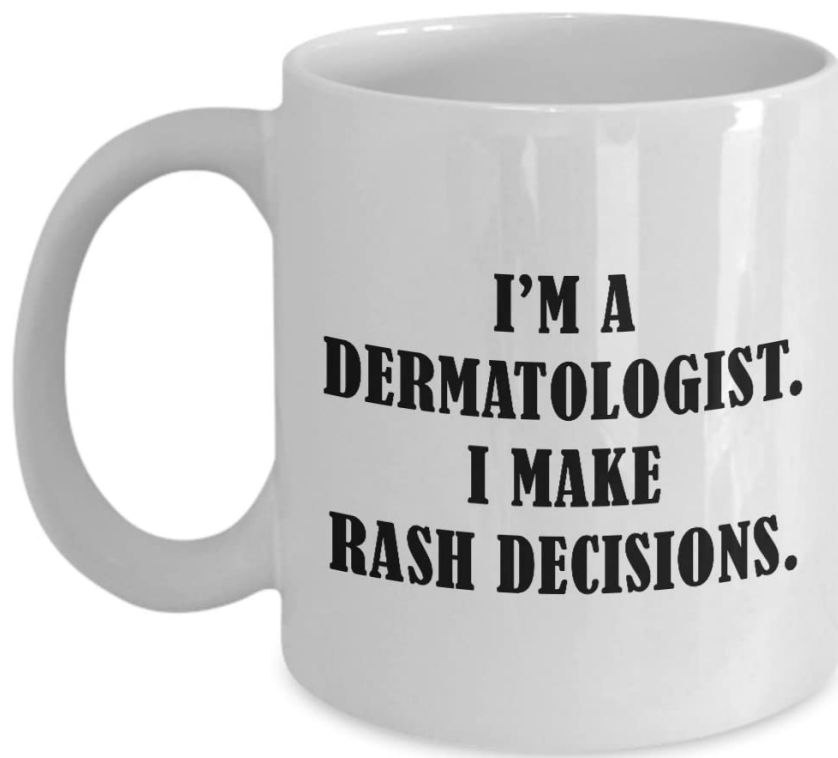


MS4 Guide to Applying Dermatology



For students of the University of Arizona
College of Medicine – Phoenix

6/2021

Dear Students Interested in Dermatology,

Woohoo! Congrats on deciding on such an exciting field! I am here to support you through this anxiety-producing process. I understand it is overwhelming, but you are not alone!

I promise to be as honest with you as possible, but remember that this is a very limited, one-person, COVID affected viewpoint, so take everything with a grain of salt! Also, a big disclaimer for dermatology especially:

****There is always an exception****

so if you don't fit every mold of what is shared here (I did not myself either), don't let it deter you! Hard work and passion are the biggest keys.

Always know that myself and the other alumni are rooting for you!

Best,
Jenna Koblinski
CO 2021

P.S. This is not meant as a substitute for working with your advisor and/or specialty mentors.

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MATCH DATA

Here is the most recent data from the “Charting Outcomes in the Match” from the NRMP (2020). There is also the Texas STAR tool that the school shares with you as well that can be helpful. This just gives an overall idea of derm applicants.

Table DM-1 **Summary Statistics on U.S. MD Seniors**
Dermatology

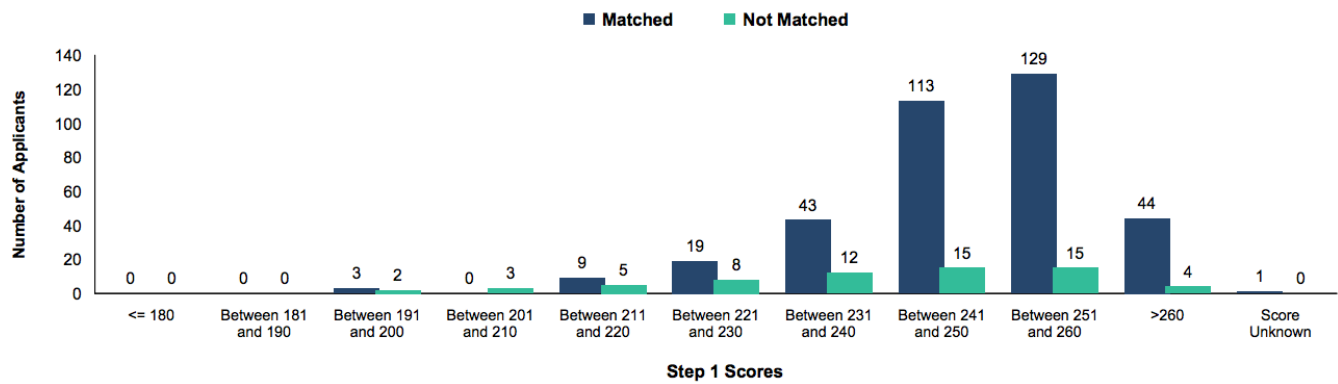
Measure	Matched (n=361)	Unmatched (n=64)
1. Mean number of contiguous ranks	9.9	4.5
2. Mean number of distinct specialties ranked	2.2	2.4
3. Mean USMLE Step 1 score	248	239
4. Mean USMLE Step 2 score	256	248
5. Mean number of research experiences	5.8	4.9
6. Mean number of abstracts, presentations, and publications	19.0	10.8
7. Mean number of work experiences	3.7	3.4
8. Mean number of volunteer experiences	9.4	8.8
9. Percentage who are AOA members	47.4	28.1
10. Percentage who graduated from one of the 40 U.S. medical schools with the highest NIH funding	41.3	34.4
11. Percentage who have Ph.D. degree	10.2	8.5
12. Percentage who have another graduate degree	19.7	24.6

Note: Only U.S. MD seniors who gave consent to use their information in research are included.

Sources. NRMP Data Warehouse; Top 40 U.S. medical schools with the highest NIH funding in measure 10 is from the NIH website (<http://report.nih.gov/award/index.cfm>).

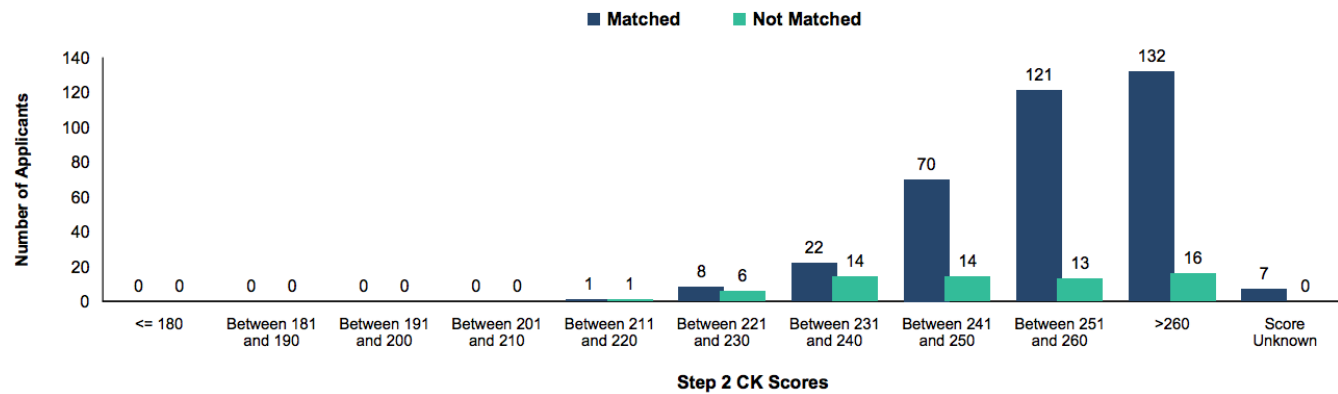
**Chart
DM-3**

USMLE Step 1 Scores of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology



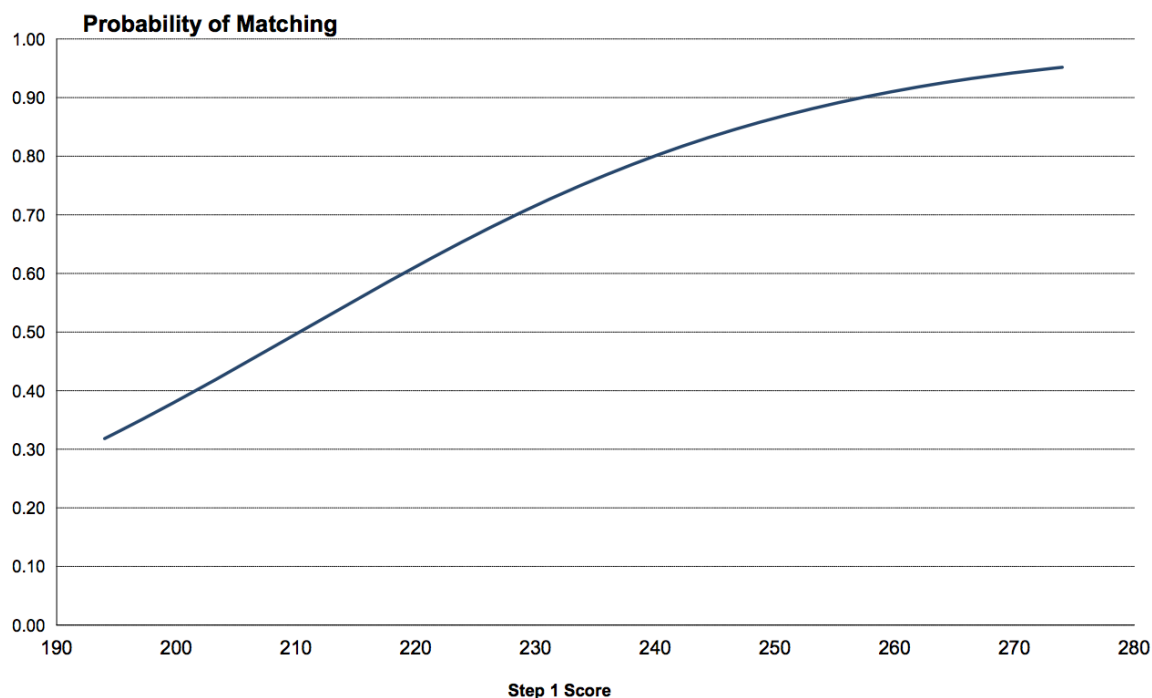
**Chart
DM-4**

USMLE Step 2 CK Scores of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology



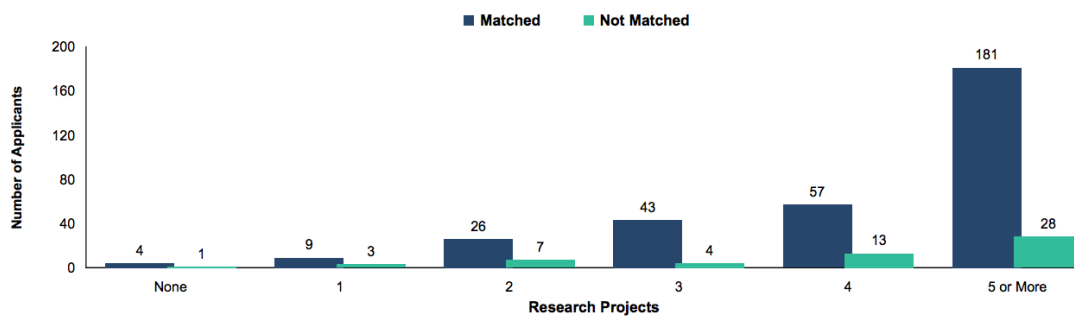
**Graph
DM-2**

Probability of U.S. MD Seniors Matching to Preferred Specialty by USMLE Step 1 Score
Dermatology



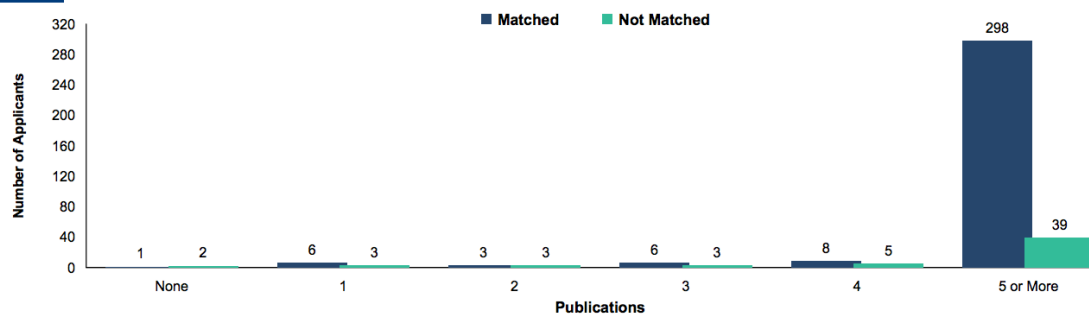
**Chart
DM-5**

Number of Research Projects of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology



**Chart
DM-6**

Number of Abstracts, Presentations, and Publications of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology



Source: NRMP Data Warehouse

Chart DM-7 Number of Work Experiences of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology

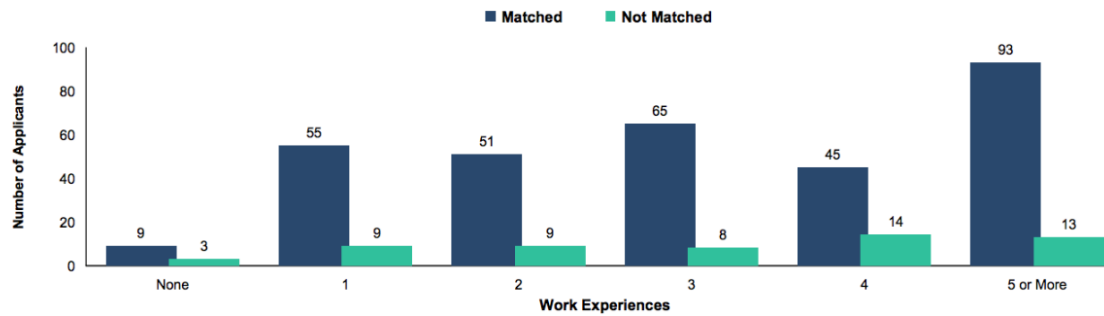
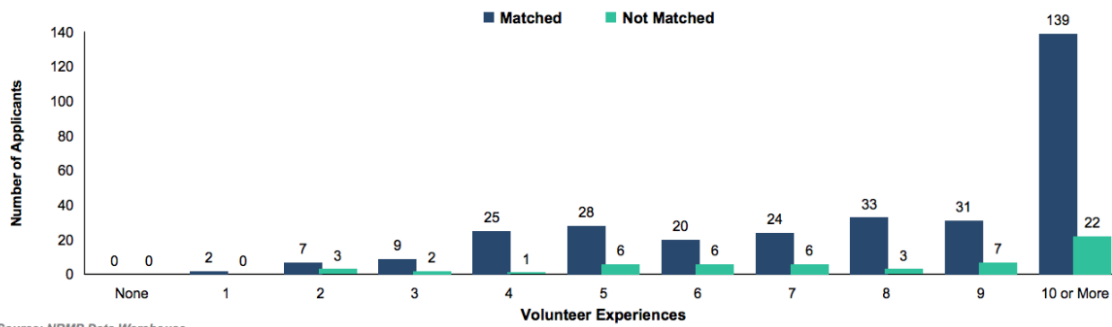
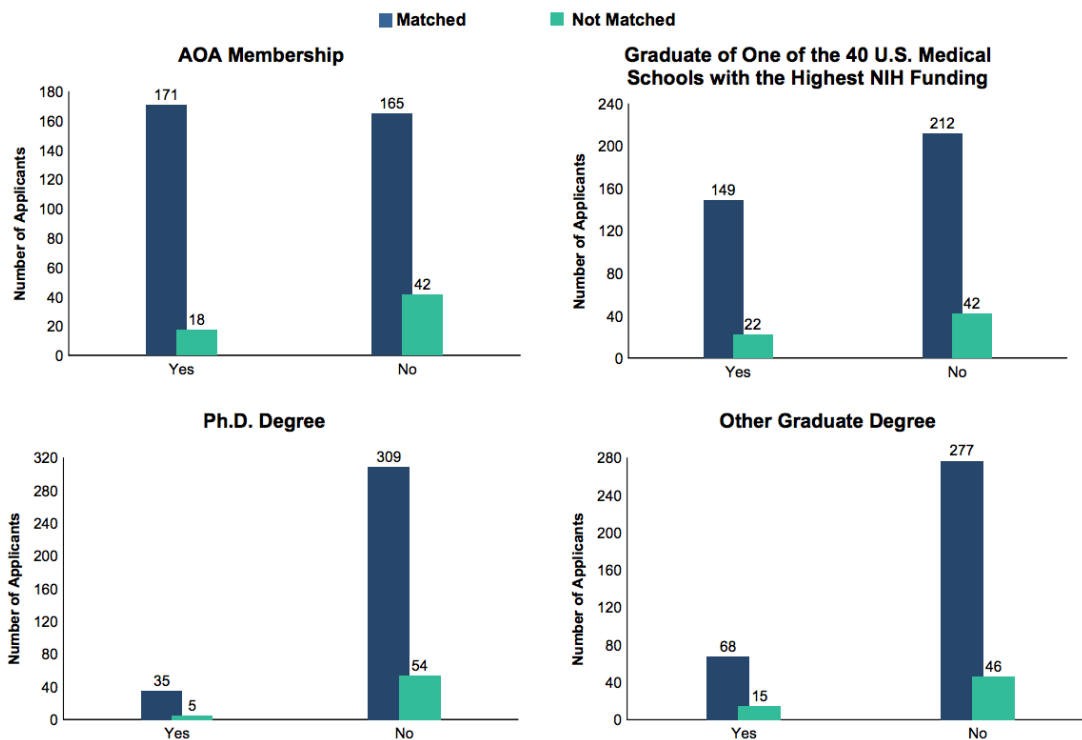


Chart DM-8 Number of Volunteer Experiences of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology



Source: NRMP Data Warehouse

Chart DM-9 Other Characteristics of U.S. MD Seniors
Dermatology



VSAS/AWAYS

****This is one of the things that COVID really affected for me. Because of this, I will put my experience and my advice in black ink, but I have also copy and pasted some advice from the MS4 ob/gyn guide because my year wasn't traditional and even though it's a different specialty, it's more than I can give.**

VSAS can be frustrating because it is all a game of odds. You want to apply to enough that you will get an acceptance, but it is stressful when you have applied to many overlapping ones and you don't want to have to be at the point to turn down multiple acceptances. The hardest part is when there is the one program that you really want, but you have already received an acceptance for someplace else, but you want to hold out for your dream place. I did have the latter happen to me, but luckily I was accepted to the place I really wanted in the window of still being able to deny the other acceptance I had. I still received an interview to the place I turned down, but I was VERY sincere when I declined their invitation and again it was within their window of needing an answer. From talking with derm residents, it is totally acceptable to turn down an away acceptance if you do it within their window of needing an answer and you are very gracious. However, if you tell them a definitive yes or the window expires then it is not worth it to cancel the away last minute. That looks very unprofessional and it is unlikely they will interview you after that. There is not really a great strategy to balance applications, but just know you are not alone! Keep an eye on deadlines and apply early. Also, there are plenty of places that do not use VSAS so make sure you are aware of that too. For example, Mayo does not use VSAS and they have rolling deadlines. Their earliest deadline is in January for an away in May/June and there isn't as much competition for an early spot (other than classmates) because a lot of schools don't start fourth year until July.

In terms of "unlocking a region," I have heard mixed things about it. I cannot say much personally because we had to stay local with COVID. I think if there is a program that you are super interested in, then that should be your priority because if they work with you and you excel, then it will go really far. However, it probably can't hurt to show that you are interested in moving (if you really are) and so far, only really have connections to one region. One thing that might be worth looking at if you don't have a heavy preference and just want to increase your chances is to try and see what programs automatically interview their away rotators. I know Mayo and Emory do this, but people will generally put this on the reddit page. Some places almost never interview their away rotators, so that might not be worth the time and the money. However, I do want to say:

****BE CAREFUL WITH REDDIT****

Aside: The Reddit page is a great tool and I have used it to ask questions, learn about programs, and keep up to date on deadlines (Reddit people are neurotic so it's all there). With that being said Reddit can also be damaging. There are trolls who change people's stats, delete posts, etc., so again take everything with a grain of salt and don't necessarily let one thing swing your opinion in either way. If you do decide to use Reddit however, I would suggest staying off of it once you are at the point where interviews are coming out. It's crushing to see people get interviews you don't get and it doesn't do anything for anyone.

Okay back to aways: there are a lot of specialties where you don't even need to do aways and you'll hear even for derm people from Top 10 programs are told not to do aways because it can

only hurt them when their program name already has so much weight. You might ask if you need to do aways and the answer is YES!! We do not have a home program and so you absolutely need to do aways to get your letters and to make connections (this can also help you get research). Crushing an away can do wonders for you for that program. I would recommend AT LEAST 2, if not more. I know it is expensive and that is unfortunate, but we need them (you can do local ones to save money). Another thing to keep in mind is people do not know our school and they oftentimes will think you are from the Tucson program and ask you about attendings there, so be ready in your VSAS, ERAS and interviews to make the distinction and share you do not have a home program. Not having a home program is hard and people know that so they will look at your application differently.

Lastly, I would recommend asking to meet with the PD at some point during your rotation (they are busy, so ask sooner rather than later to get something scheduled). You can ask questions about the application process, ask questions about their program, ask for feedback on how you did/your application/your CV, etc. Come prepared but it is a great chance to have facetime with the PD.

Okay here is from the OB/GYN guide until we can have students update this with non-COVID advice:

WHEN SHOULD I APPLY FOR AWAY ROTATIONS?

ASAP! Unfortunately, every program has a different deadline, so try to stay on top of those!

WHERE SHOULD I CONSIDER APPLYING FOR AWAY ROTATIONS?

We highly recommend applying to away locations where you think you might really want to match. Rotating at those locations are helpful because they will give you such great perspective on the program: you may fall in love with it even more, or you may realize that the program really only looks great on paper. I (Alison) can't speak to anyone else's experience, but doing an away rotation in the South didn't seem to help me "open up the region" or increase my chances of getting interview invitations from other Southern programs, so just make an effort to rotate at places you're genuinely interested in.

CAN I APPLY TO AWAY ROTATIONS THAT ARE ON A DIFFERENT SCHEDULE THAN OURSCHOOL?

Absolutely! Our school makes every effort to move rotations ~~and~~ for away rotations. But note 3-week rotations require extra approvals from the school and are only approved when there are no 4-week options. So, unless that is your dream program and there are no 4-week options, stay clear of 3-week rotations.

DO I NEED TO SET UP A MEETING WITH THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR DURING MY ROTATION?

It is highly recommended. During my away rotation (mid-September) I met with the PD for a quick 10-15 minutes and she had already reviewed my ERAS application. This made me feel better when I did not have the chance to interview with her during my actual interview day. Furthermore, if you have a draft of your personal statement written, most PDs are more than

happy to read it during your meeting and offer their feedback. Many of us arranged quick meetings like this with PD at the programs where we rotated, both away and our home programs.

WHAT OTHER THINGS SHOULD I CONSIDER ABOUT AWAY ROTATIONS?

They can get expensive, so do not be too stressed if you do all your rotations locally. Also, keep in mind the location and your support (if any) in the area. It is likely that you will be rotating with other students and hopefully will make new friends, but potentially you might have an awkward crew and they can get a little lonely. It's super nice to go to a place where you might know people! BUT don't let that deter you from doing an away rotation because it is very likely that you will meet other students and it's an incredible opportunity to really get to know a program- just another thing to think about :).

OTHER GENERAL ADVICE ABOUT AWAY ROTATIONS:

You can always try reaching out to a program directly if you're really interested in doing a rotation there. Sending a personalized email (read: not a generic form email) to the program coordinator might help you get one of those coveted spots.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Okay back to a derm perspective ☺

WHEN DO I NEED TO START THINKING ABOUT GETTING LETTERS?

Because dermatology is for the most part an advanced specialty, you also need to think about getting letters of recommendation for your preliminary/Transitional (TY) years. One piece of advice I was given that a lot of people did not get and then were struggling with is: it is never too early to think about letters of recommendation. If you crush a rotation in third year and connect really well with your attendings, it is worth it to ask for a letter of recommendation. They can upload them early to ERAS and then if you need a letter for VSAS too, you are all set. You can have an infinite number of letters uploaded to ERAS and then pick and choose which letters you want for which specialty and which program. Especially with us for COVID, when we got pulled from rotations, there was a lot of stress about getting LOR and people were asking for LOR from third year attendings they hadn't worked with in months. Even if you are THE number 1 med student, they might not remember you or might not remember specifics about you to make a strong letter. Unless you think you are going to work with that person again (i.e. you do a medicine clerkship and then are going to try and rotate at the same place for your IM sub-I or you finish the rotation and are still working with that person through research or volunteering or some other capacity), then it is better to ask for a letter sooner. This does not mean you need a letter from every third year clerkship, but again if you really have a connection, especially if it's somewhat derm related (surgery, IM, peds) or what you want to do your prelim in then it is nice. I actually had an ENT letter I never used from the brief period where I thought I wanted to be an ENT. However, writing LOR takes time and is

not easy, so be considerate when asking people and try to only ask for letters you really think you will use. Also, thank you cards go a long way!!

Ideally, the majority of your letters will be from fourth year rotations and dermatology specific ones so you won't be able to get them until you have done your away rotations. I know it's stressful but hang in there! I would recommend having all of your letters in by ERAS opening to programs, but if you have one or two that come late because it was a later away rotation that should be okay.

HOW MANY LETTERS DO I NEED?

3-4 for your prelim/TY interviews and 3-4 for your dermatology. Any letter you get for dermatology, you can use for your prelim/TY as well (it does NOT have to be IM/peds/TY specific). This is helpful so when you are asking a letter writer for a letter you can just ask for a letter for dermatology and you don't have to ask for a second letter for your prelim. Prelims and TYs know you're applying to an advanced specialty (that's the point), so any letter recommending you for dermatology will also work for the prelims. However, you do automatically get a chair letter from medicine or surgery in support of your prelim which will be specific to the prelim. I only did an IM chair letter and then used it for my IM prelims and TYs only (some classmates used this chair letter for dermatology as well).

This is the breakdown of my letters:

I had 5 dermatology letters (2 of them were with attendings I did research and rotated with), 1 peds letter (I am interested in peds dermatology and applied to peds away rotations), 1 IM letter and 1 IM chair letter (all of them were dermatology specific except for the IM chair letter).

For all of my dermatology applications I did four dermatology letters. These were my strongest letters from the people who knew me the best. I did the same three letters for every single program (my two that were research and clinical and one from a well-known chair) and then I alternated the fourth depending on where that letter writer had connections (i.e. if it was where they trained, where their friends work, etc.). I definitely had more letters than I thought I would need. 3-4 is fine, but if you have four strong ones then four is better. If you have three strong ones and one "okay" one, then three is better.

You can use non-dermatology letter writers for your dermatology applications, but I would try to at least have three dermatology and then you can use a fourth non-dermatology (i.e. non-dermatology research, IM sub-I, etc.). You want the program to get a sense of who you are and the strongest letters will do that. With that being said, dermatology is a small field and I was on some interviews where an interviewer knew one of my letter writers even though this person was not necessarily connected to dermatology through research. This was always a surprise to me, but it gave us something to talk about and since they knew the letter writer, that person's opinion meant more than a stranger's.

For my IM/TY/peds interviews, I did two dermatology letters and then two non-dermatology letters based on the letter writer.

WHO SHOULD I ASK FOR A LETTER?

You should ask for letters of people who know you the best. Strong letters are what are going to help you and LOR really matter for dermatology. (See above for discussion on dermatology versus non-

derm and derm). Again, since dermatology is so small, someone somewhere will know your derm letter writer even if it is a newer/younger attending you are working with. However, if you can get a letter from the PD or someone well-known in the field, it will carry more weight IF it is a strong letter. People trust people they know so it will help you, but again strong letters are the most important, so a strong letter from someone “unknown” in derm or outside of derm will typically mean more than a bread-and-butter letter from Dr. Amy Paller.

HOW DO I EVEN ASK FOR THAT??

If you get along well with an attending and think they might be willing to write you a letter, ask if they would be willing to meet with you for 15 minutes or so to discuss letters of recommendation. If they can't meet, at least try to find a way to ask them in person. You can gauge their reaction better and it is always better than an email. Dr. Kaib tells students it is helpful to ask specifically if they would be willing to write you a “strong letter of recommendation,” to minimize your chances of ending up with a so-so letter. It feels awkward to ask it this way, but it is for the best and students all across the US will be phrasing it the same way). Most attendings find it helpful if you provide them with a copy of your CV and a draft of your personal statement. One thing you can do is make a folder for them with all this info. Including a cover letter in your folder can be helpful too, especially if you're asking someone before your personal statement is ready. You also might have letter writers ask you to type up a couple of patient stories from your rotation with them. This is great if it happens because it means they want to really make your letter special by adding in real experiences about you as a student. Make sure you get this to them in a timely fashion. Additionally, you should log into your ERAS account and add your letter writers as soon as they agree to write you a letter. After adding their information, you can download a page with instructions for how they should submit their letters. Give this information to your letter writers ASAP so they can submit your letters in a timely fashion. Again, remember thank you cards!

I WAS ASKED TO WRITE MY OWN LETTER.. HELP!

This happened to me and I was stressed out about it because I'm not someone who likes to talk about myself and it felt awkward to speak highly about myself and then send it to the attending to read. However, this is actually a great opportunity and DON'T sell yourself short. LOR for residency are supposed to be glowing and they wouldn't have asked you to write it if they didn't like you. This is your chance to include unique details about yourself and really talk about what you think is important about you. They will also edit whatever you send to them so it is not the end all be all. Feel free to email me for some examples/guidelines about how to do this. Dr. Mercer is also a great resource and sent me an email breakdown about how to write strong LOR.

CURRICULUM VITAE

WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN MY CV?

Your CV should include basic information including education, research,

publications/posters, volunteerism, honors/awards, jobs, and hobbies/interests. You should generally limit these sections to things you did in medical school, but definitely include significant awards or activities from undergrad/gap years/etc., depending on how important you feel they are. Google has a ton of great examples if you're at a loss for how to format or structure your CV.

I had a derm PD review my CV and give me a lot of great info about how to organize it and make it stronger. I would recommend having someone go over it with you! The career advisors will also give you great advice.

WHEN DOES IT NEED TO BE READY?

Finalize your CV as early as possible, ideally before any of your sub-Is/aways. You'll want to ask for letters of recommendation during these rotations, and you should provide your CV to all of your letter writers.

WHAT WILL I ACTUALLY USE MY CV FOR?

Most programs will want it uploaded to VSAS. It's also helpful to give to letter writers, and it streamlines inputting your information into ERAS. Our interviews were virtual, but if you have in-person interviews, it doesn't hurt to have copies with you.

APPLICATION/ PERSONAL STATEMENT

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE MY PERSONAL STATEMENT READY?

Ideally, you should have a good draft ready by July or August so you can show your letter writers, but it does not need to be finalized until you submit ERAS.

WHO CAN HELP ME WITH IT?

Ideally you should at least have one PD review your PS and give you feedback. This should be someone you trust who you think will have your best interest in mind. PDs read so many PS, they know what is good and what is bad. However, it may be hard to have a connection like that with a PD, so try to at least have someone who is derm and participates in the residency process give you feedback. You can also ask your career advisors or other mentors you might have. It might also be helpful to have someone give you feedback who does NOT know you so then they can give you advice from a similar perspective to how programs and interviewers will perceive your LOR. However, while it is good to have a lot of people read it so you can finetune it, be careful it does not get changed too much where it no longer sounds like you. I lost my voice during all of the editing processes and the PD actually helped me find it again. This is a chance for programs to know you.

WHAT THINGS DO I NEED TO CONSIDER ABOUT WRITING MY PERSONAL STATEMENT?

START EARLY! Keep it to one page!! Even if the allowed word count is longer, one page is about all programs want to see. People will always say "include things that aren't in your application," which is great advice, but if you are like me and your whole life is in your application, you can

still find ways to share more of your personality and how you came to find derm. Another piece of advice I was given was to try and make everything tie together. If you write your PS about how much you love research, but then you have zero research on your ERAS, it doesn't make sense. You can have themes about yourself whether it is teaching, research, service, etc. and your application should support that. Though you do not want to just repeat your application in your PS; they have your application. However, you can now share the human side of what's on your application. If you volunteered with children, you can talk about specific stories to really show who you are. A good outline to start is:

1. Why derm? (How did you find derm? Why is it the field for you?), 2. Why you? (Why should this program interview you? What do you bring that's different?), 3. What you are looking for in a program? (This can be a generic example of what you want in a program – mentorship, service opportunities, etc. or it can be personalized to a program).

SHOULD I PERSONALIZE PERSONAL STATEMENTS?

People will have mixed feelings about this. Some say yes and some will say no. I think a consensus is to pick a handful of programs you are very interested in/have connections to and then personalize those. I went overboard and personalized like half of mine. You can personalize things by talking about mentors/residents who you know that are associated with that program (connections always help), family you might have in the area or any other connections to the region or if you have nothing but if it truly is a program you are wanting to go to, then you can write about why that program is the one for you (i.e. the vascular anomalies clinic, volunteering at Camp Discovery, etc.). You can find information about the programs online to make it specific. The reason I personalized so many was also because there are some programs who require it. READ the residency pages to know what programs these are. This is also where Reddit is helpful. If a program tells you they require you to say, "why them?" and then you don't, they will take that as a sign you didn't pay attention and aren't interested.

If you do decide to personalize, it doesn't have to be a lot. 2-3 sentences at the end of your PS is all it takes. There were a lot of programs where I did personalize my PS for them and I didn't get an interview and a lot of programs where I didn't personalize my PS for them and I did get an interview, so who knows what the right answer is. It does take a long time, so just make sure you stay on top of everything.

DO PROGRAMS SEND OUT SECONDARIES?

Unfortunately, yes. This was a big change for my year where the majority of my programs sent out a secondary (even the ones you required a personalized PS). This was unexpected and of course not fun. The same as for med school, get them back as soon as you can while still being thoughtful.

DO PEOPLE ACTUALLY PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR HOBBIES/INTEREST SECTION?

Yes! You will be asked about your hobbies and interests at some point along the interview trail. Try to keep up-to-date on these if you can. Example: If your hobby is traveling, I would be ready to give an anecdote about your last excursion, etc., so your interviewer sees that it's a genuine interest

(even though you won't have much time for your hobbies during interview season). Also, an upperclassman had shared her hobbies section with me and I liked how she was specific (i.e., instead of just putting reading, say reading and then the book you are reading in your ERAS). I

was asked about what I thought about the ending of the book I had put down in at least a third of my interviews and when people loved the shows I loved we had real conversations. This is also a section where you can actually have fun on your ERAS (while still keeping it professional). Everyone bakes, hikes and runs, but put what you bake, hike and run. Here is my section as an example:

Dancing - I grew up dancing and my favorite styles are contemporary and hip-hop. I am always dancing and try to take classes whenever possible.

Writing - I enjoy writing about my experiences.

Reading - I am an avid reader of fiction novels. I am currently reading "Where the Crawdads Sing" by Delia Owens.

Music - I can always be found listening to music (all genres). I have a knack for knowing song lyrics. Guilty pleasures include cliff-hanger TV shows like Game of Thrones or Money Heist.

OTHER GENERAL ADVICE ABOUT THE PERSONAL STATEMENT/APPLICATION:

Remember that everything in your application is fair game to interviewers. If you put a deeply personal story in your PS, you could be asked about it. If you include a research project, you could be asked about the results (especially if its derm-related). I wrote down key facts about all of my research projects (i.e. "we found a 2.22x greater odds of melanoma) and would just briefly review them before my interviews so I could really be the "expert" on my projects and show that I was an active participant.

There are a lot of people you can ask for advice during this process! The PS especially can be frustrating, but you've got this!

CHOOSING PROGRAMS

HOW DO I DECIDE WHICH PROGRAMS TO APPLY TO? WHAT RESOURCES DID YOU USE?

This is very different for derm than for other specialties, but you should apply to almost all of them. I think I only didn't apply to 20-30 of the programs (so I applied to 90-110 programs). There will be people within derm who say "only apply to programs you are truly interested in," but when you want to go into derm, you are interested in becoming a dermatologist and a lot of it is an odds game. It is very expensive, but it is worth it in the long run. The Association of Program Directors for Dermatologists has been discouraging this mass applying and wants application caps, but until they mandate caps, do not self-select out of programs especially coming from a school with no home program. Even one of the PDs who is a large advocate for application caps and recommended every applicant apply to 40-60 told me to apply to 60-80 because of no home program. I think application caps would be beneficial but that is a discussion for another time. For me, the majority of my interviews I could connect to regional bias or my letter writers, but one of my co-applicants from my year pulled up his rank list during one of our derm interest group talks and pointed out that he would have chosen to not apply to SIX of the programs he received interviews at (which is a ton), if he was trying to limit his applications to places he only really wanted/thought he had a chance at. The moral of this story is you have no idea who your application will speak to, so you want to get it out to as many places as possible. I did not get interviews at places I thought would for sure put me

on their list (including one I did a virtual away at) and I got interviews at places I wouldn't have expected. Play the odds!

SCHEDULING INTERVIEWS

WHEN DO INTERVIEWS START COMING OUT FOR DERM?

So the timeline by month is likely different for me than it will be for any of you (everything was pushed back because of COVID), but from talking to upperclassmen who went through it before me and then from my own experience, derm is always later than a lot of other places (a month or two after ERAS goes live). You will get your prelim interview invites before this (I got one on the same day as ERAS), so schedule those early to clear up space for when derm interviews roll in. For my year they also attempted a coordinated release date for programs about a month after ERAS where your interview invites were released over two days and then then you could not schedule the actual interviews until a few days later (this was to encourage only accepting interviews you really wanted, but it also helped for organizing your interview schedule by having time to think about everything). Only about half of programs participated but it was helpful. The programs who were participating were on a list, so you knew who to expect. One thing that was not helpful though was that there were programs who did not participate in the coordinated release, but still released their invitations on the same day as the interviews for the coordinated release. This was a problem because many people assumed that program was doing coordinated release and didn't sign up for the interview ASAP and wanted until the official sign-up day for coordinated release. By that point, most of the interviews were snagged. Because of this, if you get an interview, just double check that you can or can't sign-up right then and don't assume they are following the coordinated release protocol.

HOW LATE DO INTERVIEW INVITES GET EXTENDED?

Interviews can come in at any point, especially as people cancel. Derm interviews go through January even in non-COVID times, so be ready. Accept any interviews you get- even if you weren't in their "first wave" doesn't mean you aren't qualified and they wouldn't take you in their program.

DO I REALLY NEED TO RESPOND MY INVITE IMMEDIATELY?

YES!! The sooner you respond, the more say you'll have in your interview date. Some places even offer more interviews than they have spots so it IS possible if you aren't near your phone/email that you could miss an opportunity and end up having to join a waitlist, especially for the interviews that get sent out later when a lot of spots are already full. Have a system of organizing what days are already full for you so you can schedule accordingly. The Association of Program Directors released a document of all interview dates offered for programs so you could play odds when scheduling, especially during the coordinated release.

WHAT METHODS DID YOU USE TO MAKE SURE YOU GOT YOUR INTERVIEW INVITES?

WHATDID YOU DO IF YOU WERE ON ROTATION?

TEXT FORWARDING AND PASSWORD SHARING. It takes a village. If you are on a rotation, you just preface that it is interview season and that you might have to step out to check your emails. I had to leave in the middle of a pelvic exam because my phone went off. The resident was awesome and understood. Also make sure you have Thalamus app already downloaded on your phone. Programs will use ERAS, Thalamus, Interview Broker, responding with preferences to an email, Doodle Poll to schedule interviews, so be ready for that. It also means that you can't trust that you have a day free because it doesn't show up on your ERAS.

I didn't have an apple watch at the time and did fine, but people have said it is very helpful. Do with that information what you will. This is not me telling you to go out and buy an apple watch, especially since I had no problems without one.

The following is from the ob/gyn guide but is all what I would say:

I had my best friend patrolling my email all day and did text forwarding (to my phone & hers) for every email that contained the word "interview" so that if we were both away from our computers, we would still be alerted. This was a GOD SEND. I made a calendar on google docs that she was able to use to schedule my interviews for me and had a premade email template that I created for her to respond for me if needed. I would highly suggest having someone help with this process- ESPECIALLY if you are on a sub-internship and don't want to have your phone continually out.

Other students invested in Apple watches so they could see new emails without checking their phones. The good news is that residents and attendings understand that it's interview season, so if you mention that you may need to briefly step out of rounds to respond to an interview invitation, they tend to be OK with that.

- Also, get the google text forwarding- it's amazing.
- The google email application is also faster at getting emails on your phone than your regular mail application; they come instantly with Gmail.
- The ERAS website doesn't have all of its function on Safari on your phone, so Puffin is another internet browser you can use on your phone to fully access ERAS.

HOW EARLY DID INTERVIEWS START THIS PAST YEAR? HOW LATE WAS YOUR LAST INTERVIEW?

This again was different for me because of COVID. My first prelim interview was like the week after ERAS came out, my first derm interview was one month after ERAS came out (approximately), and my last derm interview was in February (like the week before rank lists were due).

I JUST GOT REJECTED FROM A PROGRAM WHERE I REALLY WANTED TO INTERVIEW. IS THERE ANYTHING I CAN DO??

It will never hurt to write an email to the program coordinator and/or program director and express your interest, even after getting a rejection email. Give several very specific reasons for why you really want to interview there (this is a good place to mention any family ties you have to the area, etc.). You may not end up getting an interview invitation after sending an email, but it's always worth a shot.

IS THERE SOMEWHERE TO CHECK WHAT PROGRAMS HAVE EXTENDED INTERVIEWS?

Reddit... again using Reddit for this is more harmful to your psyche than helpful, but we all do it. Of note, many programs sent out interview invites in batches, so even if a program has sent out invites and you may not have gotten one, that doesn't mean you won't be extended an invitation. The one thing that is helpful is you can use this to email programs who didn't give you an interview.

I'M WAITING TO HEAR BACK FROM A PROGRAM. WHAT CAN I DO IN THE MEANTIME?

Again, like above, you can always call/email the program coordinator/director. They will print out any emails you have and include it in your file as well, so if you do get an interview, any interviewer will read it. You want to make sure you are not being annoying by emailing, but I've heard it can be helpful. I received interviews from programs I had emailed and I did not receive interviews from programs I had emailed, so who truly knows. If you do send something, again make sure it is specific and not generic.

OKAY, SO I EMAILED THEM AND STILL HAVEN'T BACK BUT I HAVEN'T GOTTEN REJECTED YET, WHAT NOW?

Some programs do not send actual rejection emails and you will just get ghosted. I think there was only one program where I double emailed and I never got an interview. This is from the ob/gyn guide, but just for another perspective (the timeline is not the same and I am not sure if it relates to derm because I have a limited experience):

I got placed on a waitlist or a program just didn't respond at all. For programs where I really wanted to interview, I actually contacted them again several weeks after my initial email/call (i.e., closer to Thanksgiving). I just sent them a quick follow-up email to my first letting them know that I was still very interested and would love the chance to interview. And this worked out a couple of times. Additionally, most applicants will be done interviewing in December/early January and when you're getting closer to the end, people get tired and start canceling. So, it's a good opportunity to try to reach out and contact programs then, especially after the holidays (the time most people seem to cancel), if there's still a place you want to check out.

INTERVIEW PREP

HOW DID YOU PREP FOR YOUR INTERVIEWS?

It's oh-so-painfully awkward, but I do suggest practicing the most commonly asked questions in front of the mirror or with someone you trust (I did a couple of practice sessions with classmates over zoom – COVID). The school also offers a mock interview day where you'll have a mini-interview with faculty. I would recommend going to this because it is all about practice.

You can also google common interview questions and have an idea of an answer (try not to be too scripted) and a lot of these programs love behavioral questions. Also, as I mentioned

above, make sure you really know your application and your research. You will eventually get the hang of the interviews and know what you need to do to prepare.

Some people do invest in books specifically for medical residency interviews and/or watch videos about skills and techniques. I did not, but they may be helpful.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE COMMON QUESTIONS YOU GOT?

- ****Why derm? (This is big)
- Why this program?
- Why this state?
- “Tell me about yourself” (I usually had a small spiel like “I was born in a suburb outside of Phoenix, Arizona and grew up as a dancer. I then went to undergrad at the University of Arizona where I really found my passion for research and then came back up to Phoenix at the University of Arizona College of Medicine – Phoenix”). Who even knows if that was right, but I didn’t want to take up a ton of time going through everything and then they can ask me the more pointed questions they wanted to know.
- What is your biggest strength?
- What is your biggest weakness?
- What are three words your friends/family would use to describe you?
- Specific questions about things on my app
- **** What questions do you have for me? (This is also big. Almost every interviewer will ask you this whether they start with it or end with it. Have one or two questions to ask everyone (try to make them different) but it’s also okay to politely say you don’t have anymore. You can ask general program questions, questions about the state/city, etc., but it is also helpful to know who your interviewer is ahead of time so you can make sure you ask them the relevant questions (i.e. the PD will know everything most likely, but don’t ask the mohs surgeon about peds derm). Also, if someone does line up with your interests, you can also look up their research and ask them about it. It shows you’re interested and you did prepare. It also helps you learn about the program).
- Make sure you read about the program before so you’re familiar
- ****Tell me about a difficult patient experience and what you learned (I got this at least once every interview day. Have a few examples ready, so if you get asked by different people it’s not the same one over and over. My big example was not derm.)
- If you weren’t going into derm what specialty would you choose/what was your favorite and least favorite third year rotation and why?
- ****Where do you see yourself in the next 5/10 years

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE WEIRD/STRANGE QUESTIONS YOU GOT? OR STRANGE THINGS THAT HAPPENED?

- I had one MMI type question where I had to give instructions to someone
- How would you rate your application on a 1-10?
- If I asked you to look at someone’s hands, what would you be looking at or for?
- During one of my interviews, I got asked the exact same

question back-to-back because the second interviewer wasn't paying any attention to what I was saying or being asked before her turn to ask a question

- I never had anyone ask me any hard derm questions, but you hear that's a thing (just do your best, they know we're medical students)
- You also hear of people being asked to tell a joke (it didn't happen to me)
- Not derm but a classmate was asked to pick a song to be their theme song and another one was asked to do a catwalk

WHAT WAS THE GENERAL FEEL OF DERM INTERVIEWS?

The majority of my interviews were very laid back and a lot of it was conversational. There were the ones that were more intimidating but overall, they just really wanted to chat with me and get to know me and vice versa. You also often have a resident room where you interview with/talk to residents, which is nice.

WHAT KINDS OF QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK PROGRAMS? DID YOU HAVE GO TO QUESTIONS FOR YOUR INTERVIEWERS?

- When do they teach (before clinic, during the day, during lunch)?
- How much and how often do they get surgical experience?
- How much dermpath time do you get?
- Peds derm exposure
- What are the policies for conference trips (I never asked this, but a resident sent it as a suggestion)?
- What is the relationship between residents?
- What is the relationship between residents and attendings (I loved this one)?
- Dermoscopy use/dermoscopy training
- Patient population (skin of color exposure)
- Call (this was a resident question, not an attending one)
- What is your favorite thing about the program?
- Anticipated changes?
- What are you looking for in a resident?
- Ask about the city, their favorite restaurant, etc.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE PRE-INTERVIEW DINNERS?

So, since I interviewed during COVID, these were virtual socials the night before (though some programs provided doordash money which was nice), but I would still recommend going. It is nice to meet the residents in a more casual setting and ask the questions you wouldn't ask of an attending. It is also nice to hear of other questions people ask. You will see familiar faces on the virtual trail as well which is nice but of course is not the same as making friends on the in-person trail. A lot of them say drinking is fine and it really is fine if you do or don't have a drink with you (obviously don't be crazy). If you can't make it though, it should

be okay and they aren't supposed to count for or against you, but it is awkward when you don't go and the next day they ask how the social was and you say you didn't go haha. The dinners are also great to see the relationship between the residents.

POST INTERVIEW

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON HANDWRITTEN VS EMAIL THANK YOU NOTES?

I did not send any handwritten notes (and usually I am a big thank you note person). For me, I wasn't sure exactly what addresses to use, who to make it out to, etc. and I don't have good handwriting. I felt like I could send a direct, kind email and that would be okay. I don't really know what is right though and maybe places were expecting handwritten notes? I can't really say. However, I actually had a LOT of programs that specifically said no thank you notes/emails. I think it is really overbearing on their inboxes haha. I would make sure you really pay attention and don't send anyone something if they say that (it's not a test on if you will, but it will show if you didn't listen). However, if you do have a question about the program, it is totally fair to email them and ask and include a thank you, but I would only do that if there is something you want to know. Any place that did not mention not to, I sent an email and tried to include something specific we talked about to remind them of me and our conversation, but it is mentally exhausting and I don't think I did for every prelim after a point.

This is a different take from the ob/gyn guide:

It's really what you feel comfortable with. Some programs will tell you that they do not care if they hear from you afterwards and that it will not affect your standing. On the other hand, some programs strongly encourage you to contact them afterwards. I would definitely recommend at least contacting the programs that encourage it. The only programs you don't want to send thank-yous to would be the ones that specifically tell you not to.

My general policy was a handwritten note to the PD and coordinator of every program. I thought it was a nice courtesy to extend to them for inviting me to interview. I only wrote two thank-yous per program because I didn't want the coordinator to have all these notes to distribute, giving her/him extra work to do. So, I settled on the PD and the coordinator (since the coordinator is the person putting the interview day together). Others will email everyone, or a few people. It's really whatever you feel comfortable with.

WHAT OF LOVE LETTERS?

I personally don't know what to make of the love letters. I think you should 100% send your number one program an email telling them "you are my number one," even if they say no post-interview communication (but your advisors would say to follow their instructions if they say, "no-post interview communication"). In terms of letters to your top programs that are not your number one, I actually didn't send any. People will say to email them things you like and say "I'm going to rank you highly," but programs know that if they were your number one, you would come out and say it, so I'm not sure if it would help or hurt (a lot of people are strong

advocates for it though). I talked to a PD who said it didn't make a difference for her, but that is just one opinion. As I said before I only sent one email to my number one and then I ended up matching at my number two that I didn't send anything to afterwards (no thank yous or love letters) and it was an early interview, so it didn't hurt me there. I was hoping because they said no post-interview communication, they wouldn't be on the lookout for those love letters to affect their rank lists. I have heard for other specialties that love letters can change your placement on the rank list slightly, but in the long run, if they love an applicant and want them as number one, they will put them as number one even if someone they didn't like as much says "you are my number one." They do it the same as how we make our ranks lists- make it honestly and it will work out however it works out, but "gaming" the system doesn't work.

Too long...didn't read-- Who knows if love letters work. Feel free to ask mentors their opinions, but at least send your number one program a letter no matter what (with the caveat above about 'no post-interview communication').

Again ob/gyn thoughts:

Not sure how much weight they carry, but they definitely will not hurt you. They probably carry the most weight with the programs that tell you they want to hear from you. I reached out to my top 3 at the end of January letting them know why I was interested and why I thought I would be a good fit for them. You can tell programs if you're planning on ranking them highly, but it's definitely advised to save the "I'm ranking you No.1" for your true top program.

4TH YR IS EXPENSIVE

HOW DO I FINANCE AWAY ROTATIONS?

I only did a local away rotation, so this didn't apply for me. For interviews I did get an airlines credit card, but then they ended up being virtual (I'm still happy I did though). I do know Kelly has her alumni list as well for people that host students for interviews or even aways! ☺

Ob/gyn:

Plan ahead that it is going to be expensive. Just knowing this in advance will keep you from panicking when it actually happens. I highly recommend getting a credit card (ASAP if you don't have one yet) with a great rewards program because you will rack up tons of points = free flights!

Don't feel bad about taking out extra loan money, because this is the time in your life when you don't want to be any more stressed out than you have to be. Totally rely on all of your friends and

family (and their friends... and their friends... etc.) for housing in cities that you will be visiting. They will often show you around the city too so it's an extra bonus!

HOW EXPENSIVE IS INTERVIEW SEASON GOING TO BE?

It's hard to say because we were virtual which saved us a bunch of money. The school will share average dollar amounts for each specialty though to get an idea. Be prepared to spend significantly more than your classmates applying to other specialties though.

HOW DO I MAKE THIS WORK?

Financial Aid team! Just know we all have to spend the money and you're not alone.

TWITTER/DIGA

WHY ARE YOU BRINGING UP TWITTER?

There is a lot to be said about #MedTwitter and #DermTwitter and we won't get into the bad here, but at the end of the day it is a great networking tool that allows you to make connections and learn about events (especially residency meet-and-greets), that you otherwise wouldn't know about (we don't have a home program, so we aren't on the email lists). Through my professional Twitter I was connected with the PD who mentored me through this process, helped me with my PS, etc. A lot of the time people will share a tweet saying they are looking to help URM's (which is a great opportunity if you are one!) or they will mention wanting to help students without home programs (this is where I made connections). It feels SUPER weird but I have slid into a lot of DMs of people high up in derm and it is huge. I would recommend following Dr. Ilana Rosman, Dr. Daniel Butler, Dr. Emily Altman, Dr. Misha Rosenbach and Dr. Steven Chen to start (a lot of derm programs have their own twitter pages too). From there just make connections and it's even nice to reach out to residents.

WHAT IS DIGA?

This is the Dermatology Interest Group Association. I would recommend subscribing to their emails because they are very helpful and share a lot of great information, especially during interview season. I would also keep an eye out for an email about resident mentors. My year they had a program where they connected applicants with a derm resident. It was very helpful!