

Using data to gauge your competitiveness

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Assessing your competitiveness for different specialties requires 1) an honest assessment of your qualifications, and 2) information about what program directors want in their trainees. We'll get to the honest assessment later. First let's address the information sources you should use.

Charting Outcomes in the Match

This [joint AAMC/National Resident Matching Program® \(NRMP®\) report](#) provides competitiveness data for 19 specialties including USMLE Step 1 and 2 scores, number of contiguous ranks, and credentials (e.g., research, AOA) for applicants who matched and those who didn't. Released every other year, this report should be your first stop to gauge your competitiveness.

And here's a quick preview: Chart 6 in the report shows the middle range of Step 1 scores for all 19 specialties, which is an overview of the score "safe zone" needed to match.

School-specific Match data

Charting Outcomes in the Match poses the national picture, but institutional data refines the focus. Your school may have different outcomes for a particular specialty, institution, or region that you should consider when making your residency decision. If your school makes data available (usually through an advisor or student affairs office), review the numbers of students, range of USMLE scores, and programs by specialty past students entered.

NRMP Program Director Survey

The NRMP recently released the *Program Director Survey*. The survey asks program directors from 19 specialties how they select applicants to interview and rank applicants for the Match. Knowing how program directors value elements of the application and application process such as letters of recommendation, personal statements, USMLE scores, research in the specialty, and clerkship grades can help you position yourself to be competitive.

FREIDA

The American Medical Association's [FREIDA](#) provides the most comprehensive database of residency and fellowship programs to determine where to apply. With information on more than 9,000 residency and fellowship programs, you can search by location including state and region, specialty area, and other factors such as number of training positions, special training tracks, and program size.

In the search results, programs with basic listings provide contact information, ERAS participation, program length, and whether they're accepting applications for the coming year. For programs with expanded listings, FREIDA provides information on the program size, number of interviews offered, number of faculty, work schedule, educational environment, and employment benefits.

Specialty organization Web sites

Specialty organizations are vested in helping students pursue a career in their field, so many offer more focused tools to help students learn about their specialty and residency programs. From the American College of Surgeons' [Online Guide to Choosing a Surgical Residency](#) to the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine's [E-advising program](#) and [Residency Directory](#), specialty organization Web sites can be a virtual goldmine of information to help you learn more about the specialty and position yourself effectively for residency. CiM links to more than 1,000 specialty societies, associations, journals, and publications across specialties.

CiM Medical Specialties

As you can see, CiM aggregates data about specialties from numerous sources — the perfect place to start gathering information about the more than 120 medical specialties recognized by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).

What physicians in the specialty do, the qualities and characteristics physicians in the specialty share, the length of the residency training, and how competitive the specialty is are just some of the topics and details addressed. Also featured is data from nationally-recognized sources besides the NRMP, including the ACGME, American Medical Association, and American Board of Medical Specialties — all to offer you the best possible start in your research.

Once you've collected all the appropriate, helpful information about specialties and residency programs, honestly assess your qualifications, then compare yourself to the data.

Note: Your candidacy is more than your board scores and grades; other qualities and qualifications provide programs with valuable information that helps indicate the complete picture of you. Meet with your advisor and departmental faculty mentors to assess your strengths, weaknesses, and program options. They can help you synthesize the wealth of information and serve as a healthy reality check, so you can find a residency that meets your educational and career goals.

- [Jeanette L. Calli, M.S.](#)
Program Manager, [Careers in Medicine](#)

Jeanette has a master's degree in higher education with a specialty in career development counseling. She has been working with medical schools and students on career planning and specialty choice for 11 years and is primarily responsible for developing CiM content, day-to-day management of the program, and training faculty how to effectively advise medical students.