and upcoming events

Email updates about admissions cycles, policy changes, or special opportunities for students

Advisor-specific website section with resources, FAQs, and contact information

Social media engagement through dedicated professional groups or platforms where advisors participate

Virtual information sessions specifically designed for advisors to learn about osteopathic medicine



Content Recommendations

Outcome Showcases

- Residency match lists and statistics across all specialties
- Board exam pass rates with relevant comparisons
- Notable alumni achievements and testimonials

Application Guidance

- Key characteristics of successful osteopathic medical students
- Application timeline and AACOMAS overview
- Interview preparation recommendations

Program Differentiators

- Unique curriculum features or learning opportunities
- Community engagement and service learning initiatives
- Research and specialty track options



IMPLEMENTATION TIP:

"We send them quarterly newsletters with information they can share. We also host events here on our campus, as well as virtually, that are specifically geared towards the advisors... when they get on campus it just connects them differently."

Action Steps for COMs

- 1. Conduct an Advisor Relationship Audit:**
Evaluate your current pre-health advisor relationships, identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for enhanced engagement.
- 2. Develop an Advisor Engagement Calendar:**
Create a year-round schedule of touchpoints including newsletters, campus visits, virtual sessions, and personal outreach.
- 3. Create an Advisor Resource Kit:**
Compile essential information about osteopathic medicine and your COM into easily shareable formats for advisors to use with students.
- 4. Implement Tracking Systems:**
Establish processes to monitor application and matriculation data from institutions where you've focused advisor relationship-building efforts.
- 5. Host Dedicated Advisor Events:**
Develop special on-campus experiences specifically designed to give advisors first-hand exposure to your osteopathic program and community.
- 6. Leverage AACOM Resources:**
Utilize national materials about osteopathic medicine to supplement your institution-specific information in advisor communications.
- 7. Establish a Feedback Loop:**
Regularly solicit input from advisors about how your COM can better support their work with prospective osteopathic medical students.

Measuring Success

Key Metrics to Track:

Application yields from specific institutions where you've focused advisor relationship-building efforts

Advisor participation rates in campus events, webinars, or information sessions

Student referrals directly attributable to specific advisor relationships

Newsletter engagement metrics including open rates, click-throughs, and resource downloads

Pre/post surveys measuring changes in advisor knowledge about and attitudes toward osteopathic medicine after engagement initiatives



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