Education

Evaluating Factors and Resources Affecting Ranking of Diagnostic Radiology Residency Programs by Medical Students in 2016–2017

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Rationale and Objectives: Recent changes in radiology curriculum and access to residency program information, including the introduction of various online resources and the Interventional Radiology integrated pathway, may influence the rank list order of medical student applicants. The purpose of this study is to assess factors that affect the rank lists of medical students applying to our radiology residency program in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Materials and Methods: After IRB approval, an anonymous online 19 question survey was emailed to 622 applicants to our diagnostic radiology and/or interventional radiology integrated pathway. Applicants ranked 35 unique factors that may influence their residency rank list order from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important), listed their top five 'very important' factors, and ranked various sources of information used to learn about residency programs. General applicant demographic questions were also included.

Results: Response rate was 18.8% (117/622). The 5 most important factors affecting applicant ranking of programs are perceived happiness of the residents and faculty (4.69), fellowship and job placement of recent graduates (4.34), interactions with programs' current residents (4.33), stability of the department and program (4.29), and geographic location of the program (4.27). The top 5 resources for learning about residency programs were interactions with current residents at the program (4.47), program director (3.87), and interviewing faculty (3.87). Individual program websites were ranked more highly than internet message boards and forums as an information source.

Conclusion: Medical students consider a large number of factors and resources in determining their rank lists, with factors encountered during the interview day playing a significant role in shaping the applicants' view of a residency program.

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INTRODUCTION

Every year, medical students devote significant time and energy organizing their radiology residency rank lists for the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP). The factors that play an important role in determining the rank list order are diverse and often outside the control of the residency programs (1). While candidate selection criteria used by residency program directors are often objective in nature (e.g. class ranking and test scores), medical students often base their rank list order on more subjective criteria (2). Although the overall candidate interview and matching process has remained essentially unchanged since a 2002 study of rank list factors by Pretorius and Hrung, the interval emergence of online educational resources, digital devices, and web-based information may influence how candidates receive information about various residency programs and how they choose to rank them (3, 4). In addition, the introduction of the interventional radiology integrated (diagnostic radiology/interventional radiology [DR/IR]) pathway by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education in 2013 (5) is an important change in training paradigm, potentially attracting an applicant pool that values different factors than those applying for the diagnostic radiology (DR) pathway. Though there are recent publications that have described the results of the first integrated DR/IR residency match (6) as well as evaluate the impact of social media and internet resources on residency training (7, 8), there are no recent studies that attempt to comprehensively evaluate the importance of various factors and resources in determining radiology residency rank list order in different subsets of applicants, particularly those applying for the DR/IR pathway.

Acad Radiol 2018; ■:1–9

Disclosures: None of the authors cite any conflict of interest.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acra.2018.05.001

The purpose of this study is to assess the different resources applicants use to learn about residency programs and determine which factors students value most highly when ranking radiology residency programs.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study was reviewed and approved by our Institutional Review Board. An invitation to complete an online questionnaire (Surveymonkey.com) was emailed to a total of 622 applicants who applied to our radiology residency program during the 2016−2017 academic year. Our radiology residency consists of 32 residents (eight per year, with two residents on the DR/IR pathway candidates per residency class) training in an academic, tertiary care hospital in a large urban city. The survey was sent to applicants applying to both the DR and DR/IR radiology residency program tracks. Applicants applying to both tracks were counted as a single response. The applicants were predominantly current medical students attending medical schools in the United States. Results from current residents in other medical specialties seeking to switch into radiology residency were included. Results from a small number of international applicants were included as multiple international programs often send their students for clinical exposure in hospitals throughout the United States.

In order to assure the applicants that their answers would not influence our or any radiology residency program rank lists, the survey was open to collect responses only during the time period between the candidates' and programs' submission of rank lists to the NRMP and match day for the applicants (3/9/17−3/16/17); this was explained in an email containing a link to begin the survey.

The questionnaire contained a total of 19 questions (Appendix 1). Input for the questionnaire design and content was provided by current radiology residents in our program, all of whom had recently participated in the NRMP match within the past 5 years. Thirty-five unique factors that may influence an applicant's radiology residency rank list were identified; candidates were asked to rank each of the factors from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important) and identify their top five "very important" factors as a way of further separating the most influential factors.

Applicants were also asked to rank the importance of various information resources about radiology residency programs. A total of eleven resources were identified based on input from faculty and current residents in our program, including online resources such as the radiology department's institutional website, and social networking sites such as Doximity (www.doximity.com, San Francisco, California) that provide residency ranks and public forums. Resources were ranked from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (very important).

General demographic questions such as age, gender, USMLE score, Alpha Omega Alpha (AOA) Society membership, total number of preliminary year and radiology interviews, and research projects were included within the survey. Additional specific questions were included to determine applicants' perception of the specialty, whether applicants' first specialty choice in medical school was radiology or a different field and their exposure to radiology education during medical school. Data comparing the results of different subgroups is analyzed using unpaired t test, with a threshold p value of $<.05$ determining statistical significance.

RESULTS

Applicant Demographics

The survey was sent to 622 applicants to our radiology residency program. A total of 18.8% (117/622) of invited applicants replied, with results listed in Table 1. The majority of surveys were completed in their entirety; results for each question include those that did not answer. Certain questions were only applicable to a subset of applicants (e.g. candidates that switched to radiology from another specialty choice during medical school).Data from these particular questions was also included. 62.3% (73/117) of respondents were men, 32.5% (38/117) were women, and 5.1% (6/117) did not

TABLE 1. Applicant Demographics

Question	Responses (n = 117)*
Gender	
Male	73 (62.3%)
Female	38 (32.5%)
No response	6 (5.1%)
Pathway	
DR only	66 (56.4%)
DR/IR	46 (39.3%)
No response	5 (4.3%)
USMLE Step 1 score	
201−215	8 (7.1%)
216−230	22 (19.6%)
231−245	40 (35.7%)
246−260	37 (33.0%)
261+	5 (4.5%)
No response	4 (4.0%)
Total post-grad research publications	
None	12 (10.7%)
1−2 publications	33 (29.5%)
3−4 publications	36 (32.1%)
5−6 publications	10 (8.9%)
7+ publications	21 (18.8%)
No response	5 (4.0%)
AOA membership	
Yes	19 (16.2%)
No	92 (78.6%)
No response	6 (5.1%)

AOA, Alpha Omega Alpha; DR/IR, diagnostic radiology/interventional radiology.

* The applicants' survey results were tabulated, with a small number of applicants choosing not to respond for various questions. Total number of answers for each survey question is listed in this table.

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