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## Dermatology Online Journal

### Title

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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4pr742jj>

### Journal

Dermatology Online Journal, 25(5)

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### Publication Date

2019

### DOI

10.5070/D3255044061

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Peer reviewed

# Interview date trends for dermatology residency from 2012-2017

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## Abstract

Data regarding dermatology residency interview patterns can better inform applicants regarding the application process as well as encourage further coordination among programs. Our objective was to describe dermatology residency interview date patterns over the past five applications cycles from 2012 to 2017. A retrospective review of dermatology online forums (the Dermatology Interest Group Association and Student Doctor Network) was performed from 2012 to 2017; these web-based public databases were reviewed for interview dates and interview offer dates. Data from 117 programs per year were obtained. The majority of interview offers arrived in early November (41.5%), followed by late November (40%). Interviews were conducted predominantly in December (25.7%) and January (66.3%). On average, programs scheduled 2.26 (range 1-13) interview dates. Most interviews were held on Thursday (23.9%) and Friday (28.7%). Our results suggest that there is an increasing trend of overlapping interview dates among programs. Being cognizant of dermatology residency interview date patterns can help prepare applicants for interview scheduling while avoiding scheduling conflicts.

*Keywords: residency, interviews, applications, matching, National Resident Matching Program, Student Doctor Network, Dermatology Interest Group Association*

## Introduction

Dermatology continues to be one of the most competitive specialties in terms of difficulty in matching. In 2014, the specialty of dermatology had

the highest median number of applications and this number has only increased over the years [1]. It is well known that there are higher proportions of unmatched applicants as well as 100% fill rates in dermatology, illustrating that there is a greater number of applicants than available positions [2]. In the 2016 application cycle, 22% of applicants failed to match into a dermatology residency program in contrast to the 8% of applicants overall who failed to match [2]. Owing to the large percentage of those who fail to match, many applicants often engage in research fellowships or other graduate degrees before re-applying. Some forgo applying in dermatology altogether and instead pursue a less competitive specialty [3].

Applicants who successfully match often have exceptional letters of recommendations, research experiences, and USMLE board scores. As reported by the 2016 National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) Charted Outcomes, U.S. allopathic senior applicants who matched into dermatology had an average USMLE Step 1 score of 249 compared to the mean Step 1 score of 233 of matched students overall [2]. Given the highly competitive nature of the dermatology residency Match, medical student applicants as well as residency program directors would benefit from increasing familiarity with the residency Match process. Awareness of the interview patterns and practices of the dermatology residency application would offer many potential benefits. For one, it could help minimize scheduling conflicts. It could also ease the anxiety surrounding the application process by better informing applicants'

expectations. Currently, data regarding interview dates and patterns for dermatology residency applications is limited. The aim of this study is to better characterize dermatology residency interview date patterns over five application cycles spanning from 2012 to 2017.

## Methods

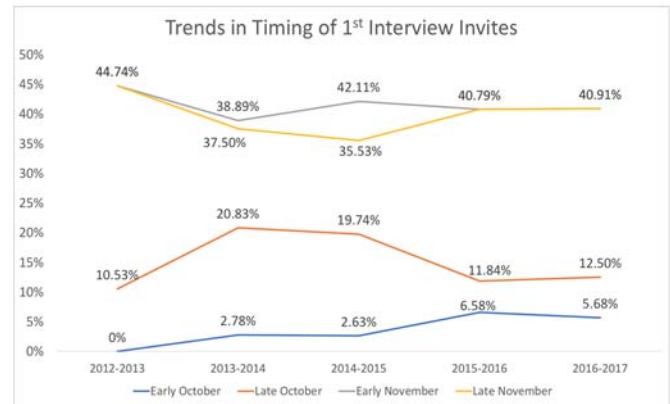
Student Doctor Network (SDN), (<http://www.studentdoctor.net>) and the Dermatology Interest Group Association (DIGA), (<http://interviews.derminterest.org>) are public websites with information regarding the dermatology residency application process. Information is uploaded anonymously by medical students who voluntarily post interview dates as well as the dates they received interview invitations from individual programs. In addition to medical students, program directors also contribute to DIGA's database by posting interview dates and they are encouraged to notify DIGA if interview dates change. This study received exemption from the Institutional Review Board.

These sites were reviewed for posts from the 2012-2013 to 2016-2017 residency application cycles. We looked at the following: interview offer date, interview date and day of week, and number of interview dates. From this information, we determined overlapping interview dates and the number of days between interviews. Descriptive statistics calculated via Microsoft Excel 2017 was used to summarize the data (mean, range, standard deviation) and Fisher's Exact test was used to compare categorical variables (VassarStats). To compare across the different years, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used (Good Calculators).

## Results

### Interview Invitations

Data for the past 5 consecutive application cycles were obtained for 117 programs per year. The majority of interviews were offered in early November (November 1-15<sup>th</sup>; 41.5%), followed by late November (16-31<sup>st</sup>; 40%), (**Figure 1**). There was a steady increase of interviews offered in early October



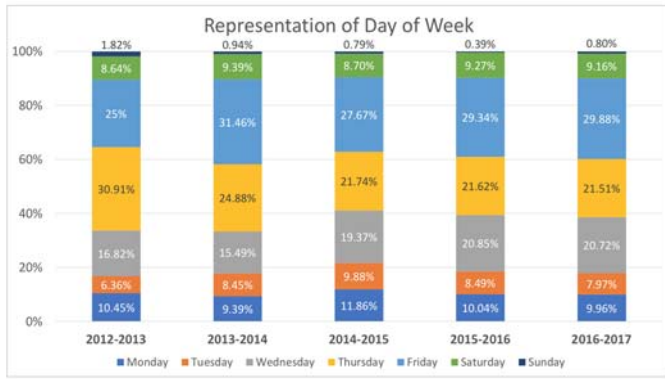
**Figure 1.** Trends in timing of first interview invites. The majority of interviews were in early November (first two weeks), followed by late November. This remained consistent throughout the five application cycles.

over the span of five application cycles, increasing from 0% in 2012-2013 to 5.68% in 2016-2017 ( $P=0.062$ ). Another noteworthy change was an increase in late October interview invitations from 2012-2013 (10.53%) to 2013-2014 (20.83%,  $P=0.112$ ). This was maintained in 2014-2015 (19.74%), but dropped over the following two cycles down to 12.50% in 2016-2017 ( $P=0.283$ ). Other than these changes, the offers in early and late November remained relatively steady throughout the five application cycles.

### Interview Dates

The majority of interviews were held in January (66.3%), followed by December (25.67%). Over the five cycles, there was a slight but steady decrease in January interviews from 2012-2013 (69.41%) to 2016-2017 (61.20%,  $P=0.066$ ). Conversely, there was an overall increasing trend in December interviews from 2012-2013 (22.83%) to 2016-2017 (27.60%,  $P=0.244$ ). On average, the least number of interviews were held in October (0.08%), followed by February (3.44%). There were generally no interviews held in October except for a single interview in the 2014-15 cycle.

Programs on average held  $2.26 \pm 1.28$  (range 1-13,  $N=585$ ) interview dates. The average number of interview dates per program were relatively similar: 2.28 in 2012-13, 2.15 in 2013-14, 2.32 in 2014-15, 2.30 in 2015-16, and 2.22 in 2016-17. The majority of interviews were held on Fridays (28.68%), Thursdays (23.91%), and Wednesdays (18.81%). The least

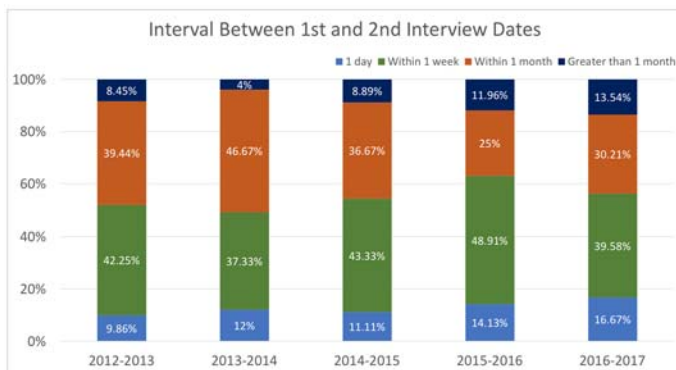


**Figure 2.** Representation of day of week that interviews are held on over the five application cycles. The least popular interview days were Fridays and Thursdays. There was no significant change between days of the week among the application cycles.

popular interview days were Sundays (1.82%) and Tuesdays (8.28%). Some notable trends were a steady decrease in interviews held on Thursdays (from 30.91% in 2012-13 to 21.51% in 2016-17,  $P=0.021$ ) and a small increase of interviews held on Wednesdays (from 16.82% in 2012-13 to 20.72% in 2016-17,  $P=0.291$ ), (**Figure 2**). Other than these changes, the number of interviews held on the other days remained relatively consistent ( $P=0.966$ ). Another trend was the increasing tendency to schedule interviews on consecutive days. In the 2012-13 cycle, 9.86% of 2<sup>nd</sup> interview dates occurred one day after the first compared to 16.67% in the 2016-17 cycle ( $P=0.259$ ), (**Figure 3**).

**Interview Date Conflicts**

Programs on average had  $15.3 \pm 10.0$  conflicts with other programs. On a date with multiple interviews, there was an average of  $4.4 \pm 3.8$  conflicts (range 1-

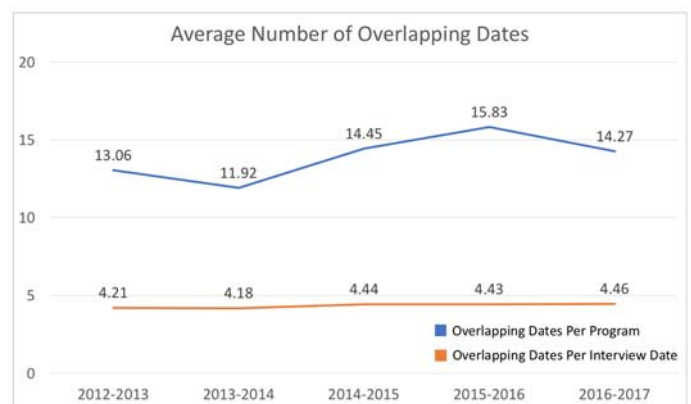


**Figure 3.** Interval time between first and second interview dates. There was an increasing trend in holding interviews on consecutive days, however these changes were not statistically significant between the different cycles.

18), (**Figure 4**). These numbers remained consistent from 2012-2017 ( $P=0.153$ ). On average, most interviews were held in the months of November to January. A heat map of conflicts during these months was created for the past five cycles, depicting the majority of conflicts in January (**Figure 5**). Conflicts were typically concentrated in the latter parts of the week (Wednesday to Friday) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> weeks of January. Since most interviews tend to occur on Thursdays and Fridays, it is also apparent in the figure that dates with greater than 15 conflicts typically fell on Fridays, followed by Thursdays.

**Discussion**

This study aimed to characterize the pattern of interview offer dates and interview dates for the dermatology residency Match process. This information could better prepare medical student applicants in terms of when to expect interview offers and scheduling interviews, especially since it is an extremely competitive field and the competitiveness has only increased throughout the years [4]. In 2017, the median number of applications submitted by matched U.S. seniors was 92 [5]. It seems inevitable that with the amount of applications and small number of interview dates that each program offers within a similar timeframe, interview dates will overlap. Applicants who have been invited to interview at programs with conflicting dates are often forced to choose between the programs based on limited information such as



**Figure 4.** Average number of overlapping dates per program and per interview date. Changes in the average number of overlapping dates were not statistically significant.



the program’s reputation, geographic location, and other information they can gather from residency websites. When interviews are cancelled, there is no way to predict whether the applicant would then receive another interview invitation from a different program, creating further anxiety regarding their chances of matching.

The information in this study can hopefully help decrease medical student anxiety associated with the Match process. The anxiety and fear associated with the matching process, especially into the specialty of dermatology, is evident. For example, there are numerous studies demonstrating that applicants feel pressure to misrepresent their accomplishments on their applications and indeed many applicants do [6]. In some cases, whether it be related to anxiety or discouragement, applicants also frequently pursue less competitive residencies [3]. For example, many medical students applying into dermatology also apply simultaneously to another specialty that is less competitive, such as internal medicine or pediatrics, as a back-up plan in case they are unsuccessful in the dermatology Match.

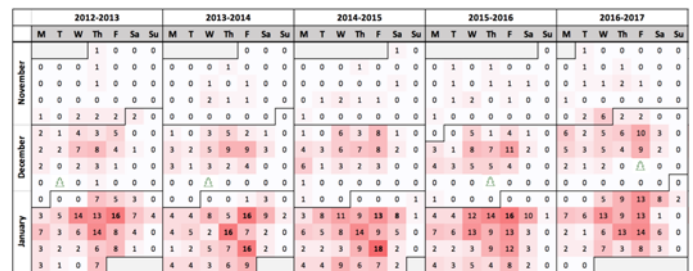
In addition to helping applicants, this study could better inform program directors and dermatology and medical school faculty advisors about the current Match process. Currently, there seems to be dissonance regarding residency applications between dermatology faculty and applicants. In a 2017 study (N=174), nearly three-quarters of faculty recommend that that applicants apply to <60 programs, but more than 70% of dermatology residents applied to >60 programs [7]. This information could help bridge the gap between applicants and faculty as well as encourage program directors to better coordinate interviews and attempt to reduce conflicting interviewing dates [7].

Along with better coordination of interview dates, programs could also aim to streamline scheduling methods in order to increase the efficiency of the residency application process. Currently, residency programs use a variety of methods to schedule interviews such as verbal or e-mail confirmation or scheduling systems. Resident applicants have shown preference for the round-the-clock accessibility of

the online scheduling system since many applicants are on rotations during the interview offer season and are unable to reply to residency administration in a prompt fashion during business hours [8]. Not only does an online scheduling system result in greater satisfaction by applicants, but it also decreases the workload of residency administration [8]. A transition to more uniform scheduling systems, namely an online system, between programs could help increase the efficiency of the interview process, prevent overlapping dates, and reduce stress and workload amongst both administrative staff and applicants.

Current studies about dermatology residencies focus on different factors that best increase chances of matching into dermatology residencies, such as publications, volunteer work, or letters of recommendation [9]. There are also studies looking at the difficulty and cost associated with the dermatology residency interview process, but no study to our knowledge addressed the different interview dates and patterns [1, 3, 6-9].

According to our results, the vast majority of interview offers were given in November and this remained consistent throughout the five application cycles. There was a minimal difference in the average interview offers in early versus late November. Scheduling interviews for dermatology is largely performed on a first come-first serve basis. Anticipating that the majority of interviews are offered in November, students could be advised to maintain consistent email access by strategically adjusting their rotation schedule or recruiting friends or family to check emails for them during this critical month.



**Figure 5.** Heat map of interview date overlaps. Conflicts were most apparent on the latter half of the week (Wednesday to Friday) and in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> weeks of January.

The actual interviews were conducted largely in January, followed by December. Given that over half of interviews occurred in January, it would be strategic to schedule as many interviews as possible in December to avoid overlap with January interviews [3]. Most interviews were consistently held on Thursdays and Fridays. The average number of interviews held on weekends remained low throughout the five cycles. Although weekend dates may be more convenient for applicants in terms of decreasing school obligations, based on this trend, it seems unlikely that this pattern will change.

### Limitations

Some limitations of this study were its use of self-reported data on SDN and DIGA. In a study comparing self-reported data on SDN compared to objective data of the National Resident Matching Program, self-reporting on SDN seemed to have a bias toward more successful applicants compared to the objective data. However, it acknowledged that increased self-reporting provides reasonably accurate information [10]. Furthermore, these websites have now been widely used by medical students for many years, suggesting their reliability.

### Conclusion

This study looked at crowd-sourced data to identify trends in dermatology residency interview patterns.

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The majority of interview offers arrive in early November, followed by late November. The interviews are typically held in January and December and most commonly fall on Thursdays and Fridays. There is an increasing trend of overlapping interview dates among programs. Being cognizant of dermatology residency interview date patterns can help prepare applicants for interview scheduling while avoiding scheduling conflicts. Applying into one of the most competitive specialties makes the already stressful Match process even more anxiety-inducing for applicants. This information may hopefully alleviate some of the stress associated with interviewing by better informing applicants of historical interview patterns for dermatology residency. Program directors may also benefit from this information when planning their interview dates. Future survey studies may be of benefit to further evaluate the effect of interview timing, interview date overlaps, and scheduling and communication methods on the overall anxiety level amongst medical students applying for dermatology residency.

### Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.