Association
of Pulmonary and
Critical Care Medicine
Program Directors

APCCMPD Recommendations on the MyERAS® Application
Approved on July 17, 2023

Introduction

The Association of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine Program Directors (APCCMPD) consists of program leaders from Critical Care Medicine (CCM), Pulmonary Medicine, and Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine (PCCM). It represents 98% of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) accredited fellowships in these subspecialties. The APCCMPD's mission is to foster excellence in training and mentor future pulmonary and critical care medicine educators. In addition, the APCCMPD provides a communication channel among fellowship programs and stakeholder organizations.

As part of our mission, the APCCMPD takes a vested interest in all aspects of fellowship recruitment. In June 2023, the APCCMPD assembled an ERAS Signaling Task Force to provide recommendations on the MyERAS® Application for the 2023-2024 recruitment cycle. The ERAS Signaling Task Force comprised 14 volunteer Program Directors representing APCCMPD Member training programs in CCM and PCCM, with diverse geographic distribution, program size, and affiliation.

Background

For the 2023-2024 application season, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) made some important changes to the MyERAS® application. This includes the opportunity for fellowship applicants to indicate potential geographic preferences for programs of interest and a revised template for applicants to describe their most meaningful past experiences. In return, the hope is that program directors and fellowship selection committees can use the available information to complete a more holistic review of applications they receive while better identifying those applicants who will contribute to their program's goals and mission.

Building upon the experiences of our colleagues in Internal Medicine residency programs, the APCCMPD convened a Task Force to make initial recommendations to guide program directors in using the updated MyERAS® application. We have intentionally omitted recommendations for applicants for this cycle due to the timing of this communication. We plan to include them next year after we have our own experiences to inform them. We acknowledge that this will be a new process for us all and that we are making these recommendations before the opportunity to review any applications for the 2023-2024 application cycle. We anticipate that the importance of some of the recommendations will need to change and encourage you to engage in a dialogue with us so that we can make meaningful updates to share with our members and applicants for 2024-2025. Ultimately, our goal is to provide a starting point for all stakeholders to facilitate the equitable and holistic review our applicants deserve.

Application Recommendations and Guidelines for Programs

I.   *Geographic Preference*

How this Works: Applicants now have an opportunity to share if they hold a preference or lack a preference to train in a particular region of the country. They can do this by selecting up to 3 of the 9 US Census division and additionally by

adding a maximum 300-character description of why they chose a particular region[1]. An applicant can also choose not to answer this question. Suppose an applicant selects a particular division (up to three). In that case, only programs located in that division (to which they apply) will see the response and the description of why they chose the division. Programs applied to, but not in divisions selected, will see a blank response to this question. If an applicant selects "I do not have a division preference," then all programs to which the applicant applies will see the same response, indicating no preference. If an applicant chooses not to answer this section, it will be displayed as blank for all programs they apply to.

> **Example #1:** An applicant selects the "Mountain West", "New England", and "Pacific" regions. That applicant then applies to four programs: the University of Colorado, the University of Washington, Vanderbilt University, and Yale University. Under "Geographic Preference," the University of Colorado will see "Mountain West" and the reasons they would like to live and work in the West; the University of Washington will see "Pacific" and the reasons the applicant would like to live in the Pacific region; Yale will see "New England" and those reasons. Vanderbilt University will see a blank response to this question, indicating either that the applicant chose not to answer it or did not choose their division.

> **Example #2:** A second applicant elects not to answer this question. All programs this applicant applies to will see a blank response to this question. All programs to which they apply will not know if the applicant left this section blank or signaled other parts of the country apart from theirs.

> **Example #3:** A third applicant chooses "I have no preference". In this case, all programs this applicant applies to will see the same response, "I have no preference". An applicant who chooses "I have no preference" also gets up to 300 characters to explain why they have no preference if they so choose.

APCCMPD Recommendation to Programs Directors:
1) We <u>recommend against</u> using regional signals as a screening tool for whom to interview.
2) We strongly <u>recommend against</u> declining to interview someone simply because they did not signal your region if they are otherwise a strong candidate for your program.
3) We <u>advise and highlight</u> that a blank answer can mean the applicant did not signal your program, *but it may also mean they chose not to answer the question.* Very limited negative weight should be given to a 'blank' response.
4) We <u>strongly recommend</u> preparing before the season opens to collect and analyze data on preferences so that your program can make more individualized decisions regarding their value in the years to come.

II. *Setting Preference*

How this Works: The setting preferences section is designed to allow applicants to communicate their preference or lack of preference for urban or rural settings or some combination of the two[2]. Applicants can also choose not to answer this question or to respond with "No preference". Applicants are also allowed up to 300 characters to clarify their responses. The response the applicant chooses to this question is displayed to ALL PROGRAMS to which the applicant applies, regardless of the setting of each program. Applicants may choose not to answer this question, in which case all programs will see a blank response.

APCCMPD Recommendation to Programs Directors:
1) We <u>recommend</u> that programs screen for applicants whose setting preference is dramatically different than the setting in which your program is located. These could be indicative of a mismatch.
2) We recommend against putting much weight on the values which combine two terms (suburban/urban and rural/suburban). These are too vague and open to interpretation to be of value.

III.   *Selected Experiences*
How this Works: Applicants now have the opportunity to identify up to 10 selected experiences, described as "experiences that communicate who you are, what you are passionate about, and what is most important to you." Each of these experiences must be categorized into one of 10 predetermined groupings[3]. In addition to naming the experience and the organization within which it was performed, applicants have the opportunity to describe how long they were engaged in the activity, the primary focus of the activity, and the key characteristics of their role. Applicants are given 1,020 characters to describe the context, roles, and responsibilities of each of the 10 experiences.

APCCMPD Recommendation to Programs Directors:
1)   We <u>strongly recommend</u> using this section to facilitate and enhance the holistic review of applicants. It is a chance for applicants to distill down 7+ years of training and tell you what they find most valuable and important. Done well, this should inform you about their goals and values through their actions (what they did and what they elect to tell you about).
2)   We <u>recommend against</u> putting significant negative weight on this section and advise that you view this information with thoughtful consideration for equity. Some applicants will get better advice than others on how to fill this section out. Some applicants will use fewer than the allotted 10 spaces; while this may be a sign of someone with limited engagement and passion, it may also represent an individual with significant focus and dedication to a limited number of topics. It may also represent an applicant who did not have the access to the same breadth of experiences or opportunities.

IV.   *Most Meaningful Selected Experiences: What made this experience meaningful?*

How this Works: Once an applicant has chosen their 10 "selected experiences", they are given the opportunity to describe 3 of them and what made those experiences meaningful. The applicant is directed to "reflect on the experience, why it was meaningful, and how it influenced you. Weave in the focus area or key characteristic you tagged. This should not describe what you did in the experience or list a set of skills you developed or demonstrated during the experience." The aim of this section is to have the applicant tell the program which of their previously shared experiences were the most meaningful, how they impacted them, and helped them to become the person and doctor they have become and why. This section should tell the program more about applicants' passions and drives beyond enumerating what they did during their training years. For each of these three experiences, applicants are given 300 characters to describe and reflect on the experience and its impact.

APCCMPD Recommendation to Programs Directors:
1)   We <u>strongly recommend</u> acknowledging that some applicants will get excellent advice on completing this section and others will not. We know from the Internal Medicine applications in 2021-2023 - when this section was first introduced for residency applications - that the answers provided here were

widely variable. This section can be helpful if done well, but many applicants will not use it to its fullest potential. Limited or short responses here should not be given negative weight. Keep in mind that applicants may elect not to share personal experiences in their application.

V.   Impactful Experiences

How this Works: Applicants will also have the opportunity to provide additional information about themselves related to disadvantages overcome or major challenges encountered on the road to fellowship application that is not captured elsewhere in the application. Not all applicants will have applicable experiences or feel comfortable sharing this information. The aim of this section is to provide unique information that has not been shared previously and is not included in the personal statement. A variety of experiences may be considered, but the applicant should keep in mind that anything contained in the application may be discussed during the interview. Those who opt to respond will have up to 750 characters.

APCCMPD Recommendation to Programs Directors:
1)   We recommend using this section to facilitate and enhance the holistic review of applicants and not as a tool to screen applicants for potential interviews. It is a chance for applicants to share those lived experiences that provide valuable insight into the characteristics that programs can use to support mission-driven holistic reviews.
2)   We recommend against putting significant negative weight on this section. Some applicants will get better advice than others on how to fill this out. Some applicants may not have experiences relevant to share, and others may elect not to share such personal information in their application.

Program Signals
Program signals allow applicants to express their interest at the time of their application. For the ERAS 2024 application season, program signals will not be available to fellowship applicants.

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[1] The 10 responses for the "*Geographic Preference*" question include: **Pacific** (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA); **Mountain** (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY); **West North Central** (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD); **East North Central** (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI); **West South Central** (AR, LA, OK, TX); **East South Central** (AL, KY, MS, TN); **South Atlantic** (DC, DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, PR, SC, VA, WV); **Middle Atlantic** (NJ, NY, PA); **New England** (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT); **I do not have a division preference**.

[2] The 6 responses for the "*Setting*" question include: **Urban** (described as the central part of a city; high population density; high density of structure such as houses, buildings, railways; public transportation more readily available for commuting; most jobs are non-agricultural; **Suburban** (described as smaller urban area around a city; less populated than a city; serves mainly as residential area for city's workforce; mostly residential with single-family homes, stores, and services; more parks and open spaces than a city; limited public transportation and private vehicles needed for commuting); **Rural** (described as large amounts of undeveloped land; low population density; open areas of land with few homes or buildings; no public transportation; private vehicles needed for commuting; main industries likely to be agriculture or natural-resource extraction); **Suburban or Urban**; **Rural or Suburban**; **No Preference**.

[3] The 8 responses for the "*Selected Experiences*" question include: Work; Research; Volunteer/service/advocacy; Education/training; Military Service; Other extracurricular activity/club/hobby; Professional Organization; Teaching/mentoring.

[4]Potential *impactful experiences* may include descriptions of family background, financial background, community setting, educational experiences, or other life circumstances.

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