Guide to Applying for Dermatology Residency

MS1 - MS2

1. Excel in your coursework.
2. Participate in the Dermatology Interest Group (DIG).
3. Volunteer at the free clinics.
4. Explore research: research does not have to be in dermatology. Most clinical projects are preferentially given to MS3s and MS4s who have already decided on dermatology since we are a small department. Consider translational and basic science research projects in immunology, rheumatology, or other specialties if you cannot find a project specifically in dermatology.
5. Shadow in the clinics: e-mail Carrie Certo (carrie.certo@pitt.edu) to arrange this. Please inform her if there are specific faculty members, days of the week, or types of clinic (general dermatology, pediatric dermatology, Mohs surgery, etc.) that you are interested in observing.

MS3 - MS4

General Advice

1. Be enthusiastic and excel on all clinical rotations (not only dermatology)
2. Schedule your basic dermatology elective DERM 5420 (from 2nd half of 3rd year to 1st half of 4th year): **there is no perfect time, but ideally you should complete your home rotation before going to away rotations**
3. If you have extra elective time, you can consider Pitt dermatopathology (DERM 5440) and pediatric dermatology (PEDS 5455) electives
    a. Refer to School of Medicine - Student Affairs - Course Catalog (pitt.edu) for availability
4. Present your research at regional and national meetings
    a. American Academy of Dermatology (March, abstracts are generally due in September of the prior year)
    b. Pennsylvania Academy of Dermatology (September)
    c. Society for Investigative Dermatology (May, abstracts are generally due in January)
    d. Pitt conferences

5. Limit pre-interview and post-interview communication with programs.

Away Rotations (no more than 2)

APD recommendations on away rotations.docx (wordpress.com)

1. Submit VSLO application ~March of your MS3 year. Plan for away rotations ~June - October of your MS4 year. **There is no perfect month, but it is best to rotate before interview invitations are released (generally early to mid-November).**
2. Consider geographic locations or institutions you would want to complete residency (and/or eventually find a job) when deciding where you might want to rotate. It is best not to apply to too many away rotations as it does not look great to turn down an away rotation if an offer is extended to you.
3. If you are unable to do an away rotation, you can still match to dermatology without having completed any away rotations!

Before submitting ERAS

1. Decide how many programs to apply to, explore AMA FREIDA to review programs by location and program size.
    a. FREIDA Residency Program Database | Medical Fellowship Database | AMA (ama-assn.org)
2. Review preference signaling/tokens.
    a. Dermatology Match Preference Signaling Tokens: Impact and Implications - PubMed (nih.gov)
    b. https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-residencies-eras/myeras-application-and-program-signaling-2023-24
    c. https://connect.aamc.org/resourcelibraries/2024erasprogramsignaling
    d. In dermatology, there are **3 gold signals and 25 silver signals** that can be sent to programs. We recommend making a list of your **top 28 programs.** We do not recommend applying to more than 28 programs, as **a number of residency programs have indicated that they may not be able to review your application (due to high number of applications received) if you do not send their program a signal**.
        i. Send signals to your away programs (unless they tell you otherwise).
        ii. If Pitt is in your top 28, you can send us a silver signal (don't use a gold).

ERAS Tips

1. Letters of recommendation
    a. 3 dermatology +/- 1 internal medicine (or other core rotation)
    b. 1 letter should be from the chair or PD/APD (PD for most).
2. Personal statement
    a. Limit to one page.
    b. Review with your advising dean and mentors who are not PD/APD.
3. Most meaningful experiences
    a. For your three most meaningful experiences, describe ones that reflect how you built or showed your character.

Interviews

1. Mock interviews by our PGY-2s (first-year derm residents) are generally held ~September-October.
2. Dermatology participates in a coordinated release of interview invitations, generally in November.
3. November - January of MS4: most dermatology interviews are held during this window

Between interviews and Match Day

1. Create your rank list
2. Rank programs in order of your true preferences! Consider which programs may be the best fit for you (academic offerings, geography, family/friend support nearby, etc.).
    a. If you have questions about specific programs, this is when you can ask PD/APDs.
3. Make sure to rank academic preliminary internal medicine programs on your primary list (below your advanced dermatology programs), so that in case you do not match to a dermatology program, you will be able to match to an intern year program

FAQs

1. Should I take a year off for dedicated research?
    a. There is no correct answer to this. We have had medical students successfully match to dermatology both with and without taking a year off for research. If you take a year off, it has to be productive (meaning, resulting in publications and/or presentations).
    b. If taking a year off, is it better to take it between 2nd and 3rd year or between 3rd and 4th year?
        i. Neither is “better.” It depends on your situation. If you anticipate ending 2nd year with a research project that has a lot of momentum already, some students prefer to do the research year between 2nd and 3rd year. However, many students feel that they want to explore core rotations and electives before committing to the full year off, which would be a good reason to choose to do the research year between 3rd and 4th year.
2. Should I do an away rotation? How many away rotations should I do?
    a. These can be helpful for increasing your chances of obtaining more interview invitations. If possible, plan to do 1-2 away rotations (maximum of 2).
3. How do I decide how many programs to apply to?
    a. Currently, there are 3 gold preference signals and 25 silver signals you can send to programs. Please note that a number of programs have stated that if you do not send them a signal, they may not be able to review your application due to the high volume of applications. You can certainly apply to more than 28 programs, but please note that your application is not guaranteed to be reviewed without a signal.

Supplemental (some info from prior Pitt med students)

Additional Resources
ERAS and Interview Resources – Dermatology Interest Group Association (derminterest.com)
Residency Application & Matching Resources | UCSF Medical Education
AOA Guide to the 4th year (gwu.edu)

Applying to Dermatology Away Rotations: 2022 Cycle

General Overview

Many, but not all, away rotations are applied for through VSLO, a centralized application program. This program can be accessed here.

Not every program uses VSLO, so it is important to visit programs' individual websites if you do not see them listed.

The timeline of when rotations can be applied for vary by institution and specialty – there is not one day when applications "go live" such as when applying for medical school or for residency. Dates are listed in VSLO. In general, most apply for rotations between February – May of their third year to obtain rotations early in their fourth year. Students are encouraged to apply for rotations close to when they become available.

When applying, you apply for a specific institution and month. For example, you can apply to Hospital A from June 1- June 30, Hospital A from July 1 – July 31, and Hospital B from July 1 – July 31.

For 2022, AAMC currently says that COVID should not limit the number of away rotations that a student can do. Below is their statement from December 13, 2021:

When the Coalition work group's recommendations were released in April 2021, the situation with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic was very different than what exists currently. Since that time, learners have returned to the clinical environment with support from administrators, faculty, and staff, and are utilizing safety protocols to protect themselves as well as patients. While there remains uncertainty about the direction, impact, and duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, a return to a regular cycle for 2022 away rotations is anticipated. Medical schools, sponsoring institutions, and residency programs are encouraged to continue to monitor and consider their local conditions when establishing their guidelines for mobility.

VSLO charges per rotation, not per application. (For example, applying to the same rotation at Hospital A in both June and July would only be charged once. If you applied to Hospital A in

June and Hospital B in June, that is charged twice.) The cost is $40 for the first three institutions, and $15 for each institution after.

Requirements

The specific requirements for away rotations vary by institution. Not everything listed below will be required for each application. Some students prefer to only do what they know will definitely be necessary, whereas other students like to obtain all of the following for increased flexibility when applying.

Most require:

· Immunization form (most use the standardized AAMC form, some have institution specific forms requiring a physician signature). Note: Some programs required updated Hep B and other titers within 6 or 12 months (If necessary, can do this at student health)

· Updated TB test

· CDC Covid Vaccination Card

· Physical exam signed by a physician or other healthcare provider

· Criminal Background check

· Copy of Step 1 Score report

· BLS Certification

· Copy of transcript (most programs allow an unofficial transcript)

· Certification of N95, HIPAA, OSHA

· Grade evaluation form

· Headshot

Some require:

· Mini personal statement (why this specialty, why this program?)

· Clerkship evaluations

· Letter of recommendation from a non-dermatology specialty (I got one from internal medicine)

· Department letter of recommendation (I did not need this)

· Copy of health insurance card

Process:

Students must gain access to VSLO. Amber Fontenot will send an e-mail in late January with instructions on how to gain access. You can also e-mail Amber individually (alf164@pitt.edu) prior to this date, and she will grant you access.

How to obtain the other information:

1. Immunization form

If you do not need updated titers, you can use the immunization form that Pitt has on file. E-mail schedulingrecords@medschool.pitt.edu to request this. You can also go to AmpUp ® Student Tools ® Immunizations. From the drop down select “Print Immunization Record.” Note this requires a physician signature.

If you need updated titers, you can download the Standardized AAMC Immunization form here. Student Health Center (412-383-1800) on Pitt’s campus will draw titers.

2. Updated TB test

Note that some institutions require the Quantiferon-Gold test, and not the PPD. Student Health Center (412-383-1800) on Pitt’s campus will conduct both forms of TB testing. It is probably best to just get the blood test as this will fulfill the requirements for all programs.

3. Proof of COVID19 Vaccination

Upload scan of CDC COVID Vaccination Card. You must be fully vaccinated (and I would imagine boosted within the past 6 months).

4. Physical exam signed by a physician or other healthcare provider

Can obtain at Student Health Center (412-383-1800)

5. Criminal Background check

Most institutions do not require fingerprints. You can obtain a cheap ($20) criminal background check online here using only a SSN. Results are returned within minutes.

6. Copy of Step 1 Score report Log in to NBME and select “Score Report” for Step 1

7. BLS Certification

You obtained BLS certification during pre-clerkship week. If you did not download the certificate at that time, you can access it here.

8. Letter of good standing E-mail Jessica Layre (Jessica.layre@pitt.edu) of the Office of Student Affairs & Diversity Programs. She will send you a PDF which you can upload to VSLO.

9. Department letter of recommendation

E-mail your departmental advisor. If you are not sure who this is, contact your AD.

10. Copy of transcript

Most programs allow an unofficial transcript. Go to AmpUP ® Student Tools ® Medical Student Documents ® Unofficial Transcripts. If your program requires an official transcript, you can request it from your undergraduate institution. Have them send it to Amber Fontenot electronically (alf164@pitt.edu), and she will upload onto VSLO.

11. Grade evaluation form

Amber Fontenot will e-mail you this form

12. Certification of N95, HIPPA, OSHA + malpractice insurance

These documents are not required initially to apply. Once an application is submitted, it is sent to Pitt for approval. At this time, Pitt will upload the N95, HIPPA, OSHA, and malpractice forms if requested by that institution. There is nothing you need to do for these.

13. Headshot

Like ERAS, VSLO has you upload a headshot to your application. PittMed does not offer headshots until August (before ERAS submission), so you will need to find a photographer on your own (many people in our class went with Jen Worley). Caroline scheduled a headshot session in early February so that she had her picture in plenty of time to be uploaded to VSLO. Bansri scheduled hers in April which is probably the last opportunity to get it back in time. If you are unable to get a headshot for VSLO, that is also ok, Alicia just used her white coat photo for VLSO, but a headshot is definitely more ideal!

Note: We recommend starting to get all of the medical information (immunization forms, titers, TB test, physical exam) in late December / early January. You may want to visit your PCP over winter break to complete some of these tasks.

In addition, Pitt requests that when you apply to an away rotation, you record this in AmpUp. Go to AmpUp ® Extramural Domestic Electives, and fill in the information. Click “Save and Print.”

Applying to the SEC for away rotation reimbursement:

REIMBURSEMENT INSTRUCTIONS:

· Read “Away_Visiting AI Grants reimbursement 07-2021.pdf” for detailed instructions on documents needed and how to complete the request form (link below and in instructions)

· SAVE ALL RECEIPTS, review the receipts with the above instructions to make sure you’re giving everything necessary for Pitt to reimburse you.

· Pitt SORC Reimbursement online form: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfzFPw0b8TgSpjy5ctqC1KOCSndoPYzo4A0qfS49nnwUiYUqg/viewform · In case you need a new W-9: https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw9.pdf

PURCHASEING TRAVEL VIA PITT: · Give us a warning E-mail at SECF@pitt.edu to let us know you're going this route so we can be ready · E-mail sorc2@pitt.edu, CC: SECF@pitt.edu

o In your E-mail: State that you are a medical student purchasing travel for your pre-approved away elective and have been granted ~$400 to pay for travel to your site (state the institution/city/state) via SOM-SEC's private funds. State your availability to meet over zoom with one of the SORC reps, who will work with you on booking your tickets over zoom. Feel free to state a few flights/busses you've looked at or save that for the meeting.

o By cc'ing SECF, we can chime in and approve as well as back you up if they need help understanding approval for this trip.

Dermatology Specific Information/Question and answer

1) How many programs did you apply to? How many do you recommend?

Alicia: To start off, I personally applied to about 7, since I was recommended that you could apply to a few and add others later, since I had been told that it can look bad to turn down an away rotation offer. I did apply to multiple different possible away rotation months for each of these programs. I unfortunately received two offers at the exact same time (they give you about 5 days to respond) and had to turn one down. Afterwards, I withdrew my remaining applications.

Our class was in a different situation since we could only do one away rotation due to COVID19, so you may apply to more if you are planning on doing two or three.

Caroline: I only applied to 3 programs, though because of COVID19 limitations, we were only allowed to do one away rotation. Therefore, if you are planning on doing multiple aways, you may want to apply to a few more. However, it can look bad to turn down away offers, so you do not want to over-apply. I was accepted to one, denied from one, and then withdrew my 3rd application after I accepted my away offer so that I did not have to turn down any offers.

Bansri: I also only applied to 3 programs and was accepted to all 3. I had to turn down two, so I would recommend applying to fewer initially. You can always add more on later depending on the responses you receive. If you're planning on doing 3 aways, I would recommend starting off applying to ~5 programs. If you don't hear back, it doesn't hurt to reach out directly to the program coordinator to state your specific interest in their program.

2) What do we do if electives are off cycle from Pitt?

Alicia: I did an away rotation that was off cycle from Pitt and it's pretty easy to arrange with Amber. Your away rotation counts as an extramural elective and you get elective credit for that, and then can sandwich it between ~2 weeks of vacation on either side, which counts as a

vacation month. Other options would be too sandwich it between virtual low-commitment electives, like clinical radiology or patient safety and quality improvement. I have also been told that you can split it between an actual elective, but I think that would be difficult to organize.

Caroline: My away lined up with Pitt's schedule, so I did not have to re-arrange anything. As Alicia said above, by doing either a research or other non-clinical elective (eg. Clinical Radiology, Patient Safety & Quality Improvement), you should be able to have enough flexibility to schedule the away.

Bansri: My away was also off cycle like Alicia, so I scheduled two weeks of a research elective before and after, so I didn't have to use a vacation month. Amber usually provides more information about how to get approval for a split away/research month.

3) How did you find housing?

Alicia: I personally looked into some Facebook groups for UCLA undergrads subletting their apartments since Airbnb was super expensive for a month in LA! I was able to find housing less than a mile from my clinic site that was pretty reasonably priced, so I was able to walk every day. Also, you can actually apply to the SEC for funding to cover your housing costs. I was told they refund about $400, but I think because of COVID19 they had extra funds, and I actually was refunded about twice that!

Caroline: I was lucky that I have family in Chicago, so I was able to stay with them during my away. Other people on the away either subletted an apartment or rented an Airbnb for the month. Also, the MAA has a new HOST program that allows PittMed students to connect with alumni

across the country. You could try contacting the MAA to get connected with an alum in the city you are going to for housing recommendations.

Bansri: I would recommend checking Furnished Finder! They have furnished rentals specifically for travel nurses and other medical professionals. I was able to find housing in Hershey that was very spacious, homey, and reasonably priced! Some of my friends also recommended Rotating Room.

4) Were there other students at your away rotation?

Alicia: When I was at my away, there were three other medical students there, two who were doing an away rotation from other home institutions, and one who was a home institution student. I personally am a huge advocate that you should reach out to any other away rotators and get to know them – spend some time together in the city and form a group chat, because they will be your future colleagues and it's interesting to hear about other people's training and experiences! The other three students and I got dinner a few times throughout our rotation and had an active group chat while we were there, and we still have been checking in with each other throughout the rest of the year!

Caroline: During my away, there were 3 other students on the rotation, all away rotators. We were always scheduled at different clinics, so we did not interact much during the day. However, it was great to have other students to connect with during the rotation! We would occasionally get lunches and dinners together and were also able to ask each other questions about the derm application process and learn more about their home institutions!

Bansri: I was the only away rotator during my month, but became very good friends with the medical student rotators from the institution I was rotating at! We would get lunch together and hang out on the weekends. We still stay in touch and it's been especially great to be able to ask each other questions as you go through the application cycle together.

5) Can you get a letter of recommendation from your away rotation?

Alicia: I think this really depends on the experience, I was fortunate in that I worked primarily with the same attending every day, so I asked her for a letter of recommendation. I know some of the other students did not ask for one at UCLA, because they worked with different attendings nearly every day. I think it's best to go in with an open mind, and see who you work with and how you vibe!

Caroline: This can vary, and really depends on how you feel at the end of the rotation. During my away at Northwestern, I worked with a different attending pretty much every day. Because of the lack of continuity, it can be hard to ask for a LOR. For me personally, there was one attending that I really connected with and who changed the direction of where I saw my career going. Therefore, I did ask her to write me a LOR. However, when talking to the other students that were on the away rotation with me, I do not think any of them asked for a letter. So, it very much depends!

Bansri: Like Alicia and Caroline said, I think this varies depending on your individual situation. At Penn State, I had the opportunity to work with the Chair in clinic several times and was able to ask for a LOR at the end of my rotation. I would try to get a letter from your away if possible, since it provides another data point that you're likeable by people outside of just your home institution, but this can be hard since you often work with different attendings every half-day. If you really connected with an attending but feel like you haven't worked with them enough to ask for a letter, you can ask your away rotation coordinator about potentially scheduling additional time in the clinic with that attending for more continuity. I have also heard the advice of reaching out to an attending toward the beginning of your rotation, to make them aware that you'd like to get a LOR by the end, so they can potentially try to engage you more (ex. allowing you to see/present patients on your own) or find opportunities to get to know you better (ex. through working on a research project or case report together) during your time there.

6) How did you prepare for your away rotation?

Alicia: I think that everyone will likely have done their general dermatology rotation at Pitt prior to doing an away, which really does an excellent job at exposing you to a variety of clinics and experiences! I was recommended previously on my Pitt derm rotation to get Lookingbill & Mark's

Principles of Dermatology, which I think is a nice quick read through, and I just reviewed that before my away rotation. I also reached out to my attending who recommended a couple topics to review, but I don't feel like a ton of specific preparation is necessary!

Caroline: I did the dermatology rotation at Pitt and volunteered at free dermatology clinics, both which exposed me to a variety of derm conditions and made me feel comfortable going into the away. To prepare, I watched some of the basic AAD modules and read some Lookingbill & Marks. I know the away can be scary because some people think of it as an "audition rotation." Though you want to know some derm going in, no one expects you to know everything (that's why it takes so many years of training!). They just want to see that you are a hard worker and easy to get along with! So don't stress about cramming a ton of material!

Bansri: I echo everything above! I did some of the basic AAD modules and flipped through Lookingbill & Marks to refresh my memory since it had been a while since my Pitt derm rotation. But don't feel like you have to do a ton of reading before your away. I would be prepared to answer general questions like "why derm" and "why this program," which you might be asked by attendings when you're rotating with them