



Association of Professors of Dermatology
Residency Program Directors Section

Recommendations regarding away electives
December 3, 2024

Given changes to the residency application process to create a more sustainable and equitable process, the APD will continue our policy of limiting away dermatology electives for upcoming residency application cycles.

In alignment with recommendations from the Organization of Program Director Associations (OPDA), the APD considers away electives important for many medical students. These rotations afford medical students the opportunity to gain additional exposure to dermatology educational experiences and programs to assess different learning environments. Away electives allow students to interact with faculty outside of their home institution, which can foster mentorship and other networking opportunities. For students without a dermatology residency program at their home institution, away electives provide a unique opportunity for dermatology clinical experience and connection with academic dermatology faculty.

For programs, away electives provide an opportunity for faculty to assess students' performance in clinical environments and among teams as well as to highlight the culture and learning environment of their program. These experiences can contribute to the holistic evaluation of candidates applying for residency. As such, it is generally advised that these electives are completed early in the final year of medical school, prior to the release of interview invitations. The utility of later rotations varies among programs.

However, it is important to state that participation in away electives is not required to receive an interview invite, nor does it guarantee an interview for a given program. It remains program-specific whether a formal interview offer is extended to all rotating students or whether interviews are conducted during an away elective. The APD recommends all programs be transparent with their policies regarding away electives and interviews.

Recommendations for students

Given the high costs associated with dermatology away electives and the continued potential for inequity that may impact outcomes of the dermatology residency match, the APD recommends the following guidelines to optimize dermatology exposure, education, and evaluation for dermatology residency candidates in their fourth year of medical school:

- Most students should limit their experiences to up to 2 external away electives
- Students without a home dermatology program may consider completing up to 3 electives at external programs

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- Students may apply to more than 2 external away electives and decline offers if needed to comply with the recommendations; programs are instructed to not penalize students who decline away elective offers with appropriate notice

Recommendations for programs

- Programs should consider funding opportunities for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and/or for students who demonstrate a commitment to diversity, if aligned with local and institutional guidelines.
 - o These may come in the form of program-specific funded electives, organizational/institutional funding, or mentorship awards/grants (eg AAD Diversity Mentorship Program or SOCS Observership Grant). Faculty can enroll as potential mentors through these organizations.
- Programs should not penalize students for declining an away elective offer with appropriate notice given that students are advised to only complete 2 of these experiences.
- Faculty mentors should counsel students to adhere to the recommendations above and to recognize that away electives are not required to match in dermatology. Individualized mentorship should be based on student goals, strengths, and opportunities for improvement.