

How DEI Experiences Add Value to Residency Applications

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TO THE EDITOR:

Medical students who are URiM (underrepresented in medicine) should showcase their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) activities and experiences gained from the unjustly imposed minority tax on their residency applications to demonstrate their leadership qualities and strong work ethic. As early career family medicine clinicians who help medical students in the residency application process, we appreciate that the Betancourt et al article on minority tax highlights how DEI work accomplished by medical students is both underrecognized and undervalued.¹ However, in light of recent changes in the residency application, we believe an opportunity exists to use these experiences to create a stronger residency application.

With the Step 1 score now pass/fail, students' personal statements and experiences have become crucial in residency applications. The emphasis has shifted to a holistic review, allowing candidates to expand on their most meaningful experiences on their application through the Electronic Residency Application Service. Students should emphasize their involvement in diversity activities, mentoring programs, and clinical experiences with underresourced populations, because these align with the missions of most residency programs.² Family medicine values a diverse workforce,³ so mentioning DEI experiences from a strengths-based perspective will distinguish students who are URiM from other applicants.⁴

These strengths-based narratives are not only compelling but also align with what program directors value in applicants. The 2024 National Resident Medical Program's program director survey data provide valuable insights into what residency

programs are looking for in their candidates. In general, program directors in all specialties value commitment to the specialty, diversity characteristics, and leadership qualities in the selection and ranking processes.⁵ More specifically, diversity characteristics were highly endorsed by family medicine program directors surveyed in 2024, with a mean importance ranking of 4.2 out of 5 in applicant interview selection and final rank order.⁵

In conclusion, the experiences gained from the inequities of the minority tax on medical students who are URiM should be considered by staff, faculty, and advisors when assisting students in crafting residency applications. Teaching students to effectively present their DEI activities and experiences can improve their competitiveness and highlight their potential as future leaders in medicine.

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