



2021 Ophthalmology Match Updates

May 8, 2020

The leaders of the Program Director's Council (PDC) and the Medical Student Educators Council (MSEC) of the [Association of University Professors of Ophthalmology \(AUPO\)](#) have been working with the [San Francisco \(SF\) Match](#) and the AUPO Board of Trustees to respond to the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on our learners and potential residency applicants.

As medical educators, we would like to address aspects of the residency application process that may be compounding the uncertainty students already may be feeling due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic. We acknowledge that COVID-19 will affect the residency application process in many ways.

Our primary goal is to facilitate the best possible recruitment process for each learner and program, while remaining flexible to adapt to inevitable changing situations.

Although a rotation in ophthalmology with at least one letter of recommendation from an ophthalmologist remains a prerequisite for application, we have outlined considerations made to other aspects of the application process below:

Application timeline-

The ophthalmology match timeline has been updated with [SF Match](#). The adjustment takes into consideration the interruption and delay of medical student rotations. Check the SF Match website for the full revised schedule.

Letters of recommendation-

At least one letter of recommendation from an ophthalmologist is required. These generally will be obtained from your home institution. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the Medical Student Educator or Program Director of your school's department of ophthalmology. If your school does not have an ophthalmology department, please reach out to your Dean for Student Affairs. Your school may have an existing relationship with a school that has an ophthalmology department. Also, consider contacting an ophthalmology department at another nearby medical school or look at a residency program that is not affiliated with a medical school.

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MSPE-

Preparation and release of the MSPE (Dean's Letters) will likely also be delayed. Being an early match, ophthalmology residency programs are accustomed to making decisions regarding interview offers prior to the release of the MSPE.

Away rotations-

We are aware that some medical schools are developing policies about away rotations - both potentially not allowing their students to study at another institution as well as preventing students from other schools to visit for a rotation. We understand that this may specifically create problems of access for medical students whose school does not have a department of ophthalmology. We encourage you to check the [AUPO website](#) where we will be posting a listing of ophthalmology residency programs, including those that are not affiliated with a medical school, soon. It is important to note that away rotations are not required for successfully matching into an ophthalmology residency.

Research-

We know that many research projects have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to communicate the effort and initiative you have applied in finding a project and mentor. A description of what you have been able to do should be outlined in your application even if it has not led to publication yet. While many applicants decide to pursue a research year prior to submitting an application for ophthalmology residency, this is not a requirement. You should only pursue a research year if you were planning on doing so before COVID-19.

Community service/volunteering-

We acknowledge that many ways to demonstrate interest and commitment to ophthalmology are through medical student volunteer clinics and other experiences that have been curtailed or even canceled. Opportunities may be available in parts of the country that have not been affected as much by COVID-19, and this can create a disparity in access to ophthalmic education and service experiences. Again, we recommend you describe your efforts in your application. Programs will take this into account as they look at your file.

USMLE Step 2-

Due to restrictions placed on testing centers, many students will not be able to take the USMLE Step 2 prior to submitting an application for ophthalmology residency. Standardized test scores are just one small part of your application. This should not prevent you from applying. Step 2 scores are not required for application for ophthalmology residency.

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Internship-

There are three PGY-1 options. Some ophthalmology programs have fully integrated internships with the entire process of application through the SF Match. Other ophthalmology programs have joint internships structured within their hospital. These require registering for both the SF Match and the NRMP, but the internship slot is linked to the successful match at that program's ophthalmology department. The third category are ophthalmology programs that have not yet integrated or formed a joint internship program. These require an NRMP match for a separate internship. Ophthalmology remains an early match. This allows for a separate NRMP match for

PGY-1 internship if needed. The type of internship needed will be clearly communicated on the SF Match website, as well as in other communications from the individual programs.

Interview-

Due to COVID-19, it is possible that many programs will be offering or requiring video conferencing interviews instead of a traditional in-person interview. There may be hybrid models. This will depend on the local resources and situation with the pandemic. Although this may benefit applicants by decreasing the cost and risk associated with travel, we also recognize that it may make it harder to decide if a program is a good fit. Programs are working now to prepare materials such as virtual tours, websites, videos, presentations and supplemental information for you to help you make a good decision. We encourage you to do your research and take advantage of opportunities to contact residents and graduates of the programs if available. The SF Match will be offering a new central interview scheduler within their system this year. This will help you keep track of your interviews.

We are so glad that you are interested in our specialty, and we look forward to meeting you.

Resources-

The American Academy of Ophthalmology has several resources for medical students: <https://www.aao.org/medical-students> including resources regarding the residency match process.

The AUPO website will be updated regularly to share helpful information about ophthalmology residency programs: <https://aupo.org>

And the SF Match is where you will register to match: <http://www.sfmach.org>

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