

HOW TO COUNSEL SECOND AND THIRD YEAR STUDENTS ON CAREERS AND ELECTIVES

A Guide for Faculty

IMPORTANT DATES AND TIMELINES

February 13, 2025

Elective registration opens on MedSIS, permits booking electives at UofT sites

March 2025 (date TBA)

Students provided access to national AFMC portal, permits booking of visiting electives at other medical schools

April 28 - May 11, 2025

Home school two-week 3rd year elective for Rotation A,B,C

May 26 - June 8, 2025

Home school two-week 3rd year elective for Rotation D,E,F

September – December 2025 (Exact dates to be determined)

4th year electives.

OVERVIEW

The landscape for medical students around career planning has evolved over the past few years. Students are faced with enormous pressure to excel in the face of concerns and myths regarding matching. This impacts student morale and wellness. As faculty, you are often faced with questions about career planning and electives strategies. Here are some tips to guide your counselling.

DO'S & DON'T'S

Do acknowledge the anxiety, uncertainty and stress associated with decisions around careers and electives.

Do remind students in the foundations years to balance their career exploration efforts with their medical expert learning and personal interests and wellness.

Do refer to and reinforce existing MD Program resources (listed to the right). Encourage students to seek out guidance and supports from the career counsellors at OLA.

Do remind students that it is normal for them to be unsure of what specialty they want to pursue, even in third year.

Don't minimize the emotions students may be feeling about the electives and CaRMS process. Electives have become a competitive and strategic process.

Don't provide false reassurance. The strategies previously used for electives and CaRMS may no longer be relevant.

Don't make assumptions about the electives or CaRMS process. If in doubt, refer the student to the Electives or OLA offices

Don't provide advice in absolutes.

"You must do this elective."

"Go to this site."

"Meet this individual."

Don't belittle, insult or minimize any career choice or specialty – even in jest.

Don't use the term "backing up" when speaking about parallel planning. This makes it sound like the second specialty of interest holds less importance and sends the wrong message.

RESOURCES



Director, Career Advising System

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Assistant Director, Career Advising System

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Electives Office

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Director, Electives

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The **Faculty Career Advisors (FCAs)** are clinician faculty with extensive experience in medical education and specific training around electives advising and CaRMS preparation. They are an excellent resource for career and electives mentoring and guidance. Each student will be paired with a FCA for electives advising.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I don't know what specialty I want to pursue. Is this normal? Am I at a disadvantage for the match?

This is very common. Many students don't know what specialty they want to pursue even in their third year. This is part of the career exploration process, and you can use your elective time strategically to both explore different programs and to help you decide which specialty is right for you. We also recommend speaking with mentors, supervisors and residents in your disciplines of interest. Consider an appointment with OLA career counsellors for further brainstorming and to connect you with potential mentors, or with the electives office to help identify how best to use your third year electives to assist with this decision making.

I am worried that I don't have enough shadowing, research or volunteer experience in my field of interest. What should I do?

Remember that you need to be true to yourself and choose interests outside of the classroom that speak to you. If you are worried that part of your CV seems sparse you might want to consider exploring that area by finding a mentor with the same interests as you, whether that is a faculty member or a senior medical student or resident. If you have other interests (i.e. travelling), you should definitely take the opportunity to explore these interests over your summer break between year 2 and 3 – this will not make or break your CaRMS application and might provide you with some unique and interesting experiences to draw from.

I have heard rumours that certain Academies are advantaged or disadvantaged in the match – is this true?

This is false. OLA has looked at 5 years of data and there is no statistically significant difference between the match rates between academies. All academies match at similar rates to the same disciplines (i.e. all academies match primarily to Family Medicine and then Internal Medicine etc.). Their match rates amongst surgical and non-surgical specialties also show no statistically significant difference.

How many electives should I do in specialty of interest?

Most students will do at least three but this will depend on the specialty of interest. We recommend you review the statistics published by CaRMS and Match Stats. The number of electives in a specialty may be limited by the AFMC diversification policy (see next question).

What is the AFMC Diversification policy?

This national policy implemented at all Faculties of Medicine in Canada stipulates that a student cannot exceed a maximum of eight weeks of electives in any single entry-level discipline. An entry-level discipline is an Entry Route in the PGY-1 (R1) match. Each of these entry-level disciplines leads to specialty certification with either the RCPSC or the CCFP. Electives in subspecialties that are part of a PGY-3 (R3) match (such as the subspecialties in Internal Medicine and Pediatrics) are counted as separate disciplines. As such, electives in these subspecialties do not count towards the 8-week maximum in the general specialty. Note: Selective experiences do not count towards the eight-week maximum in an entry-level discipline.

What is the UofT 3 Discipline Rule?

Students must successfully complete elective experiences in a minimum of three entry-level disciplines. Selective experiences count toward fulfillment of this three-discipline requirement. Note: Selectives occur in TTR.

Are there specific electives in my specialty of interest I should do?

You may hear of recommendations from mentors or other learners, however, there are no specific electives, sites or supervisors that are recommended through the MD Program. Getting an elective in your field of interest is the primary objective. Remember that completing a particular elective is not going to make or break your CaRMS application!

Should I get an elective with the program director or a specific supervisor?

It is not necessary or always possible to do electives with specific individuals. It is recommended to remain as flexible as possible, especially with visiting electives. It is always better to have an elective in your specialty of choice than to have it with a specific individual.

What if I can't get an elective at a particular site?

This happens frequently, especially for visiting electives. Maximize your potential for placement at a given site by diversifying your requests (e.g. complimentary disciplines). For many specialties, an elective at the site is not required in order to interview or to match to that program. We recommend you review the statistics published by CaRMS and Match Stats.