

An Evaluation of Resources Available to Learn About Orthopaedic Surgery Residency Programs

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INTRODUCTION: Orthopaedic surgery is one of the most competitive residencies to match into. In the 2022 Match, there were 1,737 orthopaedic surgery applicants for 868 residency positions with an average number of 86.06 applications per applicant. Understanding what information and experiences are most useful for orthopaedic surgery applicants going through the match process can potentially help reduce the number of programs applicants apply to. The purpose of this study was to (1) determine if there are residency recruitment resources that influence where orthopaedic surgery applicants apply and how they rank programs (2) identify what information would be most helpful for applicants to learn about orthopaedic surgery residency programs and (3) see if orthopaedic surgery applicants have preferential solutions to improve the residency application process.

METHODS: Orthopaedic surgery applicants who applied to the orthopaedic residency program at the senior author's institution during the 2021 – 2022 application cycle were sent an email invitation to participate in this study. The survey was designed using the Qualtrics online survey platform and covered several domains of demographics including race and ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic background. Additional questions asked about recruitment resources (e.g., information on residency websites, virtual open houses, in-person away rotations, rankings, and databases with information about orthopaedic surgery programs). Results from the survey have been reported in aggregate form and are not associated with the participant. The data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics based on the responses to questions and chi-square analysis was performed where deemed appropriate using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

RESULTS: Of the 216 survey respondents, 77 (35.6%) identified as female, 132 (61.1%) as male, 2 (1.2%) as non-binary/non-gender conforming, and 1 (0.6%) as transgender female. The majority of applicants (79.2%) were between the ages of 25 to 29 years old. The race and ethnicity of survey respondents are depicted in Figure 1. Of the survey respondents, 24 (11.1%) were the first in their family to graduate college, and 74 (34.3%) were the first ones in their family to attend graduate school. Forty-seven (21.8%) applicants had someone in their immediate family who was a physician (Figure 2).

Survey respondents selected in-person away rotations as being the most influential factor in deciding where to apply and rank programs, while the Fellowship and Electronic Residency Interactive Database (FRIEDA), the American Orthopaedic Association (AOA) Orthopaedic Residency Information Network (ORIN), and the unsanctioned orthopaedic interview spreadsheet were not as impactful. Survey respondents were asked which information would have been most helpful in making decisions on where to apply and 105 (48.6%) applicants ranked knowing the minimum USMLE Step 2 or COMLEX Level 2 cut-off score as the most influential factor. In terms of orthopaedic surgery residency program recruitment, a majority of survey respondents would like to see interview caps (70.4%), an increase in program information available on FRIEDA and ORIN (59.3%), and application caps (55.5%) (Figure 3).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: This study found that applicants to orthopaedic surgery residency programs would like to see programs providing more complete and up-to-date information on their websites and other databases like AOA ORIN. Additionally, survey respondents found in-person away rotations to be most helpful in learning about a program and determining whether it was a good fit for them. Applicants would also like residency programs to be more transparent regarding their screening criteria to help applicants make more informed decisions on the number of programs to apply to, how to rank programs, and possibly where to use signaling preference which is a new addition to Match 2023 for orthopaedic surgery. By knowing applicant opinions and desired changes, residency program directors can apply these to their individual programs to enact a collective change in the orthopaedic surgery community.

Figure 1. Race and ethnicity breakdown of survey respondents.

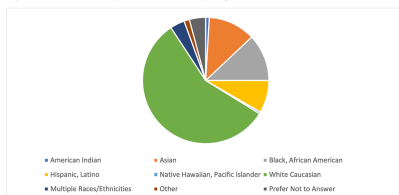


Figure 2. Personal background information of survey respondents.

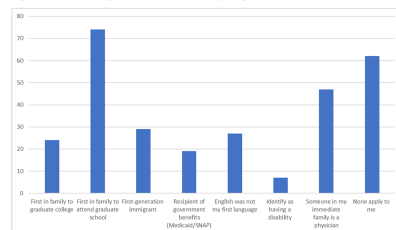


Figure 3. Changes survey respondents would want to see in the way orthopaedic surgery residency programs organize recruitment.

