

SDAMPP Training Modules for Medical Physics Recruitment
Frequently Asked Questions
January 2022

Unconscious Bias Frequently Asked Questions for Medical Physicists

Are there any methods that your institution has implemented in order to remove/reduce any biases?

- *Simply being aware of unconscious bias is the best first step. Conduct training with all participants in the recruitment process. Part of this training could include having people complete unconscious bias tests online. This training should happen, not only before interviews are conducted, but before the application review timeframe, as potential biases, such as similarity to previous graduate programs, can affect the review.*
- *Standardized interviews can help to reduce biases. These interviews use standardized questions that are designed to determine specific attributes and skills needed for success in your program.*
- *Use a standard rubric when reviewing applications and generating your ranking lists. Rubrics that are aligned with specific attributes and skills needed for success in your program provide more objective methods of assessment.*
- *Remove the term “fit” from your recruitment process. The term “fit” is not well defined and therefore allows bias to creep in. Determine specific attributes and skills needed for success, then frame the evaluation around those.*

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**Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Frequently Asked Questions for
Medical Physicists**

Would it be the panelist's recommendation to AAPM to stop collecting/reporting gender, DOB, demographics, and/or visa/residency status in the MP-RAP?

- *There are valid and useful reasons to collect demographic information in order for an individual institution to audit for discriminatory acts or to track diversity goals. Visa and residency status may be required by certain programs that can only offer specific types of visa assistance.*
- *In order to reduce unconscious bias, programs can attempt to blind the application packet of such information. It is a recommendation of the panelists that MP-RAP develop tools that allow institutions to configure what information they want to see/hide.*

If there are valid reasons for collecting information such as gender, DOB, demographics, and/or visa/residency status, why aren't other EEOC protected identifiers (e.g. sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities, religion), collected by the MP-RAP to evaluate for discriminatory acts in the Match?

- *It's not a defined role of MP-RAP to evaluate for discriminatory acts but up to individual institutions. There is a moving line between what applicants are comfortable sharing as part of their applications and what institutions may be interested in tracking as it relates to evaluating diversity.*

Are we allowed to take apart the application and remove the page with that information (race, gender, etc.)

- *There is no rule against removing pages with demographic information from the application.*
- *In order to reduce unconscious bias, programs can attempt to blind the application packet of such information.*

How would you respond if an applicant, during interviews, says they have young kids and asks about daycare options? Do you talk about your own kids now?

- *Evaluate the context in which the question was asked. If it was asked in a group setting, other applicants may feel pressured to engage in a discussion about kids, so we recommend to either refer the applicant to a neutral party or defer answering until one-on-one. If asked in a one-on-one setting, you can answer the question, but we recommend steering the conversation back to topics specific to the medical physics training program.*
- *Providing resources to the applicants (eg part of a webpage or informational packet) about ancillary or additional benefits of the program, including daycare options, can reduce the chances of this question being asked during the interview.*

But I want to show that our workplace is family friendly by talking about my kids with applicants. Is that ok?

- *We recommend against talking about your kids during interview activities. Keep in mind that some candidates don't or can't have kids, so this conversation topic may not demonstrate the same benefits of your program to everyone. Consider talking about other program benefits that would apply to all applicants, such as how your program values work/life balance and wellness.*

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Frequently Asked Questions
January 2022

How do you respond to a colleague who says they are just trying to appear friendly by asking questions about the applicant's family?

- *Remind the colleague that asking questions about the applicant's family increases both the risk and perception of illegal discrimination per EEOC rules. Even if the intent is benign, the applicant can still feel pressured to give information that they feel could be used against them. To avoid the impression of potential discrimination, it is advisable to avoid questions about an applicant's family. Since applicants may feel uncomfortable answering, those questions can reflect poorly on your program. With that possibility in mind, you can discuss with your colleague and appeal to the program's aim of recruiting the top applicant, which would likely be a shared goal with your colleague.*

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January 2022**

Med Phys Match Rules Frequently Asked Questions for Medical Physicists

An interviewer at your institution likes to ask, "What are your top 3 programs?" in order to gauge the applicant's interest in the interviewer's program. Is this a violation of the MPM rules? What can be done to prevent these types of questions being asked?

- *While the interviewer is not violating the MPM rules, we believe that the question doesn't follow the spirit of the rules and should be avoided. The applicant can interpret this question as the interviewer trying to work around the rules to find out their top programs on their ranking lists.*
- *This question could make the applicant feel uncomfortable and/or perceive this question to be a violation. This situation can reflect poorly on your program.*
- *The MPM website recommends against trying to "game the system," meaning rankings should be performed according to how interested you are in the applicant, not how interested you think the applicant is in you. Therefore, trying to determine programs the applicant prefers over yours shouldn't impact your ranking list.*
- *Preventative measures can include:*
 - *Conducting training on the MPM rules prior to interviews.*
 - *During this training, discuss these types of "grey area" questions, e.g. where it might not be obvious to all parties whether these questions are allowed or whether the applicant could potentially interpret these questions as violations.*
 - *Facilitate open discussion with program faculty and current residents. Encourage all participants in the interview process to report these types of situations. Encourage applicants to reach out to you or a neutral party, such as a program coordinator, if they experienced actual or perceived violations of MPM rules. This would allow these challenging "grey area" situations to be addressed and avoided in the future.*
 - *Consider generating interview guidelines and requiring all parties participating in the interviews to attest to the guidelines. Potential consequences, such as eliminating participation in future recruitment activities, could also be delineated in the guidelines and adhered to.*

A current postdoctoral fellow at your institution takes the applicants out for lunch and asks, "What other programs would you rank higher than this one?" in order to learn about other residency programs as he/she prepares to apply to residencies next year. Is this a violation of the MPM rules? What can be done to prevent these types of questions being asked?

- *The applicant was directly asked about details of their ranking list, so this is a violation of the MPM rules. Even if the question was innocuous in intent, information about the applicant's ranking was solicited. If the postdoctoral fellow was not a part of the interview team, the applicant could still perceive this as a violation of the MPM rules because the applicant would not know whether the solicited information would ultimately be used by the program.*
- *This scenario highlights the situation that actual and perceived violations of the MPM rules can come from anyone and at any time. The MPM rules apply at all times when interacting with applicants, including during informal times such as lunch, social events, informal zoom rooms, or the times in between interviews.*
- *Preventative measures can include:*
 - *Training on the MPM rules with all individuals interacting with applicants, in addition to those conducting the formal interviews*

SDAMPP Training Modules for Medical Physics Recruitment
Frequently Asked Questions
January 2022

- *Facilitate open discussion with program faculty and current residents. Encourage all participants in the interview process to report these types of situations. Encourage applicants to reach out to you or a neutral party, such as a program coordinator, if they experienced actual or perceived violations of MPM rules. This would allow these situations to be addressed and avoided in the future.*
- *Consider generating interview guidelines and requiring all parties participating in the interviews to attest to the guidelines. Potential consequences, such as eliminating participation in future recruitment activities, could also be delineated in the guidelines and adhered to.*

While walking the applicant to their next interview, a physicist at your institution asks, "Where else are you interviewing?" in order to engage in small talk. Is this a violation of the MPM rules? What can you do to prevent these types of questions being asked?

- *While the physicist is not violating the MPM rules, we recommend avoiding this question. Even if the question was innocuous in intent and in an informal setting, the applicant can interpret this question as the interviewer trying to work around the rules to find out other programs that might appear on their ranking lists.*
- *This question could make the applicant feel uncomfortable and/or perceive this question to be a violation. This situation can reflect poorly on your program.*
- *This scenario highlights the importance of emphasizing that the MPM rules apply at all times when interacting with applicants, including informal times such as lunch, social events, informal zoom rooms, or the times in between interviews. Actual and perceived violations of the MPM rules can come from anyone and at any time.*
- *Preventative measures can include:*
 - *Training on the MPM rules prior to the interviews, emphasizing that they still apply even during small talk and outside of the formal interview time.*
 - *Prepare ahead of time for small talk. Generate a list of ice breakers or questions that aren't actual or perceived violations of the MPM rules.*
 - *During this training, discuss these types of "grey area" questions, eg where it might not be obvious to all parties whether these questions are allowed or whether the applicant could potentially interpret these questions as violations.*
 - *Facilitate open discussion with program faculty and current residents. Encourage all participants in the interview process to report these types of situations. Encourage applicants to reach out to you or a neutral party, such as a program coordinator, if they experienced actual or perceived violations of MPM rules. This would allow these challenging "grey area" situations to be addressed and avoided in the future.*
 - *Consider generating interview guidelines and requiring all parties participating in the interviews to attest to the guidelines. Potential consequences, such as eliminating participation in future recruitment activities, could also be delineated in the guidelines and adhered to.*

You are an applicant applying for residencies. Just before the ranking deadline, the Program Director emails and tells you that if you rank them number one, you will match with them because they ranked you number one. What is within your rights to respond?

- *You are not required to respond to the Program Director, nor are you required to rank their program number one. By disclosing your position on the program's rank list, the Program*

SDAMPP Training Modules for Medical Physics Recruitment
Frequently Asked Questions
January 2022

Director has violated MPM rules. Violations can be reported via the MPM website, AAPM STSC, and AAMP MMX.

You are an applicant applying for residencies. Just before the ranking deadline, the Program Director emails you to ask whether you still intend to rank them, since you had previously voluntarily told them during the interview that you would. What is within your rights to respond?

- *You are not required to respond to the Program Director, nor are you required to change your rank list. By soliciting information from the applicant, the Program Director has violated MPM rules, despite the information being freely given by the applicant previously. Violations can be reported via the MPM website, AAPM STCC, and AAMP MPX.*
- *Both parties have the right to change their rank list at any time before the deadline. Even if you had previously indicated that you intend to rank the program, you can change your mind before the deadline.*

Are we allowed to send an email to candidates saying we intend to rank, but not give any info regarding actual rank position?

- *The MPM rules allow programs and applicants to voluntarily disclose whether or not they intend to rank the applicant or program. However, they can't disclose the specific position of that applicant or program on their ranking list. Furthermore, information about ranking intent and position cannot be solicited by either party.*

Following interviews, is it appropriate to make a phone call to the top ranked applicants to express strong interest? I hear that some programs do that, but I have been hesitant to make phone calls to stay away from any possible Match violation.

- *The MPM rules allow programs and applicants to voluntarily disclose whether or not they intend to rank the applicant or program. However, they can't disclose the specific position of that applicant or program on their ranking list. Furthermore, information about ranking intent and position cannot be solicited by either party.*
- *If programs contact applicants, they can state whether they intend to rank the applicant or not. We recommend against going further to express a strong interest to the applicant. While it's not a direct disclosure of the applicant's rank position, "strong interest" hints at being at the top of the list and can be a form of indicating the applicant's position. This type of communication can be perceived by the applicant as a violation. Furthermore, the applicant could feel pressure or manipulation to change their ranking list in accordance. Several groups have recommended the elimination of these types of post-interview communication in order to reduce gaming of the match system and risk of post-interview violations*

[References:

Hendrickson, K.R.G., Juang, T., Rodrigues, A. and Burmeister, J.W. (2017), Ethical violations and discriminatory behavior in the MedPhys Match. J Appl Clin Med Phys, 18: 336-

350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acm2.12135>

Antolak AAPM newsletter, Tom 2019 paper].

Your program has an internal applicant who is not in the match, but your program is participating in the match. Your program matches with an applicant at the bottom of your ranking list. You want to offer the position to your internal applicant instead. What should you do?

SDAMPP Training Modules for Medical Physics Recruitment
Frequently Asked Questions
January 2022

- *The MPM agreement is a binding agreement, so you should honor the agreement and hire your matched applicant. If the program did not find it acceptable to match with the applicant, they should have not ranked the applicant in the first place.*
- *While the MPM rules allow an opt-out from the agreement only if the program and the applicant agree to it, we recommend against attempting this tactic in asking the applicant to release you from the agreement. This will start the applicant's residency training with a negative experience.*

What constitutes a "confirmation letter"? My institution's bureaucracy simply can't produce an official job offer letter in less than 10 days. Can I simply send the matched resident(s) an email acknowledging the results and that the institution's process for generating an offer letter has begun?

- *The MPM rules indicate that the program send a confirmation letter to the matched applicant within 10 working days of the Match Results Day. The matched applicant must sign and return the letter within 10 working days from receiving the letter.*
- *There are no additional requirements on the confirmation letter. Programs can choose to include a simple statement confirming the applicant's match within the program, or they can choose to include additional information such as instructions for next steps of the hiring process.*
- *The letter can be generated within the program itself, as no additional approvals or signatures are required by the MPM rules.*