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Dr. Joshua Lederberg, Chairman
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Dear Dr. Lederberg,

The purpose of this letter is twofold. First, I am sending you a modified manuscript of the paper entitled, "An Analysis of the History of Infectious Nucleic Acids." Second, I need your help.

These two items are actually related. In rapidly revising the paper I have tried to make it more professional, less subjective, and more to the point. The interest generated in this paper at my medical school interviews has stimulated this revision. I have already discussed some of this with you by phone, but much has happened since that conversation.

My experience at Johns Hopkins, with both my interviewer and my host at lunch (a member of the Medical School faculty), was very positive and encouraging. My interviewer expressed considerable enthusiasm and support. Also, my luncheon host immediately requested a copy of the citation chart and Part III of the paper. After I rushed these to him, he answered by requesting Parts I and II as soon as they were ready. This interest, together with the enthusiasm which I encountered at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, spurred me to quickly finish this revision.

However, I recently received a letter indicating that I would probably not be accepted at Johns Hopkins. This negative reply really shook me up. All indications had been so positive, right up to my interviewer's parting words, " I hope to see you at Hopkins next year." This positive reaction had been further followed up by my host's persistent requests for information from me. Yet, when the chips were down, my guess is that the name "UConn" was just not good enough for Hopkins.

If I were writing this letter simply to tell you about things past you could justifiably ask why I'm taking your time. However, Hopkins is over with. In the meantime, I have had my interview at Harvard. This has been the most positive and exhilirating of all my interviews. My interviewers were extremely supportive, encouraging, and almost adamant in their overt support for me. Once again, they requested copies of the paper, which I promptly sent them.

But this time I must do something more, I must enlist your support. You have already been kind enough to fill out the standard University of Connecticut pre-medical rating forms. This undoubtedly figured strongly in my selection for an interview. However, as far as I have been able to determine, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT GRADUATE ACCEPTED TO HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL. In view of my Hopkins experience, I strongly suspect that this statistic will remain unchanged unless there is a powerful communication from you to Harvard.

It seems that the work done by a UConn sophomre at Stanford has been sufficient to cause several major medical school faculty members to initiate requests for it. But somehow, that, along with my current work on DNA/DNA hybridization, my high school project that brought me the scholarship to UConn, the 3.92 average, University Scholar, Phi Beta Kappa, and all my hospital work, vanishes as the committe scrutinizes the application to find that all-important Ivy League name.

Unless it has gotten to the point where people are absolute fakers, the sentiments expressed at Harvard would lead me to conclude that I would be admitted there. However, since I was informed that a successful applicant must be unanimously voted in by the admissions committe, I am strongly inclined to feel that the other members of the committee aside from my interviewers will simply dump a UConn application regardless of its merit. The Harvard Medical School record on UConn admissions SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. To give you a further idea of what is involved here, when one of my interviewers was explaining how the committe worked, he said that there were 20 people who handled the applicants from the western part of the country and 20 concerned with looking over the applicants from the "...Ivy League...ahh...I mean Eastern schools."

At this time, I am most interested in Harvard. However, I do not take lightly my letters of acceptance already received from Mt. Sinai, Albert Einstein, and the University of Pennsylvania schools of medicine. It is just that the particular combination of excellent clinical facilities along with outstanding research is probably strongest at Harvard.

From what I have observed of the Harvard record on admissions, Stanford is a West Coast Ivy League equivalent. Therefore, while the UConn pre-medical evaluation may be given short shrift there is no question that a Stanford University evaluation receives serious consideration.

In the courses I took at Stanford (my work for you and the computer science course), I received A and A+ respectively. Based on this, and my observations of my contemporaries at UConn and at Harvard, I am led to believe that I could perform successfully at Harvard Medical School. However, I do not think that Harvard seriously considers the UConn record to be of any value unless it is strongly supported by a reference from a respected faculty member of major accomplishment at an Ivy League school or its equivalent.

Furthermore, the type of work which I did during the summer of 1975 is not as easily evaluated as sets of MCAT numbers and names of schools. I feel that the principles involved here are broader than my personal interest alone. A strong element of "Madison Avenue promotionalism" is creeping into medical school preparation. This far over-stresses cramming techniques for boosting scores and duplicating as much of the medical school curriculum as possible as an undergraduate. I have ignored these approaches and preferred to gain an in-depth exposure to chemistry. This type of real learning has very little pay-off on the MCAT's, which do not deal with the more advanced chemical structures and thermodynamic aspects of the life sciences. My MCAT's are solid. (Verbal 595/75, Quantitative 685/88, General Information 635/92, Science 655/82) I took these once, in the middle of a busy 20 credit semester during which I also re-wrote and presented the paper on nucleic acids. I refuse to devote any time solely in the pursuit of MCAT percentage points. This is ridiculous when there are so many more constructive things to do, such as my current work on histone gene mapping in *Chironomus*. I certainly hope that Harvard recognizes my point here.

Bascially, I feel that my philosophy of what makes a top-notch doctor is on the line here. This philosophy involves a deep commitment to medicine, a sound background and ability in the technical areas, caring about and knowing how to deal with people as human beings, and an awareness of the relationship between clinical experience and advances in research.

I do not think that the extremes in wealth which currently are a major factor in enabling people to study at Ivy League schools is an essential component for being a good physician. In fact, by going to the Univ. of Conn., I have been exposed to a much wider diversity than that at the more restrictive Ivy League schools. This experience here at UConn has helped to further me towards medicine.

I feel that I have earned a chance to go to a school with the superb combination of clinical and research facilities such as those at Harvard. I think that here, as at Hopkins, I have the support of my interviewers. However, based on the Hopkins experience, I recognize that something more is necessary at this time.

Thus, I am asking you to send a separate letter on Stanford University stationary to the Harvard Medical School Admissions Committee (or to whomever you may know at that school) that conveys that, in view of our previous relationship and continuing communications, you feel that I would be a desirable student at Harvard Medical School. Therefore, you are writing an additional letter to support my application, apart from the UConn standard form.

If you feel that a personal contact, such as a phone call, would be of value, I would appreciate your doing this.

Dr. Lederberg, I realize that I am again asking you to take time. However, your urgent effort now can make the difference since Harvard still has not made its decision.

Thank you for your kind help and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Mark Weidenbaum

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