

What is the Match?

To secure a residency position at a U.S. family medicine residency program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), you are most likely to participate in the National Resident Matching Program® (NRMP®) Main Residency Match®. It occurs on the third Friday of March each year, “matching” students into first- and second-year ACGME-accredited postgraduate medical training positions.

What is the NRMP?

While the Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS®) is your home base for applying to most—if not all—programs, the NRMP is the service that will actually match you with a residency.

Other matching services include the Military Match and the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) Intern/Resident Registration Program (AOA Match).

Reminder for osteopathic medical students

The AOA Match will cease to exist after the 2019 Match. By 2020, accreditation of all U.S. residency programs will be combined into a single accreditation system through the ACGME.

During these transition years, it's important for osteopathic medical students to determine whether the programs in which they're interested are listing positions in the AOA Match, the NRMP Main Residency Match, or both.

The NRMP is a matching service with uniform processes, meaning that all steps of the process are completed in the same fashion and at the same time by all applicants and participating programs.

STEP 1

Applicants register with the NRMP after submitting an ERAS application. The NRMP website outlines applicant registration steps in detail at www.nrmp.org/applicant-registration/.

STEP 2

Applicants enter their NRMP IDs into ERAS. This is the ID programs use to rank applicants.

STEP 3

In late February, applicants and program directors submit their rank order lists (ROLs) to the NRMP. This starts the “matching” process.

STEP 4

Between late February and Match Day, the NRMP:

- Assesses all of the data it has received from applicants and program directors
- Verifies the integrity of the data and applicants' credentials/eligibility
- Runs an algorithm that results in matches between applicants and residency programs

The entire NRMP process is conducted online using the Registration, Ranking, and Results® (R3®) system. Via the online portal, applicants can pay registration fees with a credit card, enter ROLs, and receive Match communications.

How Does the Matching Algorithm Work?

Since 1998, the NRMP has used an applicant-proposing algorithm for the Match. The NRMP matching algorithm uses the preferences expressed in the rank order lists submitted by applicants and programs to place individuals into residency positions. **In Appendix D, you'll find a detailed example that illustrates the best way for all participants to prepare ROLs and how the matching algorithm works.** You can also view a video primer about this process at www.nrmp.org/matching-algorithm/.

Knowing your rights and responsibilities under the Match

Participation Agreement and being familiar with NRMP rules that govern the matching process will help you navigate the Match in a professional manner. The NRMP and the Council of Medical Specialty Societies (CMSS) have developed a tip sheet for the Match, available at www.nrmp.org/residency-applicant-checklist-match-tips.

Basic Rules of the Match

RULE #1: All medical students should enroll in the Match and are bound to abide by its terms.

The Match is nearly all-inclusive because it lists almost all PGY-1 positions in ACGME-accredited training programs. Candidates for residency positions in some subspecialty programs will participate in other matches; however, these candidates must also participate in the NRMP to secure a preliminary position for each of those specialties.

If a student is offered a position by an institution outside of the Match (such as a position in an AOA-accredited residency [prior to 2020] or an unaccredited position), his or her dean of student affairs can withdraw the student before the Match deadline for changes.

Please note: Programs sponsored by some branches of the Uniformed Services do not participate in the NRMP.

RULE #2: Applicants and residency programs are not allowed to solicit information about how the other will rank them.

Soliciting ranking information is a violation of NRMP rules. If a program asks you for this information, you are under no obligation to provide it, nor should you.

Tip:

It's not a violation for an applicant or a program to volunteer information about how one plans to rank the other. **However, any verbal indication of ranking is not binding, and the rank order list takes precedence.** Don't rely on verbal remarks from a program when creating your ROL.

RULE #3: An applicant who certifies a rank order list enters into a binding commitment to accept the position if a match occurs.

Failure to honor that commitment is a violation of the Match Participation Agreement signed during registration and triggers an investigation by the NRMP. If the violation is confirmed:

- The applicant may be barred from programs in Match-participating institutions for one year.
- The applicant may be marked as a violator and/or barred from participating in the Match for one to three years or permanently.
- The NRMP will notify the applicant's medical school, the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), and other interested parties.

All in Policy

Under the NRMP's All In Policy, any residency program that participates in the Match must register and attempt to fill all of its positions through the Match or another national matching program. This policy applies to positions for which the NRMP offers matching services, including PGY-1, PGY-2, and—in rare cases outside of family medicine—PGY-3 positions.

The policy does not apply to fellowship programs or the following exceptions:

Exceptions

- Rural Scholars Programs
- Family Medicine Accelerated Programs
- Innovative Programs
- Military appointees to civilian programs
- Post-Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program® (SOAP®) positions
- Off-cycle appointments

Find more details about the All In Policy and the exceptions to the policy on the NRMP website at www.nrmp.org/all-in-policy/main-residency-match/.



What Are My Chances of Matching?

Statistically, match rates for each type of applicant have remained steady or even improved in recent years. However, popular advice tells students that their chances of matching are in flux as medical schools and class sizes grow without proportional residency position growth.

What do the numbers say?

The 2018 NRMP Main Residency Match had 37,103 active applicants (i.e., applicants who submitted a ROL) and offered 30,232 PGY-1 residency positions.

Considering all specialties, there were 1.61 positions available for each U.S. allopathic senior participating in the Match. Considering all applicants, 0.81 of a position was available per applicant.

Family medicine is the second largest specialty participating in the Match and has a lower applicant-to-position ratio than some specialties that only offer limited training opportunities.

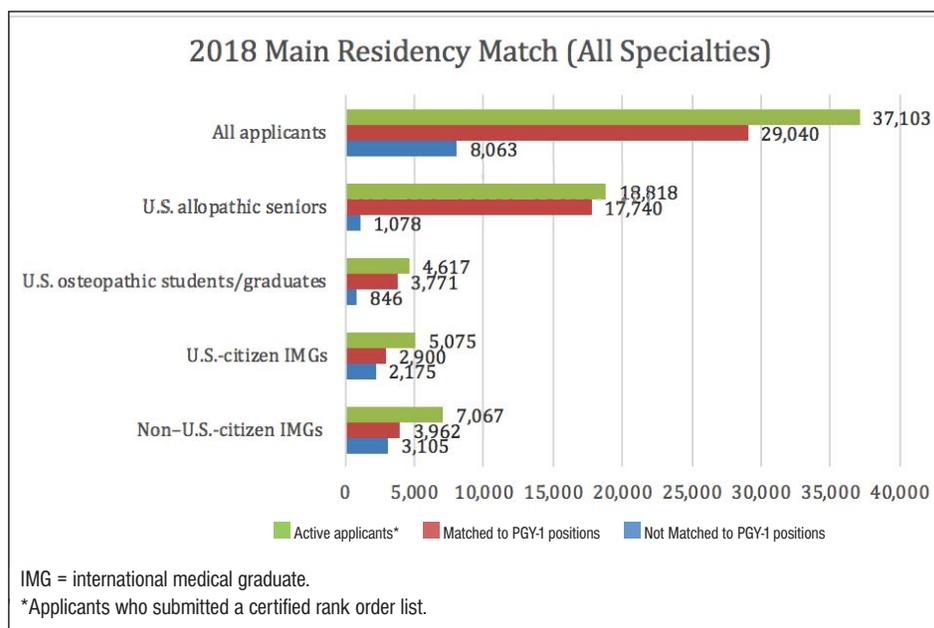
Figure 2 shows how many active applicants matched to a residency program in 2018. Active applicants who don't match in the Main Residency Match and applicants who register for the Match but don't submit a ROL may be eligible to participate in the SOAP.

Stat Snapshot

Among U.S. allopathic seniors participating in the 2018 Match:

- 94.3% matched to a residency position
- 48.5% matched to their first-choice program
- 91.8% matched to their preferred specialty
- 95.3% who chose family medicine as their preferred specialty matched to family medicine

FIGURE 2. Results of the 2018 Main Residency Match



Data Source: National Resident Matching Program Results and Data: 2018 Main Residency Match.

Charting Outcomes in the Match

The NRMP has produced special research reports to provide some data on characteristics of applicants who matched to their preferred specialty. Reports exist for U.S. allopathic seniors, U.S. osteopathic seniors, and international medical graduates (IMGs). *Tables 6-8* summarize the outcomes for family medicine. **The full reports can be found at www.nrmp.org/main-residency-match-data.**

TABLE 6. Summary Statistics on U.S. Allopathic Seniors, Family Medicine

Measure	Matched (n=1,438)	Unmatched (n=55)
1. Mean number of contiguous ranks	11.4	3.9
2. Mean number of distinct specialties ranked	1.1	1.4
3. Mean USMLE Step 1 score	220	206
4. Mean USMLE Step 2 score	237	223
5. Mean number of research experiences	2.1	2.7
6. Mean number of abstracts, presentations, and publications	3.0	2.3
7. Mean number of work experiences	3.3	4.1
8. Mean number of volunteer experiences	7.7	6.1
9. Percentage who are AOA members	7.4	0.0
10. Percentage who graduated from one of the 40 U.S. medical schools with the highest NIH funding	27.7	21.8
11. Percentage who have Ph.D. degree	1.0	2.1
12. Percentage who have another graduate degree	17.6	36.0

Note: Only U.S. allopathic seniors who gave consent to use their information in research are included.

Sources. NRMP Data Warehouse; Top 40 U.S. medical schools with the highest NIH funding in measure 10 is from the NIH website (<http://report.nih.gov/award/index.cfm>).

TABLE 7. Summary Statistics on U.S. Osteopathic Seniors, Family Medicine

Measure	Matched (n=540)	Unmatched (n=53)
1. Mean number of contiguous ranks	9.1	4.2
2. Mean number of distinct specialties ranked	1.1	1.4
3. Mean COMLEX-USA Level 1 score	506	475
4. Mean COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE score	537	500
5. Mean USMLE Step 1 score	217	209
6. Mean USMLE Step 2 CK score	233	220
7. Mean number of research experiences	1.4	1.1
8. Mean number of abstracts, presentations, and publications	1.8	1.4
9. Mean number of work experiences	3.3	3.5
10. Mean number of volunteer experiences	7.2	4.9
11. Percentage who have a Ph.D. degree	0.2	0.0
12. Percentage who have another graduate degree	22.6	16.7

Source: NRMP Data Warehouse.

Note: Only U.S. osteopathic seniors who gave consent to use their information in research are included.

TABLE 8. Summary Statistics on International Students and Graduates, Family Medicine

Measure	U.S. IMGs		Non-U.S. IMGs	
	Matched (n=519)	Unmatched (n=458)	Matched (n=240)	Unmatched (n=342)
1. Mean number of contiguous ranks	6.1	2.7	3.8	1.9
2. Mean number of distinct specialties ranked	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4
3. Mean USMLE Step 1 score	211	207	220	212
4. Mean USMLE Step 2 score	225	219	231	223
5. Mean number of research experiences	1.4	3.0	1.9	2.1
6. Mean number of abstracts, presentations, and publications	2.0	2.7	2.7	3.1
7. Mean number of work experiences	3.8	5.0	5.8	6.5
8. Mean number of volunteer experiences	4.6	4.4	4.8	4.4
9. Percentage who have a Ph.D. degree	0.0	1.8	1.3	1.9
10. Percentage who have another graduate degree	24.2	30.9	22.6	27.8

Note: Only applicants who gave consent to use their information in research are included.

Source: NRMP Data Warehouse

Keep in Mind

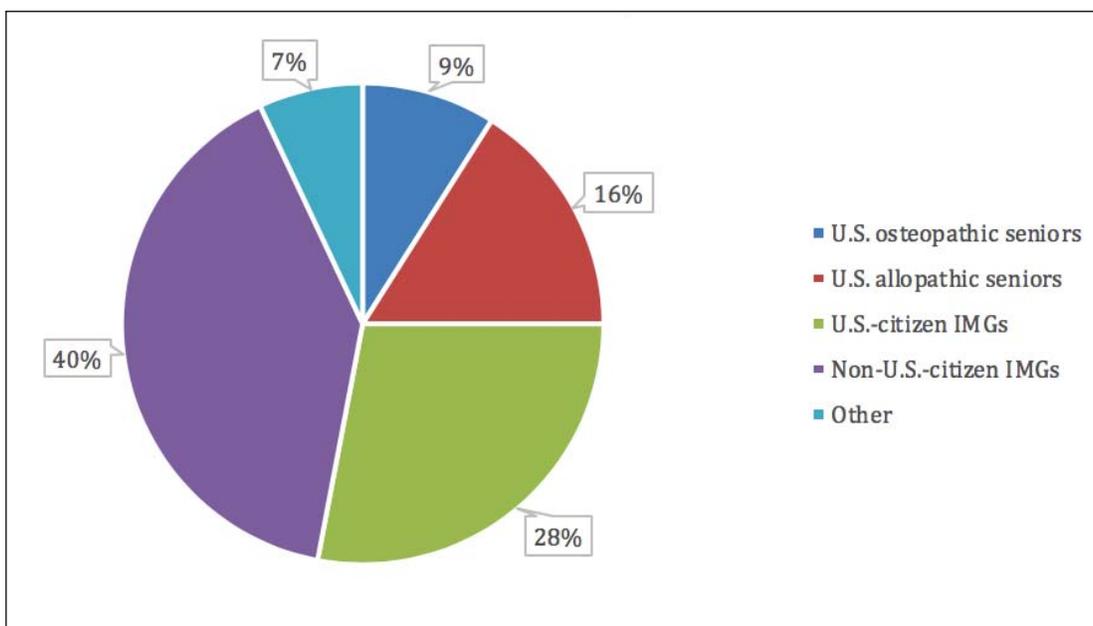
It's not true that only "bad" programs don't fill. A program may not fill if its ROL is at odds with the applicants who ranked it or if its list is too short. There will likely be multiple programs you would find desirable that end up with unfilled positions after the Main Residency Match.

Not everyone will match to a position. Your dean's office is prepared to counsel students who don't match. Applicants who don't match and programs that don't fill may be eligible to participate in the SOAP.

What is the SOAP?

The **Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program® (SOAP®)** is a program run by the **NRMP** that takes place during **Match Week** to match any unfilled residency positions with **unmatched applicants**. On Monday of Match Week, medical students find out if—but not where—they are matched. Unmatched applicants who meet eligibility requirements can participate in the SOAP to try to obtain an unfilled residency position. *Figure 3* shows a breakdown of participants in the 2018 SOAP.

FIGURE 3. 2018 SOAP Participants



Data Source: National Resident Matching Program Results and Data: 2018 Main Residency Match.

SOAP Facts

- To be eligible for the SOAP, you must be:
 - Registered with the NRMP for the Main Residency Match
 - Eligible to enter GME programs on July 1 in the year of the Match
 - Partially matched or fully unmatched on Monday of Match Week
- There are eight rounds of offers in the SOAP from Monday through Thursday of Match Week. Matches made in the SOAP are announced on Friday, along with those of applicants who matched in the Main Residency Match.
- The SOAP requires the exclusive use of ERAS by both applicants and programs to express preferences and make/receive offers for unfilled positions. Through ERAS, SOAP applicants can access a list of unfilled programs that have positions for which they are eligible. Programs can access applications through ERAS and make offers. **During the SOAP, contact outside of ERAS between programs and applicants constitutes a Match violation.**
- Positions fill quickly in the SOAP and accepting an offer creates a binding commitment. If you participate in the SOAP, be honest, thorough, and critical in your assessment of programs and their offers before accepting one.

Don't Skip Straight to the SOAP

Each year, a number of applicants register through ERAS for the Match with the intention of only using the SOAP process rather than going through the entire process to interview at programs and submit a rank order list. **It's important to note that the SOAP should not be used as a primary strategy for matching in family medicine.**

The application and interview process is highly personalized and works to the advantage of both the applicant and the program in determining an appropriate fit for postgraduate medical training. Students who rely solely on the SOAP instead of progressing through the standardized application process will be at a significant disadvantage in making a mutually suitable match. Also, the NRMP recommends against this practice, recognizing it as an ineffective strategy. **Statistically, the chances of matching to a program are very low for those who only participate in the SOAP.**

More detailed information on the SOAP is available at www.nrmp.org/match-week-soap-applicants/.

2018 SOAP BY THE NUMBERS

- **1,268** = Number of unmatched positions after the Main Residency Match
- **1,171** = Unmatched positions offered in the SOAP
 - 1,116 PGY-1 positions offered (of which 641 positions were PGY-1 only, meaning transitional year or preliminary positions)
 - 117 family medicine positions offered
- **1,055** = Positions filled in the SOAP
 - 1,024 PGY-1 positions filled

After the 2018 SOAP, 99.4% of all positions offered in the Match were filled. Only 213 positions were left unfilled in the 2018 Match overall.

After You Match

After you match, take plenty of time to celebrate and enjoy life! Be sure to give yourself some time away from the rigorous studying that got you to your successful match. Residency will be here before you know it. In the meantime, focus on your personal well-being and taking care of practical items on your to-do list, like finding housing if you're moving, making decisions about your loans, and getting oriented to your new program. Your medical school and the residency program you've matched into should be able to help you answer many of the questions you'll have as graduation day nears.

The AAFP and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) have partnered on “Money Management for Graduating Medical Students,” a two-part webcast series that can help you get financially ready to start your residency. It’s available free online at www.aafp.org/medical-school-residency/medical-school/debt/costs/webinar-moneymanagement.html.

Tips From the Experts

- “CELEBRATE! Save money. Start looking for housing (renting or buying). Spend time with family and friends before you get ready for a new chapter in life.”
 - ALEXA MIESES, MD, MPH, DURHAM, NC
- “Send thank you cards with the update about where you matched to your [letter of recommendation] writers. Go celebrate with friends and family. Enjoy your life!”
 - ANNA ASKARI, MD, MSBS, PALM DESERT, CA
- “Travel and celebrate sooner [rather] than later since most programs start work in early June and the onboarding paperwork, modules, and tasks are surprisingly burdensome.”
 - KATIE HARTL, MD, TUCSON, AZ
- “First thing is to connect with current residents of the program and try to schedule a visit to get to know the area and find housing options. These can fill up fast and it helps to start early on this. Also, if you are moving out of state, understanding the licensing requirements (driver’s license, etc.) early on during this trip will make life much easier so that you are not scrambling at the last minute to finish these tasks while busy with orientation activities.”
 - ROMERO SANTIAGO, MD, MPH, SACRAMENTO, CA