

## Methodology and Sample Representativeness of the CERA 2026 Clerkship Director Survey

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** CERA, the Council of Academic Family Medicine (CAFM) Educational Research Alliance, is a collaboration between four family medicine organizations that conduct omnibus surveys of different academic family medicine groups. This paper describes the methodology of the 2026 Clerkship Director (CD) Survey and the demographic results of respondents.

**Methods:** Five topics for the annual CD survey were selected via peer review after a call for proposals in early 2026. Questions were modified after peer review, mentorship, and a cognitive interview process. The survey was sent to CDs via email from June 9, 2026 to July 17, 2026. The demographics of the sampling frame and the sample were compared using Fisher exact test to determine whether the sample was representative.

**Results:** All original questions (50/50) were changed after mentorship and peer review, with another 46% (23/50) changed after the cognitive interview. The final 2026 pool size was 187 survey recipients (174 in the United States and 13 in Canada), of which 69 CDs responded, yielding a response rate of 36.9%. There were no significant differences in location, gender, race/ethnicity, or underrepresented in medicine status.

**Discussion:** The 2026 CD survey respondents are representative of family medicine CDs despite the lower response rate. The cognitive interview process further clarified the survey questions prior to dissemination beyond CERA mentorship alone.

## Introduction

The Council of Academic Family Medicine (CAFM) Educational Research Alliance (CERA) aims to provide infrastructure to support family medicine educational research that is both rigorous and generalizable.<sup>1</sup> CERA's goals are to increase collaboration, provide mentorship, and offer a data clearinghouse for CAFM members to increase scholarly output.<sup>2</sup>

CERA has conducted an annual survey of clerkship directors (CDs) since 2012.<sup>3</sup> Results of the CERA CD survey series have been disseminated as 56 published papers and 57 conference presentations as of the time of this writing.<sup>4,5</sup> This paper presents the methods and demographic results of the 2026 CD Survey to assess any potential response bias between the sample and the sampling frame. In addition, this paper highlights the

cognitive interviewing process that the survey director has been using before finalizing the survey questions. Cognitive interviewing involves asking a colleague to read each question aloud and describe how they would answer the question.<sup>6</sup> The goal of cognitive interviews is to identify issues with question design that might result in challenges with responding accurately to the question, which would impact the conclusions drawn from the results of the survey.

## Methods

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### ***Peer Review and Survey Development***

The methodology of the CERA CD survey has been described in detail previously.<sup>7</sup> CAFM members were invited to propose survey questions for inclusion in the CD survey from January 2026 to February 2026. Nine submissions were received and underwent peer review; five were accepted based on peer-review rankings. Approved projects were assigned a CERA mentor to help refine the survey questions. The resulting questions were pilot-tested through a cognitive interview with an academic physician who was not part of the survey sample, conducted by the survey directors (K.S. and A.K.), and beta-tested through the SurveyMonkey platform (Symphony Technology Group, Menlo Park, CA).

### ***Sample***

SurveyMonkey distributed invitations to 184 individuals through an institutional email. Twenty-eight emails could not be delivered and were resent via the survey director's personal email. Ten CDs who had previously opted out of SurveyMonkey were emailed directly; nine provided replacement contacts, who were then invited. Three undeliverable addresses and four "not the CD" responses without replacements were removed, yielding a final sample of 187 recipients.

The survey was open from June nine to July 17, 2026. Nonresponders and partial respondents were sent five weekly reminders to respond, with a final sixth reminder on the last day the survey was open.

### ***Sampling Frame***

We used the Society of Teachers in Family Medicine (STFM) membership database to generate demographics from the CD sampling frame. This database contained demographics for 155 CDs (151 in the United States and four in Canada). The remaining 32 email addresses did not have an STFM record, so base demographics could not be obtained for those individuals. Therefore, demographic information is available for 82% of the sampling frame. Individuals who responded to the CD survey were included in the sample even if their demographics were not available from the STFM demographic survey. Existing STFM demographic information was not updated with responses from the CERA CD survey.

### ***Data Analysis and Ethical Approval***

The proportions of the location, gender, race/ethnicity, and self-identified URIM status of the sampling frame vs. the sample were compared via  $\chi^2$  tests and Fisher's exact test when indicated. The project was approved by the American Academy of Family Physicians' Institutional Review Board in June 2026.

## Results

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### ***Question Revisions***

For all proposed modules, research teams revised all original questions during the peer review and CERA mentorship process (Table 1). The revised questions were submitted for cognitive interviewing and pilot

testing, which resulted in 46% (23/50) of the questions being further revised before the final survey was disseminated. [Table 2](#) lists accepted topics for the 2026 CD Survey.

## **Respondent Analysis**

Surveys were returned. Two respondents only answered the initial question, "Are you the clerkship director?" and were counted as nonresponses. Therefore, 69 surveys had complete data, which resulted in an overall response rate of 36.9% (69/187). The proportions did not differ significantly by geographic location, gender, race/ethnicity, or URiM status between the sampling frame and the sample ([Table 3](#)).

## **Discussion**

The yearly CD survey provides insight into potentially interesting topics for undergraduate medical educators. A strength of the CERA survey is the ability to target a national audience of CDs in a structured format.<sup>7,8</sup> This year's CD survey response rate of 36.9% is significantly lower than in prior years, and demographic analysis indicates that the sample is still representative of US and Canadian CDs in the sampling frame across all assessed demographic areas.

The historical response rate for the clerkship director survey has ranged between 48.8% and 83.1%. Over the past few survey cycles, CERA has been making efforts to identify and include family medicine clerkship directors from osteopathic medical schools. The denominator for the survey of 187 potential respondents was the highest ever for the survey (previous surveys ranged from 129 to 174 potential respondents). Despite the increased potential respondents, the numerator of responses was the lowest it has been at 69 responses (previous surveys ranged from 78 to 123 responses). Survey administrators kept this survey open for one week longer than normal. There was no significant survey abandonment for those who did respond.

The CERA CD survey questions underwent significant revisions from the original question submissions. The cognitive interviewing process further refined 46% of the questions for clarity, standardization, and specificity, resulting in notable question modifications. Other CERA surveys should consider adopting the cognitive interview process in their methodologies.

There are several limitations to note. CD demographic data are limited to those provided by STFM and are all self-reported. Self-reported demographic data for STFM faculty members have a nonresponse rate below 20%. Additionally, although demographic data on CDs are informative, they do not necessarily reflect the characteristics of the students or institutions they serve, and it remains unclear whether CDs are demographically representative of their local contexts.

Taken together, the 2026 CERA CD survey demonstrates demographic representativeness relative to STFM-reported CD data, providing a sound basis for generalizing results to this population.

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## **Conflicts Disclosure**

The authors are members of the CERA Steering Committee but have no financial disclosures.

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**Table 1. Frequency of Revisions Across the Peer Review, Cognitive Interviewing/Piloting Process**

|            | Original number of questions submitted | Revised question number after peer review and CERA mentor from original | Unrevised number of questions submitted from original | Revised number of questions after cognitive interviewing and piloting from revision | Unrevised number of questions after cognitive interviewing and piloting from revision | Total revised questions from original | Total unrevised questions from original |
|------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Proposal 1 | 10                                     | 10 (100%)                                                               | 0 (0%)                                                | 7 (70%)                                                                             | 3 (30%)                                                                               | 10 (100%)                             | 0 (0%)                                  |
| Proposal 2 | 10                                     | 10 (100%)                                                               | 0 (0%)                                                | 5 (50%)                                                                             | 5 (50%)                                                                               | 10 (100%)                             | 0 (0%)                                  |
| Proposal 3 | 10                                     | 10 (100%)                                                               | 0 (0%)                                                | 1 (10%)                                                                             | 9 (90%)                                                                               | 10 (100%)                             | 0 (0%)                                  |
| Proposal 4 | 10                                     | 10 (100%)                                                               | 0 (0%)                                                | 4 (40%)                                                                             | 6 (60%)                                                                               | 10 (100%)                             | 0 (0%)                                  |
| Proposal 5 | 10                                     | 10 (100%)                                                               | 0 (0%)                                                | 6 (60%)                                                                             | 4 (40%)                                                                               | 10 (100%)                             | 0 (0%)                                  |
| Total      | 50                                     | 50 (100%)                                                               | 0 (0%)                                                | 23 (46%)                                                                            | 27 (54%)                                                                              | 50 (100%)                             | 0 (0%)                                  |

**Table 2. Proposals Accepted for the 2026 CERA Clerkship Director Survey**

| Topic                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Clerkship directors' views on how generational differences influence communication in Gen Z students |
| Geriatric 5 milliseconds in family medicine clerkship curriculum                                     |
| Structural variation in family medicine clerkships remediation practices                             |
| Survey of professionalism remediation practices on the family medicine clerkship                     |
| Use of generative AI tools in family medicine education                                              |

**Table 3. Demographics and Sample Representativeness of the 2026 CERA Clerkship Director Survey**

| Demographic variables                                      | CERA survey potential respondents ( <i>N</i> = 155) | CERA survey respondents ( <i>N</i> = 69) | <i>P</i> value <sup>a</sup> |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Medical school location by US census region or Canada      |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| New England (NH, MA, ME, VT, RI, or CT)                    | 12 (7.7%)                                           | 3 (4.3%)                                 | 0.563 <sup>b</sup>          |
| Middle Atlantic (NY, PA, or NJ)                            | 22 (14.2%)                                          | 12 (17.4%)                               | 0.538                       |
| South Atlantic (PR, FL, GA, SC, NC, VA, DC, WV, DE, or MD) | 35 (22.6%)                                          | 13 (18.8%)                               | 0.529                       |
| East South Central (KY, TN, MS, or AL)                     | 8 (5.2%)                                            | 3 (4.3%)                                 | 1.000 <sup>b</sup>          |
| East North Central (WI, MI, OH, IN, or IL)                 | 24 (15.5%)                                          | 13 (18.8%)                               | 0.532                       |
| West South Central (OK, AR, LA, or TX)                     | 18 (11.6%)                                          | 6 (8.7%)                                 | 0.515                       |
| West North Central (ND, MN, SD, IA, NE, KS, or MO)         | 12 (7.7%)                                           | 6 (8.7%)                                 | 0.808                       |
| Mountain (MT, ID, WY, NV, UT, AZ, CO, or NM)               | 10 (6.5%)                                           | 2 (2.9%)                                 | 0.352 <sup>b</sup>          |
| Pacific (WA, OR, CA, AK, or HI)                            | 10 (6.5%)                                           | 7 (10.1%)                                | 0.335                       |
| Canada                                                     | 4 (2.6%)                                            | 4 (5.8%)                                 | 0.254 <sup>b</sup>          |
| No response                                                | 0                                                   | 0                                        |                             |
| Medical degree                                             |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| DO                                                         | 12 (7.9%)                                           | NA                                       |                             |
| MD                                                         | 140 (92.1%)                                         | NA                                       |                             |
| No response                                                | 3                                                   | 0                                        |                             |
| Gender                                                     |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| Female/woman                                               | 102 (67.5%)                                         | 44 (63.8%)                               | 0.581                       |
| Male/man                                                   | 49 (32.5%)                                          | 25 (36.2%)                               |                             |
| Choose not to disclose                                     | 1                                                   | 0                                        |                             |
| No response                                                | 3                                                   | 0                                        |                             |
| Race/ethnicity                                             |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native/Indigenous                  | 0 (0%)                                              | 0 (0%)                                   |                             |
| Asian                                                      | 20 (14.3%)                                          | 12 (18.5%)                               | 0.443                       |
| Black/African American                                     | 6 (4.3%)                                            | 0 (0%)                                   | 0.180 <sup>b</sup>          |
| Hispanic/Latino/of Spanish origin                          | 6 (4.3%)                                            | 3 (4.6%)                                 | 1.000 <sup>b</sup>          |
| Middle Eastern/North African                               | 0 (0%)                                              | 0 (0%)                                   |                             |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander                        | 0 (0%)                                              | 0 (0%)                                   |                             |
| White                                                      | 102 (72.9%)                                         | 49 (75.4%)                               | 0.702                       |
| Multiracial <sup>c</sup>                                   | 6 (4.3%)                                            | 3 (4.6%)                                 | 1.000 <sup>b</sup>          |
| Choose not to disclose                                     | 10                                                  | 2                                        |                             |

(Continued)

**Table 3. Demographics and Sample Representativeness of the 2026 CERA Clerkship Director Survey  
(continued)**

| Demographic variables                | CERA survey potential respondents ( <i>N</i> = 155) | CERA survey respondents ( <i>N</i> = 69) | <i>P</i> value <sup>a</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| No response                          | 5                                                   | 2                                        |                             |
| URiM by AAMC definition <sup>d</sup> |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| Not URiM by AAMC definition          | 122 (87.1%)                                         | 61 (93.8%)                               | 0.224 <sup>b</sup>          |
| URiM by AAMC definition              | 18 (12.9%)                                          | 4 (6.2%)                                 |                             |
| Choose not to disclose               | 10                                                  | 2                                        |                             |
| No response                          | 5                                                   | 2                                        |                             |
| BIPOC <sup>e</sup>                   |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| Not BIPOC                            | 102 (72.9%)                                         | 49 (75.4%)                               | 0.702                       |
| BIPOC                                | 38 (27.1%)                                          | 16 (24.6%)                               |                             |
| Choose not to disclose               | 10                                                  | 2                                        |                             |
| No response                          | 5                                                   | 2                                        |                             |
| Self-identification as URiM          |                                                     |                                          |                             |
| Not self-identified URiM             | 109 (87.9%)                                         | 60 (87.0%)                               | 0.849                       |
| Self-identified URiM                 | 15 (12.1%)                                          | 9 (13.0%)                                |                             |
| Choose not to disclose               | 12                                                  | 0                                        |                             |
| No response                          | 19                                                  | 0                                        |                             |

<sup>a</sup>Denotes Pearson's  $\chi^2$  test used for the variable against all other response options, omitting "Choose not to Disclose" and "No Response" options.

<sup>b</sup>Denotes Fisher's exact test used.

<sup>c</sup>Denotes the category in which two or more race/ethnicities were selected.

<sup>d</sup>Defined as all race categories excluding White and Asian.

<sup>e</sup>Defined as all race categories excluding White.

Abbreviations: AAMC, Association of American Medical Colleges; BIPOC, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; URiM, underrepresented in medicine