

RESEARCH LETTER

Factors Influencing Dermatology Rank List Preferences Among Successful Applicants

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A recent study has suggested that increasing the number of residency positions would help alleviate the shortage of dermatologists.¹ Filling these positions would be straightforward using the demand from the existing applicant pool, however choosing the applicants that best “fit” with a program remains a challenge.² Several studies have looked at applicant factors that predict success of matching, but no recent studies have determined the factors that influence how applicants order their rank list.

Current Dermatology residents throughout the U.S. were invited to participate in an anonymous validated 10 question survey. Demographic questions included: gender, marital status, and number of dermatology programs applied to, interviewed with, and ranked. Respondents were asked to choose the top 5 reasons for ranking a residency program higher or lower on their rank list.³

The first 100 respondents were included in the study. The average number of residency programs applied to was 57.6, the mean number of programs interviewed at was 8.2, and the mean number of programs ranked

was 8.5. (Table 1) Most respondents matched within their top 3 choices on their rank list.

Table 1: Resident respondent characteristics.

Characteristic	Percent
Mean No. Programs Applied	57.6
Mean No. Programs Interviewed	8.2
Mean No. Programs Ranked	8.5
Gender	
Male	48.0
Female	51.0
Unanswered	1.0
Relationship Status	
Single	38.0
Married/ Domestic Partnership	61.0
Unanswered	1.0
Children	
Yes	27.0
No	72.0
Unanswered	1.0
Matched in top 3	
Yes	86.0
No	14.0

Interestingly, geographic location was the top reason for both ranking programs higher and lower. (Table 2) Reputation and prestige of the sponsoring institution also influenced higher and lower ranking. Other frequently cited reasons for ranking a program higher were: personal experience from prior rotation, perceived quality of current residents, and perceived camaraderie among residents. When ranking a program lower, respondents were typically concerned with: perceived stability of the department, work-life balance, and personal interactions with residents on interview day. Factors such as perceived environment for women and minorities, employment benefits, and elective opportunities were not as high a priority. However, in contrast to a previous study⁴, there were no significant differences in preferences when selections were stratified by gender, marital status, and having children.

Other specialties have also noted the importance of geographic location among resident rank lists.³ Although the overwhelming majority of dermatology residency positions are filled¹, nonetheless this information may be valuable to residency program leadership in order to more effectively highlight the strengths of their location. This may include a presentation on local attractions, accessibility, and a description of a typical day in the life of a resident.

While some of these factors are fixed, other factors such as the applicant experience on interview day and perceptions of the department could be better optimized. Residency programs can maximize applicant perceptions by highlighting the successes and camaraderie of the current resident

cohort. For example, the interview day experience could be enhanced by scheduling interviews so there are no long periods of waiting. Providing the applicants an opportunity to engage in fun activities with current residents during downtime between interviews may leave applicants with a more positive view of the experience. In turn, the applicants the program attracts will be a better “match” to the program. Program Directors and Chairs may benefit from the findings of this study as they engage in their residency recruitment process.

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Table 2: Factors affecting rank list ordered by frequency of selection.

Position	Factors that Impact Higher Position	%	Factors that Impact Lower Position	%
1	Geographic Location	55.0	Geographic Location	53.0
2	Personal Experience from Prior Rotation at Department	44.0	Perceived Stability of Dermatology Department	33.0
3	Perceived Quality of Current Residents	39.0	Work-Life Balance	31.0
4	Perceived Camaraderie Among Current Residents	35.0	Personal Interactions with Current Residents on Interview Day	30.0
5	Reputation and Prestige of Sponsoring Institution	32.0	Reputation and Prestige of Sponsoring Institution	28.0
6	Work-Life Balance	31.0	Perceived Quality of Clinical Facilities	26.0
7	Proximity to Family	28.0	Perceived Quality of Current Residents	23.0
8	Perceived Quality of Didactic Curriculum	26.0	Size of Program	23.0
9	Size of Program	26.0	Call Schedule	22.0
10	Diversity of Patient Population	26.0	Geographic Preference of Spouse	7.0
11	Personal Interactions with Current Residents on Interview Day	24.0	Impression of Program Director from Interview Day	20.0
12	Perceived Stability of Dermatology Department	24.0	Proximity to Family	19.0
13	Geographic Preference of Spouse	19.0	Perceived Camaraderie Among Current Residents	18.0
14	Impression of Program Director from Interview Day	17.0	Cost of Living	18.0
15	Perceived Quality of Clinical Facilities	14.0	Perceived Quality of Didactic Curriculum	15.0
16	Mentor/Colleague/Advisor Recommendation	11.0	Personal Experience from Prior Rotation at Department	15.0
17	Research Opportunities	11.0	Diversity of Patient Population	14.0
18	Cost of Living	10.0	Availability of Free Meals for Residents	13.0
19	Placement of Recent Graduates into Desired Fellowships	10.0	Perceived Environment for Minorities	11.0
20	Call Schedule	5.0	Elective Opportunities Offered	10.0
21	Elective Opportunities Offered	3.0	Mentor/Colleague/Advisor Recommendation	10.0

22	Program's willingness to Allow & Pay for Conference Attendance	3.0	Research Opportunities	10.0
23	Employment Benefits	2.0	Perceived Environment for Women	8.0
24	Perceived Environment for Minorities	2.0	Placement of Recent Graduates into Desired Fellowships	8.0
25	Perceived Environment for Women	2.0	Employment Benefits	7.0
26	Availability of Free Meals for Residents	0.0	Program's willingness to Allow & Pay for Conference Attendance	6.0