

■ Letters

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and the number of students obtaining a residency position through the scramble.

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Erica J. Ottis, Pharm.D., Clinical Assistant Professor
russellej@ukmc.edu

Tatum Mead, Pharm.D., Clinical Assistant Professor

Stephanie Schauer, Pharm.D., BCPS, Clinical Assistant Professor

Department of Pharmacy Practice
University of Missouri—Kansas City
809 Lewis Hall
Columbia, MO 65211

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Better letter of intent for pharmacy residency applications

The explosion in the number of residency applicants and the very compressed timeline for residency coordinators to review them for interview selection have put greater emphasis on the content and quality of the prospective resident's application. Conventional recommendations for specific items such as a letter of intent may no longer be adequate in helping a candidate to stand out when applicant:position ratios exceed 10:1. My own experience over the past three years with more than 500 letters of intent is that they are exceedingly similar and rarely, if at all, differentiating.

I now tell students that their letter of intent would be markedly enhanced if it served as a tour guide through their curriculum vitae and transcript. I recommend the letter contain an overview of what, how, and why their pharmacy training experiences occurred. How did your class workload compare with the minimum required for graduation? Was there a "bad" semester or year, and, if so, why? Have you worked in a hospital

pharmacy or any pharmacy at all? If not, why not? To what extent did your fourth-year experiential assignments reflect your interests?

Particularly vexing to me is that there is no central and up-to-date repository of the assignment methodology, procedure, or policy used for each school's experiential activities. Does the school use a lottery, career tracks, incentive programs, merit ranks, student-generated or contracted rotations, or maybe even voodoo (as some interviewees have suggested)? Which activities, if any, were abruptly changed by site loss, preceptor changes, or illness that required makeshift solutions? This information is usually discussed during the interview, but recent experience suggests that a candidate can no longer wait for that opportunity to provide this information.

In January 2011, the postgraduate year 1 residency program at my institution reviewed 145 applications for 12 positions and invited 56 candidates for interviews. This is far different from 10 years ago,

when we averaged 65 applications for 11 positions and would interview 48 candidates. Candidates need to differentiate themselves when they are being selected for interviews and cannot wait for the interview itself to do "all the talking." Take the time to flesh out your curriculum vitae and transcript so that I can assess the body of your experiential life to date and not just the skeleton. I would like a letter of life rather than a letter of intent. All of this may become moot if a centralized application process is adopted; but, for this year, my advice stands.

Frank P. Paloucek, Pharm.D., DABAT, FASHP, Clinical Associate Professor and Director, Postgraduate Year 1 Pharmacy Residency
College of Pharmacy
University of Illinois
833 South Wood Street
Chicago, IL 60612
paloucek@uic.edu

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