

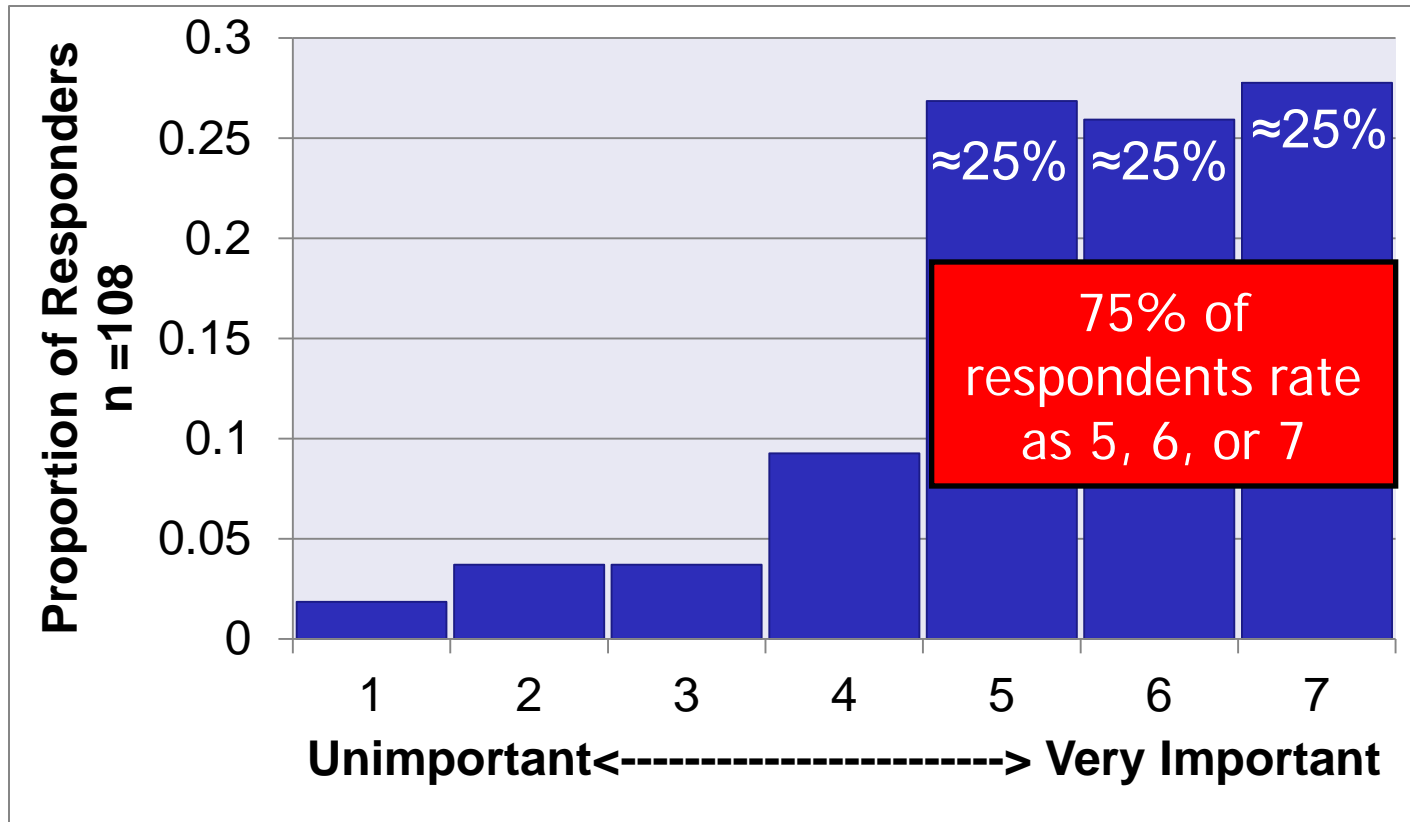


# Dermatology Standardized Letter of Recommendation: Why we need it

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The Ohio State University



# Are letters of recommendation important?

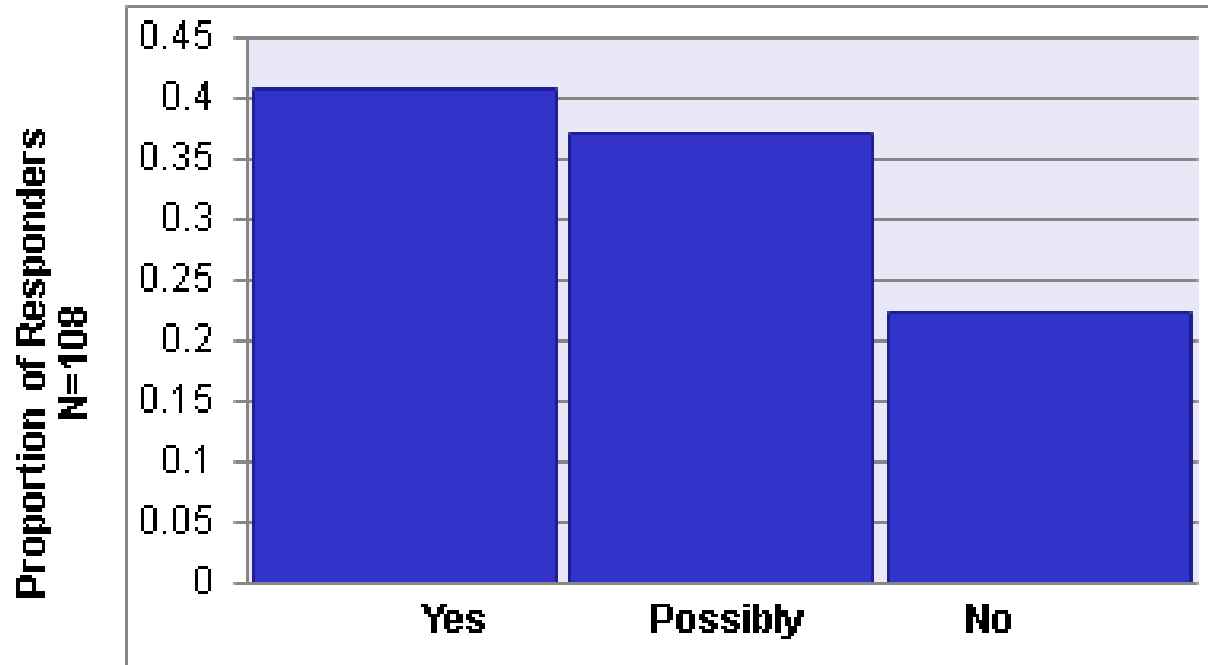


2013 Survey of APD members, n= 108



# Support for Developing SLOR

## 3A. Standardized Letter Template



- 2013 Survey of APD members, n=108
  - 79% of APD respondents were in support or possibly in support of developing a SLOR



# WHAT IS THE SLOR?

## DERMATOLOGY STANDARDIZED LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
 AAMC ID No: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your present position (choose one):  
 Dermatology Department Chair  
 Dermatology Program Director  
 Dermatology Assistant Program Director  
 Dermatology Faculty  
 Non-dermatology Faculty (Specialty : \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Research Faculty  
 Private Practice physician

This applicant waived his/her rights to view this standardized letter of recommendation as covered under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974.

Yes  No

How long have you been in your current position (or a similar position)? \_\_\_\_\_ years

### A. Background

- How many medical students have you worked with in the past year?  
 <15  
 15 - 50  
 >50
- How often do you work with dermatology residents?  
 <1 per week  
 1-3 times per week  
 >3 times per week
- How long have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_ months
- What is your contact with the applicant? (Choose all that apply)  
 Know indirectly through others/evaluations  
 Direct observation in clinical setting  
 Direct observation writing article (case report, review article, etc)  
 Direct observation in clinical/basic science research  
 Advisor

### B. Assessment

- Please assess the applicant compared to the overall **dermatology applicant pool**. If this candidate is below average in any of the areas, please include written comments in the field below.

	Below Avg for Derm applicant	Average for Derm applicant	Above Avg for Derm applicant	Outstanding for Derm applicant (Top 15%)	Exceptional for Derm applicant (Top 5%)	Best this year	Best in 10 years
Ability to work as a part of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clinical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inquisitive nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reliability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>GLOBAL ASSESSMENT</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- This applicant's most outstanding feature is \_\_\_\_\_
- The applicant's most likely career path will be \_\_\_\_\_
- Indicate any additional comments in the box below (100 word limit)

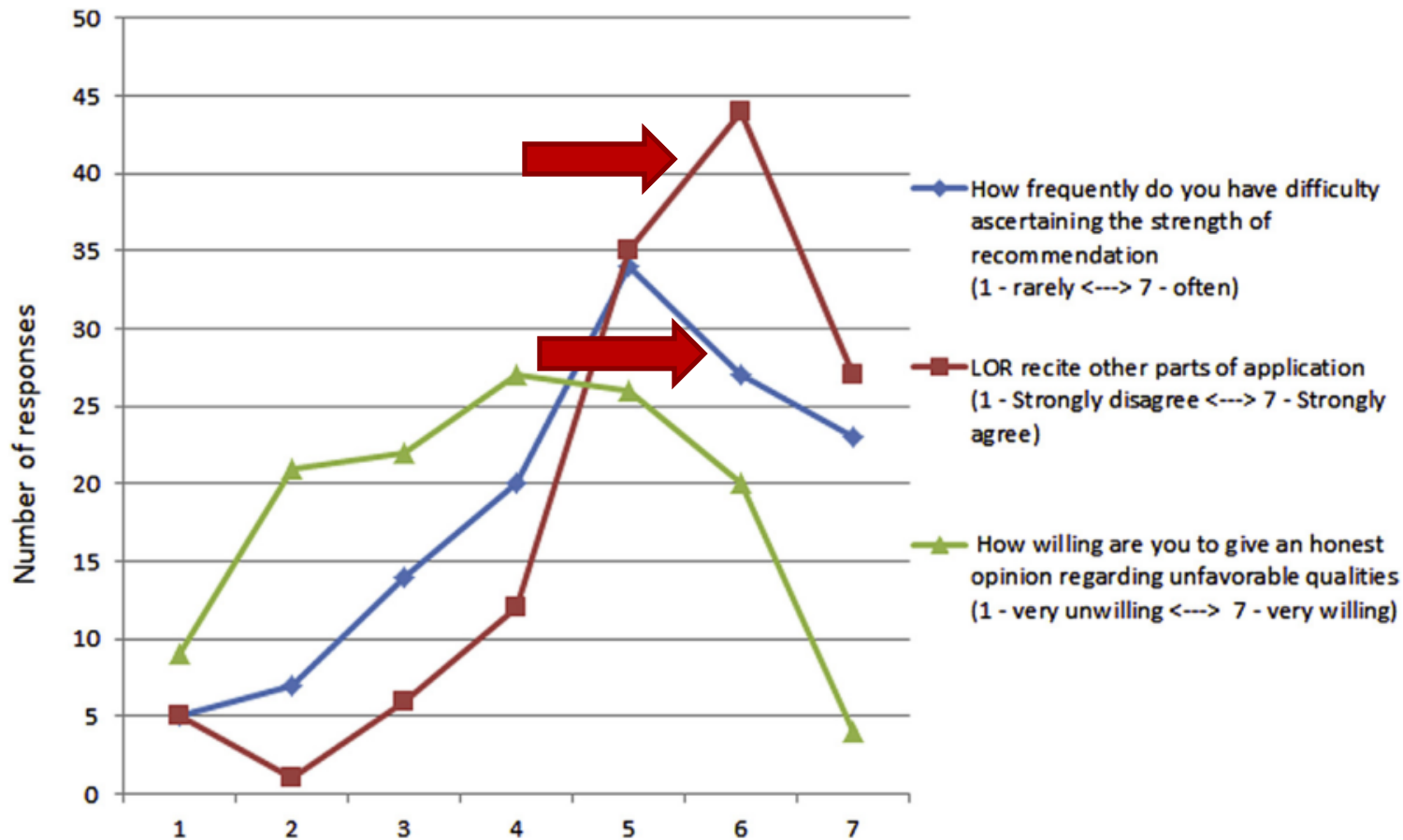
Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
 AAMC ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# 10 reasons to adopt the SLOR



# 10. Current NLOR has various problems





**Fig 2.** Questions posed to Association of Professors of Dermatology members regarding ambiguity, redundancy, and willingness to provide honest assessments of a weakness of an applicant. n = 129.

# Some problems with NLOR cont

- Contain a complicated hierarchy of laudatory phrases
  - "...outstanding" (or equivalent) was used in 37% and "excellent" (or equivalent) was used in 38%. Meaningful comparison to student colleagues appeared in 11%." (Fortune 2002). (Evaluated 966 NLOR for surgery positions)
  - "If I can provide any additional information, please call..." was almost uniformly identified as a strong negative comment and was most commonly found in the...lowest ranked group of letters". (Greenburg 1994) ( Evaluated 80 NLOR Surgery letters)
  - Primary reason EM switched to SLOR. "Although a letter writer's intent in using terms such as "excellent" may have been to imply a specific comparative value to a given characteristic, it was confusing to many program directors what that value really was and how frequently the writer used such terms when describing (Keim et al 1999)





# Some problems with NLOR cont

- Code words
  - 19% of 763 NLORs evaluated for ENT residency contained “doubt raisers” (Messner 2008)
    - “made an effort to be an effective team member”
    - “average fund of knowledge”
- Low reliability between interpreting faculty members
  - Low kappa (0.28) for NLOR evaluating 58 orthopedic residents (Dirschl 2000)




# 9. SLORs exist in other specialties, and are successful



# Programs who have adopted SLORs

- Emergency Medicine
- ENT
- Orthopedics
- Plastics



- 
- 
- “You are on the right track to start using standardized letters....They are more helpful to separate applicants. We all use the standardized form.”
    - Sorabh Khandelwal M.D., Emergency Med Program Director at OSU
  - “We have been using the standardized letter of recommendation for the past 3 years. I feel that we all like it. It is basically a scoring sheet that allows us to be a bit more objective when comparing applicants.”
    - Brad DeSilva, MD ENT Program Director at OSU

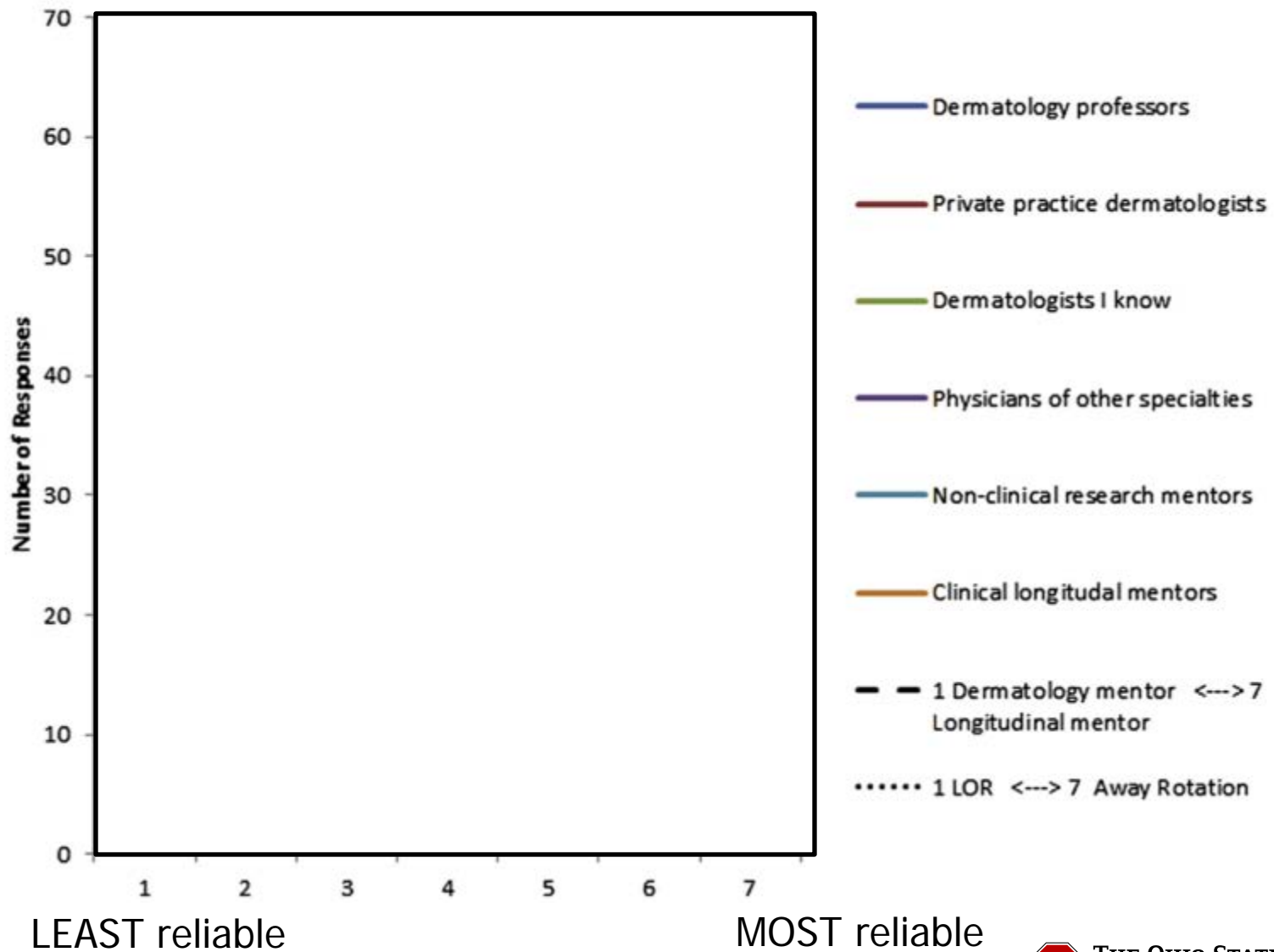




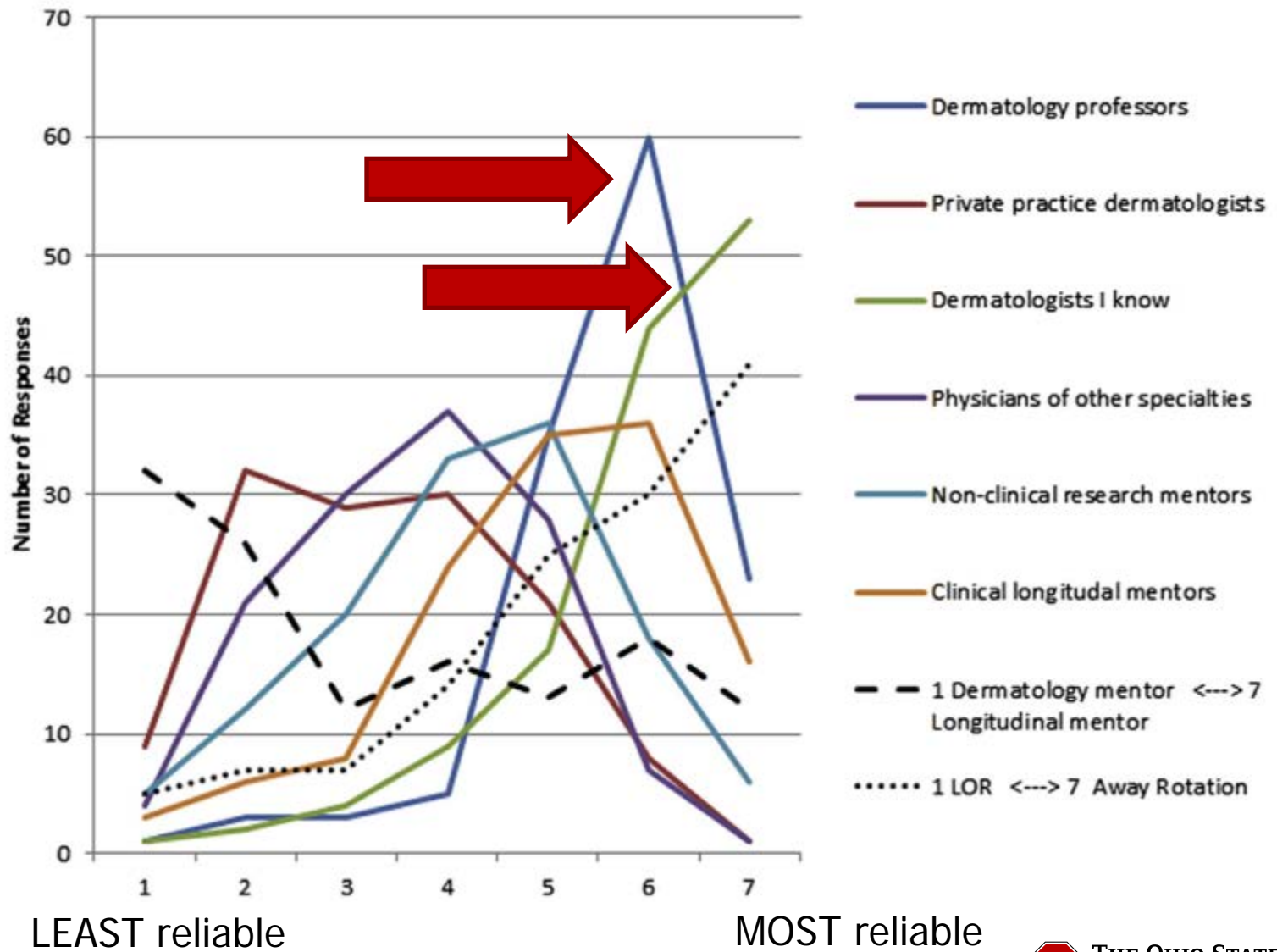
# 8. SLOs provide a framework for letter interpretation



# How reliable is a letter coming from each of the following groups?



# How reliable is a letter coming from each of the following groups?



LEAST reliable

MOST reliable

# Information about writer's background/writer-applicant relationship (unpublished data)

- NLOR 2.3 pieces of info
- SLOR 6 pieces of info

Your present position (choose one):

- Dermatology Department Chair
- Dermatology Program Director
- Dermatology Assistant Program Director
- Dermatology Faculty
- Non-dermatology Faculty (Specialty : \_\_\_\_\_)
- Research Faculty
- Private Practice physician

How long have you been in your current position (or a similar position)? \_\_\_\_\_ years

## A. Background

1. How many medical students have you worked with in the past year?
  - <15
  - 15 - 50
  - >50
2. How often do you work with dermatology residents?
  - <1 per week
  - 1-3 times per week
  - >3 times per week
3. How long have you known the applicant? \_\_\_\_\_ months
4. What is your contact with the applicant? (Choose all that apply)
  - Know indirectly through others/evaluations
  - Direct observation in clinical setting
  - Direct observation writing article (case report, review article, etc)
  - Direct observation in clinical/basic science research
  - Advisor





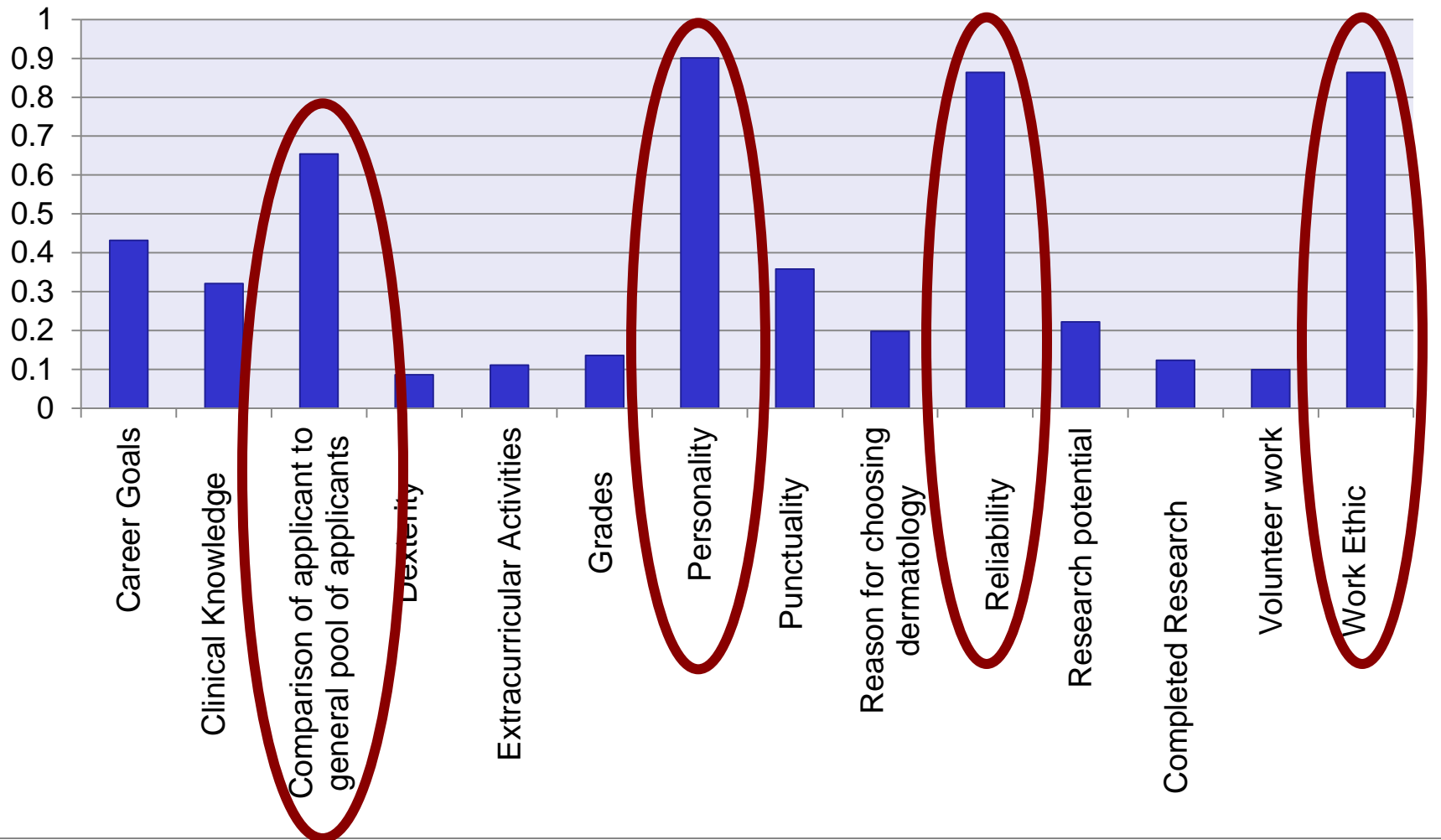


# 7. SLOR incorporates qualities which are deemed important by APD



■ 2013: APD surveyed on what they found important in a LOR (n=108). Most impnt:

- Personality
- Reliability
- Work Ethic



	Below Avg for Derm applicant	Average for Derm applicant	Above Avg for Derm applicant	Outstanding for Derm applicant (Top 15%)	Exceptional for Derm applicant (Top 5%)	Best this year	Best in 10 years
Ability to work as a part of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clinical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inquisitive nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reliability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>GLOBAL ASSESSMENT</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. This applicant's most outstanding feature is

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3. The applicant's most likely career path will be

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# 6. All applicants evaluated via same benchmarks



- 763 LORs evaluated for ENT residency
  - Female letter writers more likely to comment on applicant being a team player, or compassionate. Males more likely to write a letter of “minimal assurance” (Messner et al 2008)



	<b>Below Avg for Derm applicant</b>	<b>Average for Derm applicant</b>	<b>Above Avg for Derm applicant</b>	<b>Outstanding for Derm applicant (Top 15%)</b>	<b>Exceptional for Derm applicant (Top 5%)</b>	<b>Best this year</b>	<b>Best in 10 years</b>
Ability to work as a part of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clinical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inquisitive nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reliability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>GLOBAL ASSESMENT</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



# 5. Less potential for applicant “glamorization”



# 2014-2015 interviews: NFOR for applicant #1 written by physician A

- “I am writing to **highly recommend**” [ ] in application for a position in your residency program in Dermatology.
- “[ ] demonstrated an ability to learn quickly and her turnaround on the paper was under **RESEARCH** weeks, which impressed me....Our frequent meetings always demonstrated to me [ ]’s **work ethic, determination, and ability to receive and respond to constructive criticism, incorporating them seamlessly into the finished research project....** developed a detailed knowledge base of our subject matter...”

**COMMUNICATION** ssed her assessment and plans with **great articulation, enthusiasm and organization...**”

- “[ ] always showed **compassion, respect and concern** for those with whom she came in **GOOD INTERACTIONS**...”





# SLOR for SAME applicant #1 written by the SAME physician A

Research  
Communication  
Good interactions

	Below Avg for Derm applicant	Average for Derm applicant	Above Avg for Derm applicant	Outstanding for Derm applicant (Top 15%)	Exceptional for Derm applicant (Top 5%)	Best this year	Best in 10 years
Work as a part of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clinical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inquisitive nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reliability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research potential	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>GLOBAL ASSESSMENT</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. This applicant's most outstanding feature is  
Lively

3. The applicant's most likely career path will be  
Private practice

# 2014-2015 interviews: NLOR for applicant #2 written by physician B

- “It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation...”
- “She is a **hardworking**, studious young woman who has proven herself to be able to meet challenges....”  
**WORK ETHIC**
- “~~She was liked~~ **by members of our team** and participated in clinic with **enthusiasm and energy**....She has attempted to find additional projects and is quite persistent in this; however, she also has the ability to study independently and **she read a great deal while on our rotation**”  
**GOOD INTERACTIONS**



# SLOR for SAME applicant #2 written by the SAME physician B

Work Ethic  
Good interactions

	Below Avg for Derm applicant	Average for Derm applicant	Above Avg for Derm applicant	Outstanding for Derm applicant (Top 15%)	Exceptional for Derm applicant (Top 5%)	Best this year	Best in 10 years
Ability to work as a part of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with patients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interactions with residents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clinical knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inquisitive nature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reliability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership potential	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>GLOBAL ASSESSMENT</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. This applicant's most outstanding feature is  
Personal dedication and determination

# Less potential for applicant “glamorization” with SLOR

- Derm SLOR (unpublished data)
  - Applicants’ positive traits were felt to be less exaggerated in SLOR vs NLOR ( $p < 0.0001$ )



# 4. Higher reliability



- EM comparison of standardized and narrative LOR (Girzadas et al. 1998)
  - SLOR interrater reliability 0.97
  - NLOR interrater reliability 0.78
- Dermatology comparison of standardized and narrative LOR (unpublished data)

Table 1		
	Narrative Letter	Standardized Letter
<b>Personality</b>		
Interrater - W	0.437	0.654
<u>Intrater - Averaged <math>\rho</math></u>	0.368	0.754
<b>Work Ethic</b>		
Interrater - W	0.481	0.720
<u>Intrater - Average <math>\rho</math></u>	0.542	0.906
<b>Reliability</b>		
Interrater - W	0.456	0.723
<u>Intrater - Average <math>\rho</math></u>	0.511	0.882
<b>Perception of Letter Inflation</b>		
Interrater - W	0.282	0.364
<u>Intrater - Average <math>\rho</math></u>	0.426	0.507
<b>Global Score</b>		
Interrater - W	0.578	0.704
<u>Intrater - Average <math>\rho</math></u>	0.643	0.764

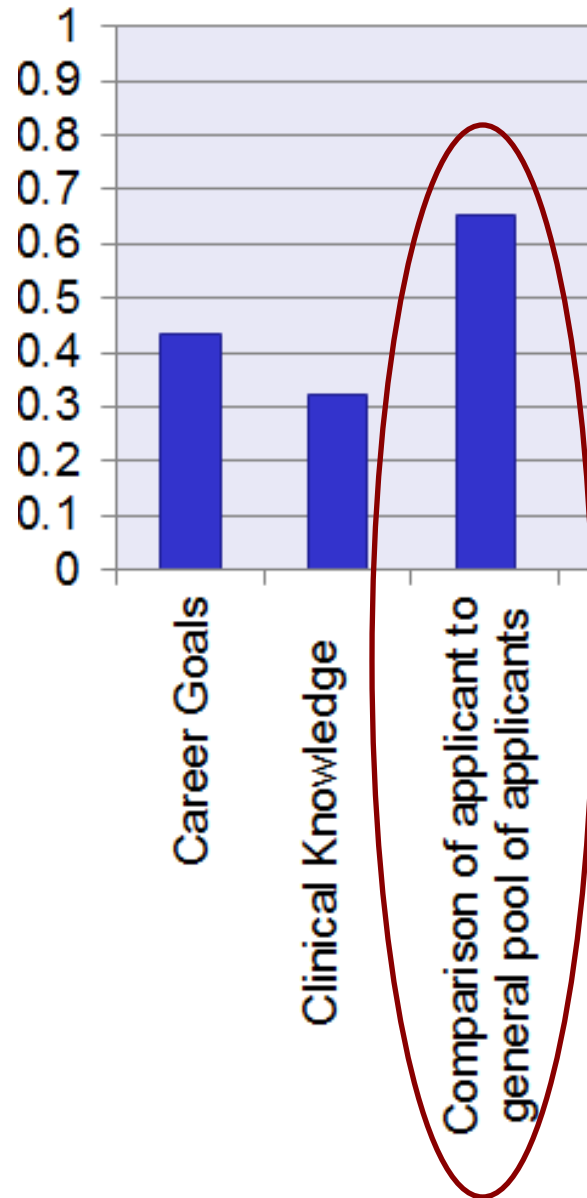
W = Kendall Coefficient of concordance  
 $\rho$  = Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient (averaged among 5 repeat interpreters)



# 3. Ability to stratify applicants



- 2013 Dermatology APD survey, one of most impnt criteria in a LOR

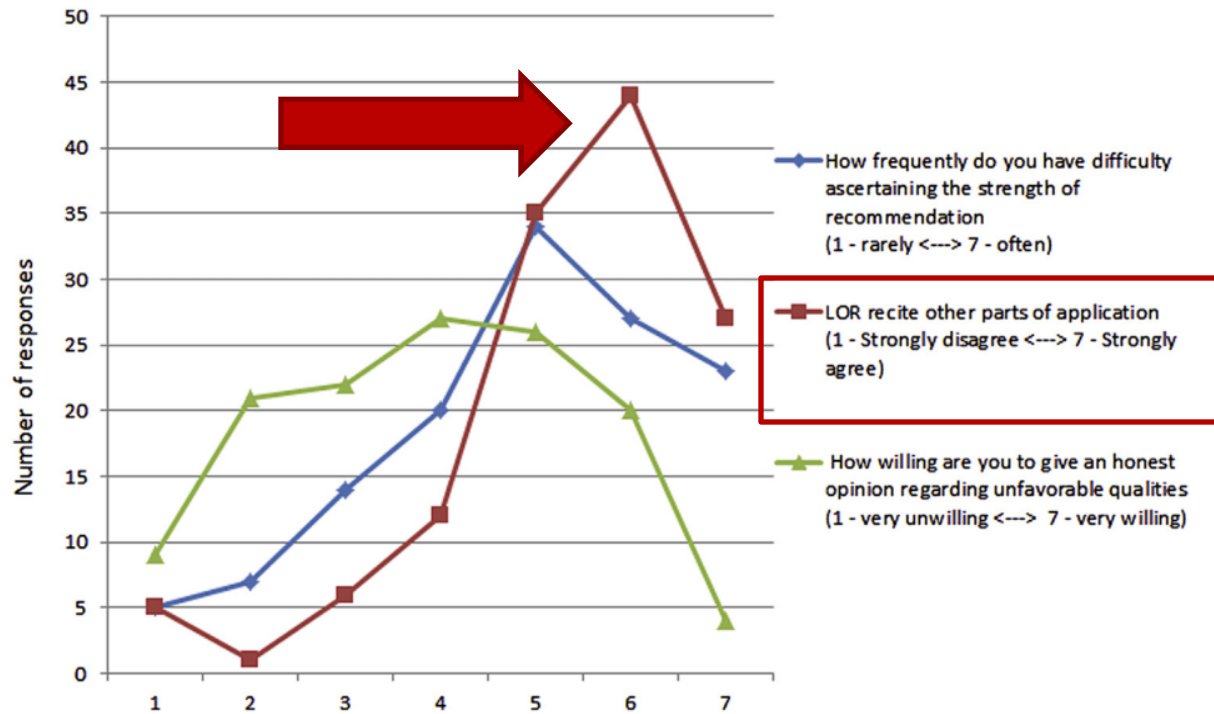




## 2. Not redundant/Efficient



## 2013 Dermatology APD survey regarding NLOR, n= 108



**Fig 2.** Questions posed to Association of Professors of Dermatology members regarding ambiguity, redundancy, and willingness to provide honest assessments of a weakness of an applicant. n = 129.

Kaffenberger et al., 2014

# 1. SIMPLE and fast!



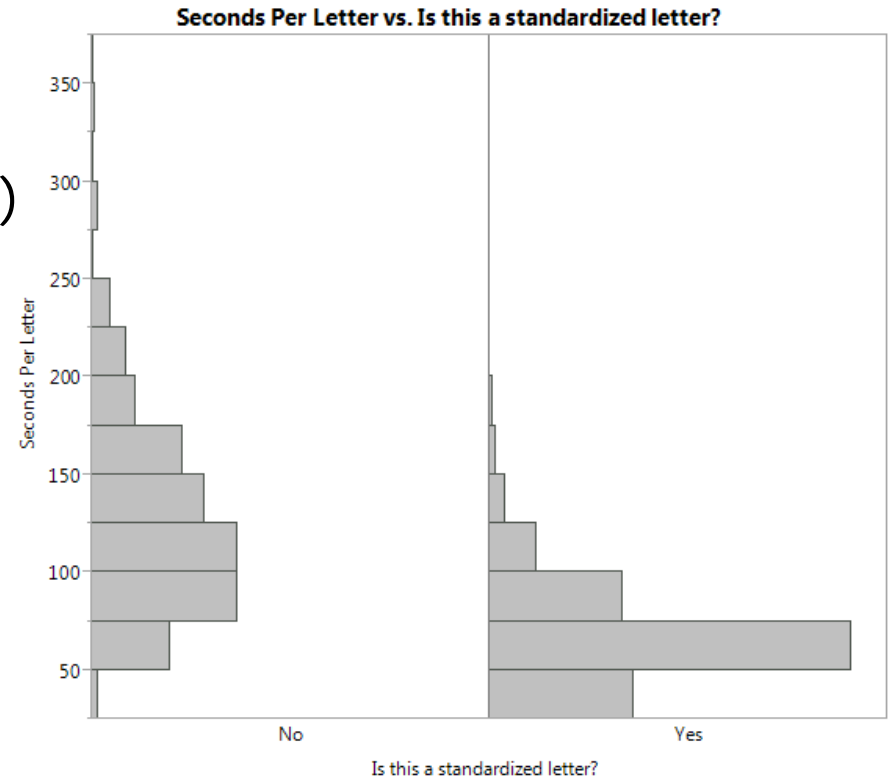
# Time to interpret

- **EM** (Girzadas et al. 1998)

- NLOR: 90 sec
- SLOR: 16 seconds

- **Dermatology** (unpublished data)

- NLOR: 2 min
- SLOR: 1 min



# TAKE HOME: 10 reasons to adopt SLOR

- 10. Current NLOR has numerous problems
- 9. Similar versions are already successful
- 8. Framework for where the letter is coming from
- 7. Incorporates qualities which are deemed important by APD
- 6. All applicants evaluated via same benchmarks
- 5. Potential for less exaggeration of traits
- 4. High validity
- 3. Ability to stratify applicants
- 2. Efficient/not redundant
- 1. SIMPLE!



# THANK YOU!



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