

Residency Match FAQ

General

Can I match successfully?

I'm struggling to decide what I want to do...

Can I match and be a (insert sub specialist)?

Can I match with a (insert red flag)? How do I address it?

Scheduling

Can I change my 4th year schedule?

When should I take Step 2 CK?

How much time do I need to schedule for interviews?

Advising

I was assigned to an advisor. Thanks! Can I talk to all of them?

What will we discuss at the main Career Goal Advisor Meeting?

Is there anyone who can talk to me about "X" University's program?

My college advisor is in a different specialty. Should I listen to their advice?

How do I get info about my less common pathway?

ERAS

How much description do I put in my ERAS CV?

For my ERAS CV, what if the project is ongoing?

My research is ALMOST ready for submission...

Wait, is anything I write "fair game" for an interview?

Will you read my whole ERAS application?

In ERAS, when do we assign letters (MSPE, LOR, etc.)?

How many programs should I apply to? My friend is applying to "n" programs...

Can I add a program to ERAS after I have submitted?..

I just got this great piece of news... do I need to notify programs?

My LORs aren't in, and ERAS just opened!

Interviews

How quickly do I *really* need to respond to interview invitations?

I am markedly introverted/awkward/have a red flag. Can I have a mock interview?

What do I do with January?

Rank List

Should I rank a program that I don't want to go to?

What if UNC isn't first?

Can I meet to discuss my rank list with you?

I'm really worried that I'm not going to match. Help...

Post-Interview Communication

UNC students/residents/faculty are asking me about my rank list and if I put UNC first. How should I respond?

General

Q: Can I match into my chosen specialty successfully?

A: While some specialties are highly competitive and have few to no open spots after the match, UNC prepares our students well to match. We consistently have a match rate of 96% or higher. It is rare that our students have difficulties as long as students follow the advice of their advisor, career goal advisor, and student affairs. Combined we have decades of experience assisting students to match in the specialty of their choice.

Q: What is the role of the career goal advisor?

A: They are student advocates in the specialty that you have chosen. They will meet with you, provide career advice and assist you through the match process. Their expertise and knowledge of the various residency programs in their specialty will especially help you determine where you should apply to find the program with the best fit for you.

Q: I'm struggling to decide what I want to do? Shouldn't I know by now?

A: You have time to make this important decision. Take the time from March to August to figure out who you want to be. Use part of your Individualization Phase schedule to explore different options. Utilize tools like AAMC® Careers in Medicine®, Texas Star, and your college advisor to help you make your decision.

Once ERAS opens in September, though, we encourage students to apply to only one specialty, unless your career goal advisor, college advisor, or student affairs has recommended a dual apply path for you.

A common and totally acceptable exception is combined programs (med/peds) where you may need a backup in one of the categorical programs. If you are applying to a specialty that is out of range for your academic credentials, you will need a parallel plan to ensure a successful match. If two specialties are applied to, great consideration needs to be paid to how the whole application is presented and should be discussed with your college advisor.

Q: Can I match successfully be a subspecialist even if I didn't do as well as I could have in med school?

A: Yes, you can. Regardless of program and/or subspecialty, we can get you there. Many subspecialties are much less competitive even than residency placement.

Q: Can I match with a red flag on my application? How do I address it?

A: Yes, most any red flag can be overcome. Course failures, shelf failures, Step 1 failures, leaving a PhD program, leave of absence. We have matched students every year who have difficulties somewhere along the line. But they cannot be ignored and CANNOT be hidden from your career advisors. You should openly acknowledge these weaknesses, which you may do in your personal statement and then again in the interviews as needed. You may have to adjust your original plan (different specialty, different programs). But addressing them and discussing how they have been overcome is important. **Be sure your career goal advisor and college advisor know.**

Scheduling

Q: I'm changing my mind about my specialty choice. Can I change my Individualization Phase schedule?

A: Yes. Make sure to discuss any potential changes with your college advisor and the career goal advisor in your chosen specialty. To make changes to your schedule, please email the Individualization Phase staff at indyphasehelp@med.unc.edu.

Q: When should I take Step 2 CK?

A: It is recommended that you take Step 2 CK in time to show on your ERAS application.

Q: How much time do I need to schedule for interviews?

A: Students will have Block 9 and Block 10 free in their schedules to accommodate interview season. Students will not be allowed to take courses during these blocks except in very extenuating circumstances; this would require approval of your career goal advisor, college advisor and Student Affairs.

Advising

Q: What will we discuss at the main Career Goal Advisor Meeting?

A: All the data you prepare (CV, transcript, personal statement) and bring will guide conversation. It is important you inform your career goal advisor of any **red flags** (failures, professionalism issues, leaves of absence) so they can advise you best. You should use Texas Star, FREIDA, Doximity and other resources to bring a draft list of programs you are interested in. You can filter by geography as a starting point. Plug in your academic characteristics to Texas Star to assess if you would have a good chance of being invited to an interview. It is also important you tell them if there are **specific programs** with whom you really want to interview. This should only be if you have a strong reason to go, would actually go, and they tell you there is a shot. Come with questions. These meetings are for your benefit.

Q: Is there anyone who can talk to me about “X” University’s program?

A: Yes! Just ask your career goal advisor or college advisor. We usually have a list of where our students have gone or our faculty have been and we are happy to connect you.

Q: My college advisor is in a different specialty. Should I listen to their advice?

A: Yes. All college advisors are specialty neutral and able to assist students throughout the match process. Your college advisor and career goal advisor are a team to support you on this next step of your career journey.

Q: I am interested in doing something less common (research fast track, etc). How do I get good info for that?

A: Talk to your career goal advisor and college advisor early. They may not know all the small details for each option, but they can connect you with those who have gone through them. They will all work together to get you great advice!

ERAS

Q: How much description do I put in my ERAS CV?

A: Enough to give a flavor of the significance of the activity and your role but try to be concise. Everyone knows what it means to see patients at the student-run clinic and to be an interest-group leader. Do highlight when you have made true commitments to a project. Remember everything is fair game on an interview!

Q: For my ERAS CV, what if the project is ongoing?

A: You can either choose an end date in the future or leave it open.

Follow-up Q: Then what do I put in the “reason for leaving” section?

A: There are a couple ways you can do this. You could state reasons only for things that may be unclear (ex: Left this position to begin clinical rotations in Asheville), or you could fill this part out for every experience (ex: 1-year term ended, ongoing, or left for...). Choose one way of doing it and be consistent throughout.

Q: How do I choose whether an item on my ERAS CV is a volunteer vs. work experience?

A: In general, volunteer experience is unpaid and work experience is paid. Most unpaid experiences and leadership positions within the School of Medicine can be considered a volunteer experience.

Q: My research is nearing being submitted but won't be quite ready when ERAS opens. Do I list it?

A: Yes. Without lying, try to list upcoming publications as "Submitted for publication" if it has indeed been submitted. If it has not been drafted or submitted, then you will need to list it under research experiences. Remember anything you write is fair game for an interview.

Q: Wait, is anything I write "fair game for an interview?"

A: Yes. Do include hobbies or interests that you are willing to talk about in your Interests section of ERAS. These are often good conversation starters with your interviewers and can lead to interesting conversations. Be specific about your hobbies.

Q: Will a career goal advisor or college advisor read my whole ERAS application?

A: Probably not, but they will answer any specific questions you have.

Q: In ERAS, when do we assign letters?

A: When you are certain. **Do not wait until the day ERAS opens** or when the documents are uploaded.

Q: How many programs should I apply to? My friend is applying to "n" programs... Do I have too many/not enough?

A: This can vary by student. **Listen to your career goal advisor.**

Q: Can I add a program to ERAS after I have submitted?

A: Yes, but better to do at the outset when possible. Listen to your advisor about how many programs you should apply to. Interview spots fill rapidly at most programs.

Q: I just got this great piece of news (AOA, Step 2 score, award, Medal of Honor, Emmy), but my application is already submitted in ERAS. Should I call programs? Do I notify the program director or the coordinator?

A: This is hard. UNC SOM works hard to have AOA elections before ERAS deadline.

Step 2 scores will update on your USMLE transcript so you will need to request an updated transcript to be sent. Only notify programs if it substantially changes things. Ideally you would complete Step 2 prior to the ERAS deadline. Many programs will not entertain your application until they see your Step 2 score, especially if your Step 1 score is pass/fail. Other awards, probably not unless they are well-known and substantial. Notify coordinators by email (do not call), and never program directors.

Q: My LORs aren't in, and ERAS just opened!

A: It's okay. Programs know that faculty members are busy people who are often late with things. Letters typically don't clinch/rule out an interview invitation. But this is why you should give your letter-writers so much advance notice that when you check in with them 7-10 days prior to ERAS opening, they can remember how much they have procrastinated and get it done.

Interviews

Q: I hear rumors that I need to be able to drop everything and schedule interviews as soon as I receive an offer, is that true?

A: Sadly, yes. This is a change over the past few years. Most students are using automatic email notification generators (thalamus, interview broker, eras/aamc, others) that scan emails for certain words (interview, invite) and then send a notification vibrate/sound to your phone. If you are on a rotation, set expectations with your team that you WILL be responding to texts/alerts and have to step away to schedule. You can also ask a trusted individual (close friend with a desk job, mother, SO) who is at a computer all day to help with this. This also means that you should NOT schedule to be in Malawi in October.

Because every program doesn't use the same system, keep an updated calendar of your interviews handy on your phone/ipad, so you can refer to it quickly and avoid double booking yourself. Some programs will post potential interview dates on their program websites as the interview season approaches. Consider writing

down the interview dates for programs you are especially interested in if they only offer a small number of interview dates so you can potentially schedule other interviews around those dates.

Q: Can I have a mock interview?

A: Yes, you can. The medical school offers mock interviews in the early fall before interview season begins. Some specialties offer practice interviews for students applying in that specialty.

Q: What interviews should I schedule in January or Block 11?

A: Good question. In general, schedule interviews that you are less likely to attend, so you can cancel them later if you get tired and have seen enough. So, if the first interview invite is to the University of Southwestern Iowa and you want to live at the beach, schedule that for January. You should have some flexibility to attend interviews in Block 11 since that is when SOM/SHS5 is scheduled.

Rank List

Q: Should I rank a program that I don't want to go to?

A: You should not rank a program you are not willing to attend. However not ranking a program means you would rather go unmatched than attend that program.

Q: Should I rank programs based on where I think they will want me?

A: No!! Rank programs based on your interest in the program and where you want to be.

Q: What if UNC isn't first?

A: It's okay. We want you to be happy. Your rank list is not shared with UNC program directors and will not affect their ranking of you.

Q: Can I meet to discuss my rank list with my career goal advisor?

A: Yes, make a preliminary rank list first. At least break your list into tiers (top, middle, bottom) prior to coming.

Q: I'm really worried that I'm not going to match. Help?

A: Let your career goal advisor, advisor and Student Affairs know. We will plan to discuss this with you if you have not achieved the goal number of interviews by Janaury. It is always better to strategize and prepare for the SOAP in advance (obtain additional letters, reconsider specialty choice, rewrite personal statement).

Post-Interview Communication

Q: UNC students/residents/faculty are asking me about my rank list and/or if I am ranking UNC #1. How should I respond?

A: You are not required to answer this question if you do not wish. If you are sure you are planning to rank UNC #1, it is fine to let them know

Q: This document is nifty. What else can I read?

A: Each year's class advocates compile a 4th year guide that includes information about matching. A lot of good advice in it from students who just matched. This is distributed by the Chief Advocate typically at the beginning of 4th year. Take a look. The Office of Student Affairs works with the Career Goal Advisors to also put together a guidebook to help based on specialty.