

# Tips on Selecting Senior Electives

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- **Consult the office of student affairs for guidelines, rules and procedures regarding senior electives.** The associate dean of student affairs, along with your clinical faculty advisor, can provide you with the core information you need to begin the planning process and ensure that you meet necessary graduation requirements.
- **Weigh your options.** The electives and core rotations in your senior year will help you to further expand your knowledge and insight into which specialty is ultimately right for you. Spend time researching possible opportunities and options. *What are your special interests? In what areas would you like further experience? What kinds of experiences would you like to have prior to choosing a residency program? Are there any elective experiences that will help you narrow your specialty choices or affirm your decision?*
- **If you are considering a clerkship at a residency program of interest, weigh the wisdom of this decision carefully.**

**Pros:**  
You will get your foot in the door. Rather than being just another number, the program staff will actually get to know you as a person.

You will experience firsthand what it might be like to do a residency at this particular program. This will help you to make a more informed decision about applying for residency there and where to rank the program on your list.

**Cons:**  
Your time may be brief and not give the program a true sense of your knowledge, skills and attitudes.

If you make a poor impression, this will harm our chances of getting into that residency program.
- **If you do choose to do a rotation at a potential residency program, try to avoid doing that rotation first.** Do another rotation to gain more experience. This will allow you to feel more confident in your skills and make a better impression. On the other hand, it won't help you unless you do the rotation before residency interviews begin.
- **Make phone calls and apply early.** If a particular field, organization or physician piques your interest, don't be afraid to try to set something up. Although there are many established clerkship options available, new positions can also be created for interested medical students. Make a few calls and see what happens.
- **As you continue to wrestle with elective options, talk with students who have completed rotations you may be interested in.** Ask: *What did you like most about your experience? What did you like least about it? What kinds of patients did you see on a typical day (age, ethnicity, sex, etc.)? What were the most common types of illnesses/symptoms your patients presented? Did your experience help affirm your choice of specialty or narrow your options? Why or why not? If you had to do it over again, would you choose the same rotation? Why or why not? What advice/insight do you have for someone doing the same elective rotation?* Use the answers to evaluate your options and prepare for your fourth-year rotations. Don't forget to think about how your choice of specialty relates to possible electives. Consider which rotations might help you make a decision or gain experience in an area that interests you.

- **As you plan your senior electives, identify rotations or clinics that have affiliations with community-based ancillary health agencies, such as the local Red Cross or free health clinics, to get more experience with the underserved and area health agencies.** These experiences will give you the opportunity to help those in need, while providing you with additional exposure to quality preceptors.
- **Become familiar with your new role as a subintern. Embrace this new experience!** You will be more experienced than a third-year clerk, yet not quite a full-fledged intern. During this typical 6-8 week period (depending on your school), you can expect to have more frequent call, more patients and, generally, more responsibility than you have had on the wards. So it is important to maintain the mental edge you've gained over the course of the year. When you have questions or concerns, seek out an intern for pointers on excelling in this situation. Volunteer to see patients first so you can hone your skills in gleaning information on your own and presenting without the safety net of residents and attending. Take advantage of this time to learn and observe everything you can.