The final year of medical school provides medical students with the opportunity to plan their electives and experiences based on their individualized needs and areas of development. Thoughtful consideration should be paid to planning this final year to improve the student’s transition into residency, and to optimizing their chances for a successful match. It is essential to personalize advising to the individualized needs of each student. Students who have already demonstrated excellence in clinical care and medical knowledge (with strong clerkship grades and high USMLE step scores) can use the flexibility of this time to pursue research and advocacy interests. For other students, the fourth year is an opportunity to shine, to fill in gaps, to study for USMLE 2 CK and CS, and to demonstrate commitment to the specialty of obstetrics and gynecology (ob-gyn). The following recommendations are based on a review of ob-gyn medical education literature, the NRMP ob-gyn program director survey and expert opinion.

Commitment to Specialty
Fourth year experiences are an opportunity to demonstrate a student’s commitment to the specialty of ob-gyn. This is an especially important consideration if a student decides later during his/her medical school experience to enter the specialty. There are many ways to demonstrate this commitment including:

- Women’s health advocacy and volunteering
- ACOG has many resources available for advocacy at both the local and national level
- Research or scholarly work on women’s health topics, or with ob-gyn faculty
- Ob-gyn interest group participation and leadership

Course electives are also an opportunity to demonstrate interest, commitment and ability to thrive. Sub-specialty electives to strongly consider include Gynecology Oncology or Maternal Fetal Medicine, especially if the student is unsure about career choice. Ideally, these electives should be taken within the first few months of the fourth year to “boost” the application as well as to obtain letter(s) of recommendation from faculty.

Exhibit Clinical Care Excellence
Sub-internships or acting internships are an opportunity for a student to shine, and strong evaluations and grades on these electives are an important aspect of the residency application package. This is especially significant if the student underperformed on the ob-gyn clerkship. It is important to note that for many medical schools, the majority of students earn an A or honors on fourth year electives, so a grade other than an A or honors can be a red flag for residency programs.

Tips for Success:
- The student should know that they need to be the “first there, and last to leave” during their sub-internships or acting internships. Students should be aware that they will be evaluated from a different lens than the residents or third-year students, so even if the residents are de-compressing and chatting together during the workday, it will be important that the student make sure that all of his/her responsibilities are complete, and that they remain professional in their interactions with all students, residents and faculty. In addition, the student needs to make sure to come in early enough to ensure that any pre-rounding responsibilities are taken care of so that the student is ready and on time.
- Another pitfall that a student should avoid is to decline a clinical learning opportunity “because they have already seen it.”
- It should go without saying that the student should engage in professional and respectful interactions with everyone they come into contact with, including whichever staff coordinates the fourth year elective.
- Do not schedule these courses during the time when interview requests are being transmitted, or during interview months. The student does not want to be distracted, or appear to be distracted by electronic communications during these high-stakes electives.

Demonstrate Interest in a Specific Program
Away (a.k.a. audition) electives should be considered if the student has a pressing need to demonstrate interest in a specific residency program. The student should consult with their advisor to ensure that these electives are a good fit for their career goals and that they are prepared to handle the additional stress and responsibilities that come with away electives.

The final year of medical school is an opportunity to shine, to fill in gaps, and to demonstrate a commitment to the specialty of ob-gyn. By personalizing advising to the individualized needs of each student, and by exhibiting clinical care excellence, students can increase their chances of a successful match.

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program. These may include geographic restrictions, couples match or if the student’s “in person” presence may strengthen the application package. Quieter or more introverted students may benefit from targeted coaching before this type of elective.

Goal: 4th Year Prepares the Student to be an Excellent Ob-gyn Physician

Although matching into the ob-gyn residency program of the student’s choice is one aspect of curricular planning, the overarching guiding principle should be to ensure that the student will be optimally prepared to become a resident physician and ob-gyn intern.

A new APGO publication highlights course electives that were recommended by ob-gyn program directors, chairs and clerkship directors in a 2016 survey (Forstein et al). In addition to one to two electives in ob-gyn, electives in critical care, emergency medicine, anesthesiology, radiology, transition to residency courses (a.k.a. bootcamps), general surgery and general internal medicine were recommended.

Timing Considerations

- **Step 2 CK**: Ideally the student’s score should be available at the time that their ERAS application is uploaded in mid-September. This will be especially important for students who may have been disappointed with their USMLE Step 1 score.
- **Step 2 CS**: An increasing number of ob-gyn residency programs are requiring students to have passed Step 2 CS before rank lists are made. Given that a larger number of US medical students are failing Step 2 CS after the August 2017 modification of the passing cut-points, it is important for students to prepare for, and pass Step 2 CS before December.
- **Interview timing**: In general, ob-gyn interviews occur from mid-October through mid-January.

Additional Resources and References

- ACOG Legislative days
- www.acog.org/Advocacy
The Effective Student Advising Series is a project of the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (APGO)
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This publication is part of the APGO Effective Student Advising Series. Advising medical students on a career in women’s health can be one of the most fulfilling things that a medical educator does. Many physicians find themselves in the role of faculty advisor without any formal background or training in advising. The APGO Effective Student Advising Series pamphlets are intended to educate medical educators and learners about best practices for advising medical students on a career in women’s health.