A PROGRAM DIRECTOR’S GUIDE/CHECKLIST FOR RESIDENCY RECRUITMENT THROUGH VIRTUAL INTERVIEWING

2020

The Virtual Interview Committee

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Introduction

For the Academic year of 2020-2021, recruitment for, and selection of, candidates for all Saint Louis University Graduate Medical Education Programs will be accomplished using a virtual interview format. The success of this process requires a number of pre-interview decisions and in-depth preparations. These decisions can be broadly classified as technology decisions, personnel decisions, and interview decisions. This guide is prepared to help Program Directors think through some of these decisions for their program.

Please note that these decisions and decision areas are not sequential as listed here. Some of these areas require concurrent planning to implement. For example, your interview guide must be in development while deciding on the technology and personnel issues.

We will briefly look at each of these areas. More in-depth resources for each area are available.

A separate guide has been prepared for Program Coordinators. Depending on the distribution of tasks in your program, there may be overlap or exchange of tasks between program leadership teams.

Of notes, GME recruitment videos are currently in preparation. It is also recommended that programs update their own department and program websites to provide applicants with up-to-date, accurate information. Additionally, consider beefing up your social media presence in a mindful and appropriate way. With many institutions going virtual with interviews, candidates will be relying more on as much digital information as they can. Having information available on standard social media platforms can go a long way in putting a favorable light on your program.

Technology Decisions

Both interviewers and applicants must have a device with internet access, a camera and a microphone. At SLU, many of the desktop computers are not equipped with either a camera or a microphone, so many interviewers may be using personal devices such as laptops, phones or tablet devices. Even with these devices however, you may find you can improve your audio quality by supplementing with an external microphone and headphones.

- Do the devices have the proper software installed?
- Do they have stable internet or network connectivity?
- Is it in a quiet and secure place free from disruptions and external noise? Is the background appropriate and free of distractions or sensitive material?
Will the program request the interviews in a specific room or site or can they be done anywhere?

Do you plan to have one-on-one interviews or group interviews? Group interviews require more planning and will be important to practice ahead of time.

**NOTE:** A faculty development program in the use of ZOOM and its features is recommended for all interviewers. The interview itself is not the time to try to learn how to set up breakout rooms if conducting group activities. Additionally, there are security risks and ways that meetings can be “zoombombed” which can allow hackers to share inappropriate or explicit content during your meeting. Taking additional steps in the set-up process can help prevent this from occurring.

At SLU, Zoom software is available through MYSLU and training videos are available through MYSLU and through the ZOOM website itself.


https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206618765-Zoom-Video-Tutorials

During the Interview, a number of small but extremely important details can impact the quality of the interview experience. (resource: Thalamus).

**Test Your Technology**

No matter how many times you have conducted virtual interviews, it is best practice that before you start any scheduled interview.

- Check your internet connectivity.
- Check your camera and microphone. Ensure proper lighting and positioning.
- If using a laptop or mobile device, ensure the battery is charged and/or plugged into a power source.

**Optimize your interview environment.**

First impressions matter whether meeting someone in person or via webcam and video conference software. Designate a specific location where you will conduct your interview. Ensure it is quiet and away from noise and other distractions. Make sure that your background is neutral without clutter. Zoom allows you to utilize a virtual background if you have the proper software/operating system, but remember to set up prior to the interview. Some backgrounds can cause pixilation with solid colors so be sure your shirt, backdrop or other items in the picture do not get incorporated into the virtual background.

**Ensure appropriate lighting.** Usually overhead lighting is sufficient, but a lamp can also be used. Avoid light behind you as it will cause a glare. You should face a light source to get the best imaging. Avoid windows, as glare from the sun may create
challenging views especially windows that are positioned behind you in the camera frame.

**Proactively remove potential distractions.**

Inform anyone in your immediate vicinity (staff, friends, family, or children) that you have an upcoming video conference, silence cell/home phones, mute any other loud devices, and secure any animals that could cause disruption to the meeting by barking or entering the frame. Silence your cell phone notifications (without vibration) to ensure a text message or app notification doesn't disrupt your interview.

Similarly, disable all notifications on the computer that will be used for the video conference. This includes Gmail and Outlook, any remote working software (Teams, Slack, etc.) and calendar notifications. Ensure other windows, especially those including content that may be considered unprofessional are closed on your computer in case you need to share screens.

If using an office with a door that can be closed, a sign on the door indicating interview in process should be utilized to prevent disruptions.

**Appearance is everything!**

Dress professionally as you would for an in-person interview. Consider an outfit that stands out well from the background (think like the costume designer for your favorite movie or TV show). Also, being well-groomed is as important in a virtual interview as in an in-person interview.

Use a stationery chair. Swivel chairs are distracting. Sit still, lean forwards slightly and make minimal use of your hands (or keep them still entirely).

Position the camera so that it is slightly above you and angle the camera downward slightly. This may require you to set your device up on a stable surface above the typical height of your desk. This promotes eye contact. Look into the camera directly when responding to questions to provide optimal eye contact. If you are using notes or another screen to review an application or file, inform the interviewee of such. They cannot see your desk or screen and if you are looking elsewhere it will appear that you are not engaging with them. When possible, position notes or other screens in a similar position to the camera lens so that you can easily review the screen and look at towards the camera. Listen attentively and with accompanying body language as you would during a face to face conversation. Use the self-view video to your advantage.

**Go with the Flow**
Technology is great, but it comes with its own challenges and difficulties. If you are doing many video interviews, expect that there may be disruptions or issues that need addressed rapidly. There may be intermittent issues with connectivity, video quality or sound quality. Be flexible and prepare for contingencies including providing a phone number to call to continue the conversation over the phone or additional time when a reschedule could occur.

Given that everyone is meeting over some distance, coordination may also be more challenging. When scheduling interview times, be mindful of time zones—calendar invitations can often eliminate this problem but are not always possible. In person, one would have to worry about entering the wrong conference room; similarly, ensure you are using the proper link to access the correct video interview. If breakout rooms are being used, available in applications such as Zoom, make sure you are entering the correct sub room.

If your computer audio isn’t working, consider dialing into the meeting by phone for the audio component.

**Personnel Decisions**

In the on-campus interview process previously employed, interviewees often would interact with multiple interviewers, both at the faculty and peer level. While that could conceivably be utilized in the virtual environment, many programs who have been using a virtual format strongly recommend that only the PD and the associate/assistant PD(s) conduct the selection interviews. This simplifies scheduling for all concerned, given that we are using what is for most of us, a new technological approach to interviewing, restricting the interviewers to the PD and associate/assistant PD reduces inter-interviewer variability, an important consideration at this point in the evolution of virtual interviewing. It is thought that this will be fairer to the interviewees at this point in time.

However, often these interviews are supplemented with resident conducted virtual group chats at other pre-arranged times including the night before, the afternoon of the interview, or at set intervals throughout the interview season to allow flexibility for applicants. See an invitation recently sent by another program:
Whether limiting the interviewing faculty to the PD and associate/assistant PD, or utilizing a broader spectrum of faculty, pre-interview education and preparation is critical. The AAMC currently recommends faculty development in the area of implicit bias prior to conducting any interviews. In addition, all faculty must be prepared to operate the technology as indicated in the previous section. And finally, faculty development regarding the specifics of the program interview and the scoring matrix is essential.

The AAMC provides a good summary of the decisions surrounding a transition from in-person interview environment to a virtual process as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If your In-Person Interview Includes:</th>
<th>Consider this instead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-hour interviewer days for interviewers</td>
<td>Limit the time an interviewer can spend conducting consecutive virtual interviews to less than four hours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panel interviews</td>
<td>Use recorded virtual interviews rather than live virtual interviews to reduce the burden of coordinating multiple people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Activities</td>
<td>Include questions about teamwork.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role-play activity</td>
<td>Include questions that assess competencies normally assessed during the role-play (e.g., empathy, communication skills) or situational questions that ask the applicant to take on a specific role.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lunch (or dinner) with current residents</td>
<td>Set up a virtual group meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour of the medical school</td>
<td>Create a short video tour of your institution with interview of key staff, faculty and current trainees**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**The University is currently planning a standardized video that can be used by programs in their interview process. This will include information on the school and hospital and have interviews with trainees, faculty and program directors.

**The Interview**

As with any interview, a thorough review of the applicant’s materials prior to the interview is important. Further, have the materials in front of you and available during the interview for reference.

Current best practice strongly encourages the use of a structured, standardized interview and a standardized answer key. This becomes especially important in a virtual environment where usual interactive and non-verbal cues may be missing or unable to be observed. A structured interview is a process established by the Program in which all candidates are asked a selection of predetermined questions in
the same order. Utilizing this approach segregates variability across candidates to the substance of their answers and reduces implicit biases that can occur between raters. This is accompanied by rating each candidate using a standardized scoring system.

A sample agenda for an interview day might be:

- Brief history of the Program
- Graduate track record (Academics vs Community job; Board pass rates)
- Case Numbers (Program, Trainee)
- Unique aspects of the program (rotation sites, etc)
- Housestaff resources
- City/Town Highlights
- Structured Interview

**NOTE:** While ACGME accreditation status is not usually discussed, if a program is accredited with warning or on probation, this must be disclosed.

If time is an issue, the above agenda (which tends to merge the recruitment information and welcome to SLU with the interview) could be supplemented with a pre-recorded video or address that encompasses many of these details and must be viewed prior to the interview, vitiating the need to be repeated for every single interview.

You may want to design your own structured interview and scoring or borrow one already employed. The University of Utah suggests the following approach to designing your interview:

- Pick 6 areas of importance to your faculty/program
- Interviewers will ask all candidates the standardized questions; if time permits, then can expand and ask any other questions they wish to ask
- Design questions where there is not just one correct answer
- Identify ahead of time how your interviewers will score the answers to the questions (Answer Key with Scoring Guide)

This example of questions and a scoring key from the University of Utah may be helpful:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational Stress Tolerance</th>
<th>Interpersonal Stress Tolerance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: To think clearly and take effective action in stressful or emergency situations; to take control of a stressful situation and calm others; to tolerate stressful circumstances</td>
<td>Definition: to maintain self-control, diplomacy and tact when others are belligerent, confrontational or violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell us about a bad complication you had during general surgery rotation and what you did about it. (After allowing them to describe the situation/details, ask follow-up questions).</td>
<td>Describe to us an example of working with a difficult person you had to deal with at work, and tell us how you handled your interactions with that person. (After allowing them to describe the details, ask follow-up question).</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>How did you interact with the family on this scenario? How does your conversation change as a resident vs. an Attending?</td>
<td>Reflecting on this experience, what would you say best describes your leadership style?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Objectivity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Compassion</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: To be open minded about alternatives and others points of view; to be free of bias; to treat every person fairly and impartially without letting personal feelings interfere; to work effectively with a diverse group of people.</td>
<td>Definition: To understand others’ needs and feelings; to treat others with courtesy and respect to demonstrate concern for others to have a genuine interest in people and their welfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is your hero? Why do you admire him/her so much? (Allow them to describe who it is and the ideal traits).</td>
<td>What accomplishment are you most proud of so far in your career? Was this accomplishment made possible by others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s interesting, but most people would disagree with you. What do you tell people who think poorly of this person? (assess how they respond when you don’t agree with their choice; assess whether they can remain objective)</td>
<td>Did the achievement rub anyone the wrong way, and how did you deal with that?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Discretion</strong></th>
<th><strong>Dutifulness and Integrity</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: To respect confidentiality of information; to discuss sensitive subjects with tact and diplomacy</td>
<td>Definition: Dutifulness - To accept authority and follow orders; to obey laws both on and off duty; to be trustworthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypothetically, if a friend of yours is an anesthesia resident in the same program and you found out that she</td>
<td>Integrity – to be honest and do what is right and ethical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are in the operating room with a junior Attending performing a CABG. You have worked the past month with</td>
<td></td>
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### Objectivity
- **Definition:** To be open minded about alternatives and others points of view; to be free of bias; to treat every person fairly and impartially without letting personal feelings interfere; to work effectively with a diverse group of people.

### Compassion
- **Definition:** To understand others’ needs and feelings; to treat others with courtesy and respect to demonstrate concern for others to have a genuine interest in people and their welfare.

### Dutifulness and Integrity
- **Definition:** Dutifulness - To accept authority and follow orders; to obey laws both on and off duty; to be trustworthy
  - **Integrity:** – to be honest and do what is right and ethical
was taking drugs, how would you confront the situation?

the Division Chief who performs anastomoses in a set method with lots of success. You see the Junior Attending struggling with both teaching and performing his method of technique. How do your respond to this situation?

Would you report her to her Program Director?

During the subsequent M&M discussion, there is a heated exchange between the Division Chief and Junior Attending about technique. The Division Chief turns to you for an opinion. What do you say

What if your actions led to the loss of your friendship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCORING KEY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composure/Frustration</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remained calm throughout, even during difficult interactions</td>
<td>May have become frustrated, but regained composure</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pace</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quickly worked through The scenario; logical thinking</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced perspective; was able to outline</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the conclusion of the interview, consider offering opportunities for follow-up conversations with select faculty, or with trainees.

**Additional Resources**


Black C. Budner H, Motta AL. *Enhancing the residency interview process with the inclusion of standardised questions*. Postgrad Med J. 2018 Apr, 94 (1110) 244-246.

**More Sample Interview Questions**

In designing your interview, this supplemental list of questions may prove helpful. However, please remember there are some questions you may not ask such as “where else are you interviewing”.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Be prepared for this opening question: “So, what questions do you have for me?”
- Tell me your strengths and weaknesses.
- Tell me about a difficult patient scenario and how you responded to it.—or—Tell me about a time when a patient’s care didn’t go as planned, how did you respond to that?
- Why did you want to become a physician?
• Tell me about a memorable patient interaction.
• Teach me something non-medical in 30 seconds.
• Tell me about your favorite non-medical book/movie.
• Role playing with interviewer on ethical situations.
• Tell me about your research.
• What do you do in your spare time?
• Present an interesting case to me. It can be from any service.
• Tell me about a stressful situation you have been in and what strategies you use to cope with stress.
• What causes you stress, and how do you deal with it?
• Which courses and clerkship did you like best/least? Why?
• What areas of our program interest you the most so far?
• Why do you want to come here?
• How/when/why did you decide on this specialty?
• If you could fix one thing in our specialty, what would it be?
• Tell me about a patient care mistake that you made and what you learned from it.
• What do you do in your spare time indoors?
• What is your strongest point?
• You are chief resident. One of the junior residents is continually late. How will you remedy this?
• What are your intellectual pursuits outside of medicine?