



UTRGV SOM CAREER ADVISEMENT MANUAL



Career Advisors,

Welcome to the UTRGV school of medicine guide to career advising and thank you for your commitment to the future of medicine! This guide will help you advise our future physicians as they embark on exploring their career path. Students are to meet with their advisors at least once a semester and this guide holds the latest NBME information regarding each of the different specialties and their level of competitiveness.

If you have any questions or recommendations, please feel free to contact our team. Thank you once again!

Careers in Medicine
cim@utrgv.edu

The Role of the Career Advisor

The goal of career advising at UTRGV School of Medicine is to ensure that each student optimizes his or her path to the MD degree by taking full advantage of the resources and services available to them in the Office of Student Affairs and the greater university. Each student is advised individually and as a class through careers in medicine while students select a career advisor via availability in Handshake. A career advisor will:

- Report to director of Careers in Medicine, Dr. Cristel Escalona and commit to a 3-year appointment in this new role.
- Provide ongoing collaborative and informative career advising to SOM students
- Provide specialized career advising to students based on academic and NBME performance.
- Work with faculty, the staff of the OSA, and other resources throughout UTRGV to provide support to students.
- Prepares students to effectively strategize course selections, away rotations, research, and overall academic success in obtaining the residency of their choice.
- Provides career guidance to assist students in self-evaluation and choosing a specialty in relation to their career and life goals.
- Utilize Handshake to maintain record of student data regarding career advising appointments.
- Maintains a high-level of communication with students and staff. This includes, but is not limited to, the ability to build relationships with students, faculty, staff, and others in the external community.
- Participates in professional development programming, assessment, and mentoring opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge in career advisement and related fields.
- Provides referral to other UTRGV services as needed.



Career Advisor FAQ's

What is career advising?

Mentoring is defined as the process where an "... experienced, highly regarded, empathetic person guides another individual in the development and re-examination of their own ideas, learning, and personal and professional development." In the context of medical education, effective career advising has been found to help with professional identity formation, professionalism development, research participation and productivity, career planning, support of overall student wellbeing and appears to be especially valuable for individuals who are underrepresented in medicine.

What is the difference between an academic advisor vs a career advisor?

Academic advisors – focus on providing medical students with professional guidance and educational resources to enhance their academic and professional experience. Academic services include tutoring services, test preparation, review sessions, etc.

Career advisor – offer advising about career exploration, help you clarify your goals and priorities, offer shadowing opportunities, and review the [AAMC](#) career advising resources. Often times students will seek a career advisor from the specialty they are interested in applying for.

What is the value of career advising in Medical Education?

- It aids in developing professional identity
- Develops professionalism
- Monitors and develops career planning
- Supports overall wellbeing
- Supports individuals who are underrepresented in medicine.

What are the ground rules for career advising?

- Consistent availability is needed to engage with our students
- Personal and professional boundaries need to be set
- Time and place for meetings need to be agreed upon
- Create a safe place for students
- Set clear expectations for roles and meetings
- Clear communication is key

How often do students meet with a career advisor and how are we tracking the advising sessions?

Students meet twice per academic year with a Career Advisor individually. These meetings can be as brief as 20 minutes and may last up to an hour. The typical career advising meeting averages 30 – 45 minutes.

Prior to meeting with each student, career advisors may review the student's academic performance, board scores (if applicable) via the students **Career Advising Portfolio**. The career advising portfolio is a pdf document that students may utilize to track career advising progression throughout their four years of medical education (this is an optional resource for students). Students may document advisement meetings, assessment results and resources utilized in their portfolio. The information documented should not be made available to other faculty, instructors, course or clerkship directors and is meant to provide continuity of the career advising experience.

Preparation for an advising session is typically brief, requiring less than 5 minutes. Scheduling of meetings can be done via Handshake. We train all of our career advisors one on one to utilize this software. Career Advisors typically meet with students via Zoom or at an agreed upon location such as the SOM.

What are the qualities of an Effective Career Advisor?

A number of factors contribute to effective mentoring sessions. In particular, having consistent availability and engagement as a career advisor, clearly defining personal and professional boundaries, creating a safe space for discussion, ensuring adequate time and space for meeting, and having clearly defined expectations for career advising meetings.

Effective career advisors encourage student reflection, provide honest, constructive feedback, take an individual interest in the student, and balance providing guidance with giving the student freedom to grow and develop. The most effective career advisors also avoid complaining about issues beyond students' control.

What if I would like more information on becoming an amazing career advisor?

No single resource will comprehensively meet the needs of all career advising relationships. Users of this career advising tool should integrate the tool with knowledge and references from peers, colleagues, and other published sources and references such as the following:

Remediation of the Struggling Medical Learner, by Jeannette Guerrasio, MD
Mentoring in Academic Medicine by Holly J. Humphrey, MD

Effective career advising is a key element for student success in medical school and increases the likelihood of eventual student career satisfaction.

Advising skills are not traditionally taught as part of PhD or MD/DO training programs and few medical school faculty have received formal training in this area. Serving as a Career Advisor can stimulate interest in teaching and contribute to improved relationships with students. Given that many new career advisors, especially those not part of formal advising programs, may face uncertainty in their career advising role, we developed this resource to help guide career advisors in approaching medical students and to facilitate the career advising session.

In the [career advising guide](#) and [advising prompts](#) that follow, you will find prompts that are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather serve as a starting point for a mentor-mentee discussion in each domain. For each level of medical student education. The prompts are not meant to be inclusive or exhaustive and not all prompts will be applicable to all mentees. The prompts are intended to serve as a guide to stimulate discussion and direct conversations.

In meeting with each student, Career Advisors should open by asking how things are going and whether or not the student has any specific issues or concerns he or she would like to discuss. Career Advisors should allow the conversation to flow naturally from topic to topic following the student needs and preferences and take notes as necessary. When the student has no other issues to discuss, the advisor should review the career advising grid for any content or topic areas that may not have been covered and ask the student about these issues as appropriate.

Advising Prompts

Student Issues and Concerns

- Do you have any specific concerns you would like to address today?
- I would like to make sure we spend time today discussing issues that are important to you. Is there something you would like to make sure we discuss today?

Academics & Performance

- Are you staying on track with your studies/clerkships and how are your grades/scores?
- Have any of your instructors or preceptors expressed concerns about your performance?

Career Planning

- What are your thoughts about your future career and what steps are you currently taking to explore opportunities in your areas of interest?
- What questions do you have regarding the field of medicine you would like to pursue?

Personal & Social

- What things, outside of school, are you looking forward to this semester?
- How has school impacted your relationships with your family and friends?

Personal & Professional Balance

- Tell me about the balance between the personal and professional aspects of your life.
- What are you doing to maintain your sense of self while in medical school?

Research

- What needs do you have, if any, regarding participation in research as a student?
- Have you thought about the role of research in your medical career?

Electives & Extracurricular

- What would you like to know about elective and extracurricular opportunities at this stage of your training?
- How are your elective and extracurricular activities meeting your goals?

Health & Medical Concerns

- Do you have access to a health care provider that meets your current health care needs?
- Are you aware of the health resources available to you as a medical student?

Career Advising Guide (M1 M2)

	Student Concerns	Academics/ Performance	Professionalism	Career Planning	Personal/ Social	Personal/ Professional Balance	Research/Scholarship	Electives/Extracurricular	Health Concerns
Early M1	emphasize mentor availability, review contact information for scheduled meetings and times of crisis; address any pressing student concerns; ground rules, confidentiality, boundaries	transition to school, study habits, adjustment to volume/work load; goals for the year, integration of step 1 and course studying, adjustment to anatomy/ lab	arriving on time, coping with feedback, response to criticism, managing conflict and time demands of school, prioritizing appropriately, responsible social media use, appropriate dress for clinical activities, respect for faculty; maintaining humanism, sense of self	emphasize academic rigor; encourage engagement with student interest groups & organizations	partner/family relationships & med school; geographic adjustment; plans for children, marriage, other personal issues that impact school	sleep, exercise, hobbies, coping methods and skills, support systems, housing/roommates, transportation (car)	yes/no --- discussion of interest or need; check list might include plan to f/u with local research mentors/faculty/ opportunities	ask/assess/advise re: elective, extracurricular, co-curricular, global health participation; student groups, community service, church activities, planned summer activities/trips	awareness/access to school resources for physical & mental health issues; health insurance; exposures; dental health
Late M1	specific concerns, timely issues, pressing needs	review of year 1 performance, adjustments for year 2, step 1 prep, summer remediation	encourage reflection on 1st year; develop plans for summer & next year; professional identity development/progress	consider unique opportunities, options re: summer externships, global health opportunities, fellowships	acclimation to med school; relationships, support; spiritual practice/health	coping strategies; summer plans: employment, experience, vacation; housing changes for next year, sleep/hobby/exercise	research plans, connecting with summer program opportunities or mentors; role for faculty introduction or connections	Summer courses, language training; step 1 prep/review of 1st year courses; trip planning, 2nd year scheduling; prioritization of activities/opportunities	maintenance of health (physical, mental, dental)
Early M2	specific concerns, timely issues, pressing needs	work load, study habits, consider alternate clinical experience/pathways at UTRGV. Step 1 prep, consideration of for profit courses or school organized step 1 prep opportunities, verify Step 1 schedule	time management, review schedule for year, map step 1 prep plans; break plans; motivation, sense of self	asking about student needs, referring to appropriate mentors, faculty, student groups, professional organizations	talk with friends/family/ other re: balancing relationships and time devoted to USMLE prep	attaining & maintaining balance, coping strategies, healthy life habits, prioritizing use of time	ongoing activities, f/u on summer projects; encourage completion of efforts; re-evaluate involvement & level of engagement in projects with respect to career goals	beginning to think about 3rd year/clinical electives or experiences; balance of required curricula and service learning	maintenance of health, adjustment to being back in school
Late M2	specific concerns, timely issues, pressing needs	adherence to study clinical year(s) scheduling process; clinical skills deficiencies: note writing, oral presentation skills; introduction of ACGME & school specific professional competencies	reflection on year, transition to white coat and professional identity, clinical roles	ask about goals, career exploration; consideration of MPH, other dual degree opportunities	level of connectedness to school, classmates, family, friends; risk for isolation, drifting	encourage discussion with family, friends, partners re: new roles on wards/clinical work	completing projects; planning for M3/4 research rotations, identify research mentor	identifying specialty specific electives/opportunities, away rotations; balance of required curricula and service learning	needle stick/occupational exposures; plans for avoiding burnout, strategies for resilience, support systems

Career Advising Guide (M3 M4)

	Student Concerns	Academics/Performance	Professionalism	Career Planning	Personal/Social	Personal/Professional Balance	Research/Scholarship	Electives/Extracurricular	Health Concerns
Early M3	specific concerns, timely issues, pressing needs	Emphasize importance of clinical year grades to residency match, planning for shelf-exams & exam prep while doing clinical work; identify sources of academic support	responding to call demands, emails, keeping up with non-rotation school requirements, core curricular activities, academic & clinical documentation, respect for hospital & clinic staff, patient ownership, team integration	identification of specialty specific advisor; consideration of MPH, other dual degrees; scholarship applications; participation in professional conferences, impact on schedule; letters of recommendation; review step 1 performance	adjustment to wards, new schedules, call demands; adjustment to away rotations, sources of support	wards, call, clinic, sleep, coping strategies, spiritual practice, maintenance of relationships, hobbies; relative loss of control	ongoing activities, f/u on summer projects; encourage completion of efforts; re-evaluate involvement & level of engagement in projects with respect to career goals	identifying specialty specific electives/opportunities	reflection on health maintenance; reminder to seek personal and preventive health care as necessary during clinical years; review occupational exposures, review access/opportunities for health care, immunizations, discuss health needs/care re: off-site experiences
Late M3	specific concerns, timely issues, pressing needs	review of clinical performance, 4th year scheduling, preparation for sub-I, increased independence for senior students; guidance for step 2 prep	review of clinical year, self-identity as doctor in training, professional identity development	Timing of step 2; 4th year schedule with respect to audition rotations, step 2 ck & cs, interviewing; coordination with advisor(s); appropriateness check for specialty selection given board scores & academic performance; ERAS process, residency interview process	social/personal plans e.g. marriage, children, travel; addressing potential for partner separation with residency/match	work; success of efforts; what's working; what's not working; appropriate use of elective time (e.g. vacation, vs. sub I, vs. nonessential electives)	research mentor/plans; is research required for specialty? Plans to complete/present/publish work	4th year away audition rotations, clinical Sub I experience, advanced electives; opportunities to address areas of need to prepare for internship	reflection on health maintenance; reminder to seek personal and preventive health care
Early M4	specific concerns, timely issues, pressing needs	sub I scheduling, rotation adjustments to meet career goals; verify step 2 ck scheduled; address step 2 performance, if applicable; assure all graduation requirements scheduled	tips/skills for successful interviews, coaching to address 'red flags'	guidance for CV and personal discussion of residency programs, # of applications/interviews, couples match, costs of interviews; dual career planning, combined residency & other degree selection given boards & academic performance programs or training; appropriateness check for specialty	debt planning, loan repayment, consideration of NHSC, USPH service etc...	attention to rotations and school during NRMP process & interviews	wrap up projects	guidance for changing schedule and electives to meet career goals	preparation for international electives, visit travel clinic as necessary, immunizations for residency, TB testing etc...
Late M4	Outstanding concerns, role transitions, closure, thank you, reflection	discuss transition for guided curriculum to life-long learning required of doctors; assure graduation requirements met	transition from M4 to PGY1; increased responsibility, identity of self as doctor. Roles within community. Visibility as a health professional.	f/u on interviews, confidence; plans for unmatched students; transition opportunities; congratulations on match, satisfaction of match results; dual career planning, e.g. combined residency with other degree programs or training	Preparation for internship, residency, moving plans, finding housing, debt planning, loan repayment; addressing partner separation if necessary	forward thinking to residency transition	publish/present	n/a	completion of paperwork, forms for residency

Web Resources

UTRGV Careers in Medicine - <http://www.utrgv.edu/som/careers-in-medicine/>

Residency Explorer - <https://www.residencyexplorer.org/>

AMA Residency Fellowship Training Program Database (FREIDA)
<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/education-careers/graduate-medical-education/freida-online.page>

Careers in Medicine, CiM <https://www.aamc.org/cim/>
Charting Outcomes in the Match <http://www.nrmp.org/>

Career Advisement General Schedule

Second
Year

- Second Semester
-Planning 3rd year schedule

Third
Year

- First Semester
-Planning 4rd year schedule
-Away Electives (VSLO)
-Career Day Sessions
- Second Semester
-Ongoing specialty advising
-Post-match forum

Fourth
Year

- End of 3rd year/Early 4th year
-ERAS
-MSPE
-Interviews
- Late 4th Yr
-The ROL
-The Match and post-match forum

Career Advisement 3rd and 4th Year in Detail

Year 3 (January-July)

- Explore specialty web resources
- Meet with specialty advisors
- Decide on 4th yr schedule
- Schedule Away electives
- Schedule MSPE Appointment
- Begin contacting faculty for LOR
- Sign up for USMLE Step 2 CK Second Semester
- Post-match forum

Year 4 (July-September)

- Write and finalize personal statement
- Complete ERAS application (www.aamc.org/eras)
- Register for the NRMP (www.nrmp.org)
- Take USMLE Step 2 CK

Year 4 (September)

- Read and approve your MSPE
- Apply to programs
- Take USMLE Step 2 CK

Year 4 (October-February)

- MSPE is released on Oct 1st
- Interviews
- February is deadline to take USMLE Step 2 CK (I recommend sooner)
- ROL opens in mid-January
- ROL closes towards the end of February

Year 4 (March)

- The Match! (Held on Friday of the third week of March)
- Post- match forum

Early Match Specifics

Urology

- Register on AUA website in June (www.auanet.org)
- Apply to programs from July-Sept
- Interview from Sept-Dec
- Submit ROL by early January
- Match in January

Ophthalmology

- Register through SF Matching Service (www.sfmatch.org)
- Apply to programs from July-Sept
- Interview from Sept-Dec
- Submit ROL by early January
- Match in January

Away Rotations

There are several reasons that students might chose to do away rotations. They may be looking to experience a different practice environment or even check out a specific program. What they should be warned about is that although they might go to a program with the intent of impressing them, that can also backfire and they might disappoint the program. For most specialties, it is not necessary to do an away rotation. The exceptions are dermatology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, plastic surgery, urology and vascular surgery. See the specific specialty information for more detail on this topic. The bottom-line, if students do decide to do away rotations, they should treat it like a month long interview.

ERAS (Electronic Residency Application Service)

ERAS is the service which transmits applications, letters of recommendation, the MSPE, transcripts, and USMLE transcripts. It opens July 1st and that is when students can start completing it and uploading their documents. They receive a password (“token”) from the Dean’s Office ahead of time. It begins transmitting applications to the programs they designate through the NRMP on Sept 15th (this is before the MSPE gets sent out, which is on October 1st).

ERAS Supplemental Application

The supplemental ERAS application is being offered by the AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) as part of ongoing efforts to improve the MyERAS application. It features new questions that will help applicants showcase their interests and experiences to programs.

The supplemental application is separate and distinct from the standard MyERAS application. Your participation in the supplemental application is optional. It will be administered online and consists of three sections:

- Past Experiences
- Geographic Preferences
- Program Signals

There are no fees for the supplemental ERAS application. Applicants to the 2023 ERAS cycle who are applying for a residency position in the following 16 specialties may be asked to complete the supplemental application:

- Adult Neurology
- Anesthesiology
- Dermatology
- Diagnostic Radiology and Interventional Radiology*
- Emergency Medicine (Program Signals only)
- General Surgery
- Internal Medicine (Categorical only)
- Internal Medicine/Psychiatry
- Neurological Surgery
- Obstetrics and Gynecology (Program Signals only)
- Orthopedic Surgery
- Pediatrics
- Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
- Preventive Medicine
- Psychiatry

* These two specialties are listed together because they collaboratively decided to combine their program signals.

The CV

Once students have opened ERAS, they should begin with their CV and personal statement. The basic format for the CV includes. . .

- Home and School Address
- Education
- Honors and Awards
- Work Experience
- Research Experience
- Publications and Abstracts
- Teaching Experience
- Institutional Service
- Community Service
- Hobbies and Interests

ERAS has its own format for the CV, so students will cut and paste this information into the ERAS format. They cannot simply upload their document.

The office of CiM offers CV workshops and personalized reviews, please remind students that this service is free and at their disposal.

The Personal Statement

The personal statement should express one's personal attributes and/or experiences that make them an unique individual. Students should write about why they have chosen a specialty and what their future goals are. Personal statements should be well written, limited to one page and have no grammatical errors or spelling mistakes. Most personal statements will not help candidates but can hurt them. This might not be true for psychiatry and family medicine who take the personal statement a bit more seriously.

Students should have someone who is good at writing and their advisor review their personal statement. It is not necessary for students to send a different personal statement to each program. They should just tailor it to their residency choice. They will need different personal statements for preliminary and advanced programs and if they are applying to more than one residency.

If a student is really stuck on this, the following advice can be helpful. . .

- 1 page, 4 paragraphs
- First, introduce the reader to you
- Second, let the reader know how you arrived at your choice of the specialty
- Third, confirm why you think the choice is right for you (research, extracurricular or clinical experience)
- Fourth, long-term goals (if not clear okay to state as such)

The office of CiM offers personalized statement reviews as well, so please refer them to our office.

Letters of Recommendation

Students are required to obtain three letters of recommendation for their residency application. They can obtain more, but programs can only receive up to four letters. Students might decide to send separate letters to different programs or they might send all letters to all programs. Students will need separate letters for preliminary and advanced programs. The best letters tend to come from clinical faculty who know the student well and have worked with them closely. Some fields also highly value letters from prominent people (ie. Dermatology, Vascular, and General Surgery). Most specialties desire at least 1-2 letters from within the specialty. Many specialties will require a chair's or departmental letter (ie. Chair's letter - Anesthesia, OB/GYN, Ortho, Peds, Plastic and Urology; Departmental letter – EM; IM provides a departmental letter that some programs will require). To obtain a chair's letter, students should arrange a meeting with the chair. To arrange for a departmental letter, students should alert the department and follow their process. Students should have their letters on ERAS by mid-September and they should give their writers 4-6 weeks to complete the letters. Students should waive the right to read the letter (get waivers from ERAS). Finally, the letters get sent directly to the Dean's Office, who uploads them to ERAS. The student then decides which programs to which they get sent.

The MSPE

The MSPE is a letter of evaluation describing the students' performance in medical school. It is not a letter of recommendation. It is intended to be supportive, yet accurate. It includes induction into AOA or the Gold Humanism Honor Society. It typically does not discuss the student's specialty choice and it is meant to be generic. A student might be applying to more than 1 field or they might change their mind after the letter has been sent. The students are prompted to write the background information before they meet with the deans. During the months of May through August, the deans will write and review the letter with the student. Then, in September the students have the opportunity to review the draft of the letter and make suggestions prior to its final form. It gets uploaded by the Dean's Office onto ERAS and it gets sent out to all programs the student applied to on October 1st.

The Application Process

Where should students apply?

This question is quite specialty specific, and more detail can be seen under the individual specialty pages. However, in general, students should apply to a range of programs. They should "shoot for the stars" but also select "safe" programs and have a parallel plan. The best candidates may need to apply only to 10-15 programs, while others should have 15-25. Very competitive programs or couple matches need more.

What are the more competitive specialty choices?

- Plastic Surgery
- Orthopaedics
- Dermatology
- Ophthalmology
- Neurosurgery
- Otolaryngology
- Urology

Student Resources

Student Health and Wellness

Mental Health Counseling Services

The mission of the SOM is to provide mental health services for UTRGV students and to promote positive mental health and wellness on our campuses through education and training. Mental health counseling is provided within the school, and referral for psychiatric services is also available. These services are free for all enrolled students. The SOM clinical social worker who is specialized to provide counseling for medical students. To schedule an appointment please email: valerie.rivera@utrgv.edu

The school of medicine also provides unlimited teleconsulting for our students at no cost via the mySSP app. Please have our students visit: <https://myssp.app/ca/home>

Collegiate Recovery Program

The purpose of the CRP is to provide an environment in which students seeking and wanting to sustain recovery from addictions can find support and better manage the challenges of this journey. It seeks to help students make positive decisions about healthy relationships while improving the way they see and think about themselves. The program also enables students to learn affirmative methods to identify and to cope with various life stressors. Participating in the program contributes to a network of mutual support for the development of lifelong commitments to individual recovery and understanding of life in recovery.

For more information, visit <http://www.utrgv.edu/recovery>

Vaqueros Crisis Line

The **Vaqueros Crisis Line (665-5555)** is a 24/7 confidential helpline for enrolled UTRGV students experiencing an emotional crisis that may include suicidal thinking, thoughts of harming self or other, confusion, panic, or otherwise feeling distressed. A trained counselor will be available on the line to provide assistance.

Student Health Services

The mission of Student Health Services is to meet the health care needs of students so they can focus on their studies. All students are required to pay a medical service fee that allows them to be seen at clinics on both campuses (Brownsville and Edinburg) as often as necessary. The office visits are free of charge, although there are low-cost charges for medicines, supplies, and lab tests.

The Health Services Clinics offer services of a family doctor, including general medical care, women's wellness, skin care, sexually transmitted diseases screening and treatment, routine immunizations, and the tuberculosis testing required by many educational programs. Health Services also has a Class D pharmacy that carries a selection of over-the-counter items and can fill most prescriptions written in the clinic.

For more information, visit <http://www.utrgv.edu/health-services/>

Breastfeeding and Breast Milk Storage

The SOM has designated a private location in the building where women can either breastfeed their babies or pump breast milk. Women who are breastfeeding or pumping breast milk should communicate with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs to develop a plan that accommodates their schedules and clinical responsibilities.

Parental Leave Accommodations

The SOM is committed to supporting all students (male and female) who have children during medical school and to working with such students to facilitate the completion of their medical education. The SOM complies with federal and state law regarding accommodations during and after pregnancy, with the goal of accommodating the immediate perinatal period and all of its demands while providing a realistic option for students to continue making progress toward completion of the degree.

Students are not required to take parental leave. However, if they choose to do so, parental leaves (birth or adoptive) are permitted for up to 12 months. The Office of Student Affairs evaluates medically necessary extensions of parental leave on a case-by-case basis.

Procedures for Requesting Accommodations or Leave

When requesting a parental leave of absence, early communication and good-faith efforts among all parties involved are essential to ensure the least impact on a student's education. Because the structure and demands of the medical education program vary throughout the four-year curriculum, the approach to parental leave accommodation differs depending on the year of the program in which the parental leave, birth, or adoption occurs. Regardless of the timing, a detailed plan must be developed by the student in close collaboration with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. The plan must receive written approval from the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Guidance regarding each portion of the curriculum follows.

- **Years One and Two:** A student who wishes to request parental leave during the first two years of medical school should consult with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs to request a leave of absence. Due to the nature of the medical education program, and depending on the time of year and the length of the leave, leaves of absence may require a student to take a full year of leave and return the following year. Students must complete all coursework and the Step 1 exam before beginning clerkships for third year.

- **Year Three:** A student who seeks parental leave during the third year should contact the OSA and coordinate with the Assistant Dean for Education Clerkship. A parental leave of absence in the third year is less likely to obligate a 12-month leave. Working with the Assistant Dean for Education Clerkship, the student may resume clerkships at a mutually agreed upon time. The plan for time away from clerkships should be completed and approved by all parties at least three months before the start of the leave.

- **Year Four:** A student seeking parental leave should work closely with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs to schedule the leave. The plan should be completed and approved by all parties at least three months before the start of the leave.

Financial Aid Effect

Any student taking a leave of absence or who has questions on debt management, or their financial aid package is strongly encouraged to contact the Associate Director of Financial Aid within the OSA for advice and guidance.

Disability Related to Pregnancy

Medical students who experience medical complications related to pregnancy and wish to explore disability accommodations should contact the UTRGV Student Accessibility Services office or the OSA. Students should consult their health care team regarding any concerns or restrictions due to pregnancy.

Academic Resources

Library Services

School of Medicine Library

The SOM Libraries provide full library services: reference and research services, library instruction, interlibrary loan, collection development, and a website tailored to support medical education, practice, and research. The libraries are at the forefront of medical library evolution and possess a nearly virtual (i.e. all electronic) collection. The virtual collection offers access to collection resources from both on and off-campus locations and can help reduce student expenditures on textbooks.

University Library hours are available online. For the most current information, visit <http://www.utrgv.edu/library/about-us/hours/index.htm>.

The SOM Learning and Research Commons (LRC) in Edinburg is located on the first floor of the Academic Medical Building on campus. In addition to study spaces within the LRC, students have access to areas within the Academic Medical Building suitable for individual study and group collaboration. Extended hours are provided during exam periods.

The SOM Library hours are available online. For the most current information, visit <http://www.utrgv.edu/medlibrary/about-us/hours/index.htm>.

University Library

The University Library plays a critical role in the commitment to academic excellence in a balanced program of teaching, research, and service. The Library facilitates scholarship by securing and providing access to resources and facilities for students, faculty, and the community. Librarians actively assist academic and research programs, providing students with library use instruction both on an individual and group basis. The University Library serves as the chief information center on campus and plays a strong role as a regional information center.

University Library hours are available online. For the most current information, visit <http://www.utrgv.edu/library/about-us/hours/index.htm>.

Security, Safety, and Disaster Preparedness

Overview

All members of the SOM community are expected to adhere to university standards and policies regarding emergency preparedness, safety, and security. The SOM will collaborate with clinical affiliates to review and ensure alignment of affiliate policies

and procedures, and to ensure the safety and security of faculty, staff, and students at clinical and community sites.

Emergency Preparedness

The SOM adheres to university procedures in the event of an emergency and follows the UTRGV Emergency Operations Plan found here: (http://www.utrgv.edu/emergencypreparedness/_files/documents/emergency-operations-plan.pdf). This plan is designed to provide a framework and guidance for coordinated responses to minor emergencies, major emergencies, and disasters. It is maintained by the Office of Emergency Preparedness (<http://www.utrgv.edu/emergencypreparedness>) and regularly updated to mitigate potential emergency situations. All members of the university community are encouraged to read the Emergency Operations Plan to understand their respective roles in a given situation. The SOM will be in consistent communication with The Office of Emergency Preparedness in the event of an emergency or security threat for purposes of emergency management.

If the students, faculty or staff members are at one of the clinical sites during an emergency, the SOM will coordinate responses through the Office of Student Affairs. The SOM coordinator will work with the designated hospital official to ensure alignment with emergency preparedness plans at both hospital sites and the SOM.

Disaster Preparedness

Refer to the UTRGV Office of Emergency Preparedness for updated policies, procedures, and operational plans as well as questions regarding natural hazards and emergency preparedness. <http://www.utrgv.edu/emergencypreparedness>.

Safety

The SOM ensures a safe learning and workplace environment through the adherence to all university safety policies and procedures. This includes the university fire safety program (<http://www.utrgv.edu/ehsrn/programs/fire-safety/index.htm>) that aims to protect lives and property, occupational health and safety program to provide safe working conditions, laboratory safety, and environmental protection.

The SOM also adheres to all UTRGV procedures for safety, chemical, biological and other hazardous material response, and other emergency measures established at the University level. (<http://www.utrgv.edu/ehsrn/programs/lab-safety/index.htm>).

The SOM will communicate with the university's Environmental Health, Safety, and Risk Management office (<http://www.utrgv.edu/ehsrn>) to promote a healthy and safe campus environment. This office oversees hazard communication, Occupational Safety and Health Administration compliance, indoor air quality, bloodborne pathogens, asbestos awareness, construction safety, accident investigation/reporting, ergonomics, and industrial hygiene.

Please refer to the SOM's Student Exposure to Infectious and Environmental Hazards Policy for further detail on specific safety policies and procedures around environmental health.

Security

The SOM faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to utilize UTRGV campus security resources. These resources include:

- Calling UTRGV police at 911 or by personal visit to the UTRGV Police Department;
- Using any campus telephone and dialing 5-7151, or 956-665-7151;
- Contacting an officer in uniform on patrol;
- Using emergency (blue light) call boxes located throughout campus;
- Contacting any staff member in a university office; and/or
- Utilizing UTRGV's emergency alert system; and
- Office for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention (<https://www.utrgv.edu/ovavp/>) when a student is a victim of or witness to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual harassment, and interpersonal violence. 956-665-8287.

In addition to these University resources, the SOM limits access to educational buildings to its faculty, staff, and students after normal business hours. The SOM works closely with campus law enforcement to ensure the safety of its community through regular surveillance and supervision.

Dean on Call

After hours, at night, on weekends and during holidays, students can reach a dean in the Office of Student Affairs for urgent matters and guidance by calling 956-296-2502.

Tuition and Financial Aid

The OSA includes staff who assist students with meeting the cost of their medical education, offer guidance in navigating the financial aid process, and provide resources on how to manage expenses associated with the pursuit of a medical degree.

The Associate Director of Financial Aid for the SOM is dedicated to assisting students with the financial aid application process and providing one-to-one counseling regarding the availability of federal, private, and institutional funds.

There are several financial aid and scholarship options available to medical students, such as the institutional and private scholarships, as well as federal and private student loans. The main types of aid available are:

Scholarships: Non-repayable awards, which may be based on merit, financial need, and/or other considerations.

Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan: A student does not have to demonstrate financial need to receive this loan. Interest payments on this loan are not subsidized by the government. The student can make arrangements with the lender to pay the interest while s/he is in school or can allow the interest to capitalize, adding to the principal balance.

Federal Direct Graduate Plus Loan: This loan is available to graduate students who are enrolled in an eligible program. Students must file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid form in order to apply for a Federal Graduate Plus Loan. This loan requires a credit check for eligibility.

Private Student Loans: Private student loans can be obtained in addition to Federal Stafford

Loans. Private student loans are based on credit and the interest rate is variable.

Hours: The Director of Financial Aid is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Extended office hours are available upon request.

Debt Management and Loan Exit Counseling

During orientation and throughout the students' medical education, the Associate Director of Financial Aid holds mandatory group sessions on loan counseling, debt management, and financial planning. The Associate Director of Financial Aid meets with students to encourage smart and conscientious borrowing habits. Personal or group debt management sessions also are available throughout the program.

During the first debt management session, students are given a printed copy of their federal loan histories and are told how to access the National Student Loan Data System and retrieve their personal loan histories. Students are provided an updated loan history every year for the duration of their medical education. They are required to attend a second mandatory debt management presentation toward the end of their second year before starting their core clerkships in the third year.

All students who have received loans during medical school are required to attend a mandatory "Loan Exit Counseling" session. This is a federal requirement for graduation for any student who has received federal student loans for school.

Additionally, the Associate Director of Financial Aid provides students with written information about financial aid programs and services available to them through the SOM and its parent university. They also have access to various financial aid resources provided by the Association of American Medical Colleges, including the Financial Information, Resources, Services, and Tools (FIRST) online program at <https://www.aamc.org/services/48668/first/> which includes a tutorial entitled "Financial Literacy 101," podcasts, and many other resources.

The SOM financial aid website also includes information for prospective medical students on financial literacy, debt management, links to scholarship resources, and contact information of preferred lenders at <http://www.utrgv.edu/ucentral/paying-for-college/financial-aid/index.htm> .

Hours: Medical students can contact the Associate Director for individual counseling during normal business hours, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, or by phone or email.

Student Financial Hardship Fund

UTRGV maintains a fund to assist students with financial emergencies. These funds may be used for non-recurring expenses, such as those resulting from accident, property damage or loss due to fire or storm, or illness or injury to the student. Eligibility criteria and application procedures are located at: <https://www.utrgv.edu/student-life/student-resources/financial-hardship-resources-for-students/student-financial-hardship-fund/index.htm>.

Office of Alumni

UTRGV has more than 100,000 alumni spread across the globe from its two legacy institutions, The University of Texas at Brownsville and The University of Texas Pan American. Graduates of UTRGV and the SOM join these alumni to serve as a

reminder of successes and sources of support for other UTRGV students. With the support of this strong alumni base, UTRGV is a significant force in higher education both in the state and in the nation.

Students are encouraged to contact the Office of Alumni before graduating.

Physical Location: 2402 S. Closner Boulevard Edinburg, TX 78539

Telephone: 956-665-2500 **Fax:** 956-665-3240 **Email:** alumni@utrgv.edu

Student Organizations

Medical student organizations and specialty interest groups provide students with opportunities to attend educational meetings and conferences sponsored by local, regional, national, and sometimes even international professional associations of that specialty. Through their participation, medical students become knowledgeable about, and may consider becoming an active medical student member of one or more professional associations of that specialty. The OSA supports extracurricular student organizations as another means for students to explore career interests, as well as encourage participation in the American Association of Medical Colleges Careers in Medicine workshops at the national level.

Student Travel

SOM students are encouraged to pursue scholarly and community activities and present their work at conferences and professional organizations. They also are encouraged to represent the school in leadership capacities. Students who are conducting research should ask their research mentors to provide support and guidance to attend meetings and presentations.

The University has set forth rules and procedures regarding student and pre-college University program participant travel to comply with the University of Texas System policy and State Law (Texas Education Code, Section §51.949). University students may travel off campus when representing a student organization, university department, or engaging in intercollegiate competition or academic activities. Examples of student travel include, but are not limited to, class field trips and assignments; attendance at scholarly or professional conferences; university-funded student organization travel; class trips for educational or cultural enrichment; student leadership conferences; placement forums; and graduate school visits. All student travel must be registered with and approved by the Dean of Students or his or her designee. For more information regarding student travel, please refer to the [UTRGV Handbook of Operating Procedures](#).

One of the primary functions of the Student Government Association is to responsibly allocate funds to the student body to support the activities of student organizations and groups. Procedures have been established by the SGA, in conjunction with the Office of Student Affairs, to provide efficient and equitable distribution of funds to support students and extracurricular opportunities. Guidelines for requesting funds to support student travel may be obtained through the SGA officers.

Academic Advising

The SOM has an effective system of academic advising and support services in place and available to all medical students. The advising system integrates the efforts of faculty members, module directors, clerkship directors, student affairs staff with its counseling, and tutorial services, and ensures that medical students can obtain academic counseling from individuals who have no role in making assessment or promotion decisions about them. The Associate Dean for Student Affairs, in collaboration with the Director of Medical Students Academic Support, ensures that medical students have access to academic counseling from individuals who do not have roles in making assessments. Students are informed during new student welcoming, and at orientation about academic advising/ counseling processes, the role of advising staff, and other administrators involved in advising.

Academic advising is an on-going process based on student needs. Students who are academically challenged tend to have more academic contact with advisors. Key individuals who advise students, and who also have no role in the assessment and/or advancement decisions of medical students are as follows:

- Associate Dean for Student Affairs
- Director of Medical Student Academic Support and Advising
- Learning Specialist

In addition to academic advisors, students are assigned to academic mentors in their first year, and remain so for the duration of their four years of Undergraduate Medical Education (UME). The role and responsibilities of academic mentors are described in the Academic Advising web page.

Students who are considered at risk for academic, physical, and emotional challenges receive ongoing academic support. During the pre-clerkship curriculum, students are considered to be academically at risk if they are not receiving passing scores in weekly quizzes, mid module exams, or final module exams. Students who fail a module remediate at the end of the academic year and retake the module exam. Students failing two modules are referred to the Medical Student Evaluation and Promotion Committee (MSEPC) for review of their academic standing.

The Office of Student Affairs supports the Student Academic Success Team (SAST). The SAST monitors and coordinates academic interventions/activities for at-risk students, whether self-identified or referred by faculty. The priority is the wellbeing of all students and their making satisfactory progress towards degree completion.

Another major responsibility of the Office of Academic Advising is that of preparing students for the USMLE Step 1 Exam. Students are assisted with high-yield resources, study skills strategies, test-taking skills, scheduling, time management, and overall readiness for the Step 1 Exam.

Overall, the following support services are available to all students.

- academic mentoring
- study skills and test-taking strategies
- peer tutoring and supplemental instruction
- learning style and cognitive assessments
- faculty help sessions on course modules
- time management
- stress management
- early intervention and remediation
- USMLE Step 1 Exam Preparations
- referral services to other UTRGV services

Detailed information about academic advising and support services is available on the Academic Advising Web page, and on Blackboard.

All medical students are encouraged first to discuss any academic concerns with their Module/Clerkship director.

The Office of Academic Advising is strategically located and easily accessible to students at the team based learning center on the Edinburg Campus.

Careers in Medicine

All SOM students receive career guidance from a variety of sources and programs during each year of their medical education. In addition to the Academic Houses, a professional development and career counseling program

is in place to:

- Help students identify and achieve their personal and professional goals,
- Assist student in the process of selecting a career, and
- Guide students through the transition from medical school to residency training.

This program includes both formal and informal activities. The SOM utilizes the Association of American Medical Colleges Careers in Medicine (CiM) Program as a foundation for its career guidance program: <https://www.aamc.org/students/medstudents/cim>

The CiM is a four-phase career-planning program that works in partnership with medical schools to help students select a medical specialty and apply to a residency program. Oversight and support for the CiM program at UTRGV resides in the OSA, under the direction of the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, and managed by the Director of Careers in Medicine.

Academic Houses

The SOM supports the academic and professional success of medical students through Academic Houses, which are small-group learning communities that help medical students develop supportive relationships with faculty and other students that span their course of study and beyond.

Benefits

Each student across all four years of medical school is assigned to one of four Academic Houses specified below. Faculty advisors and students within each Academic House work as a team to plan academic, professional, community service, wellness, and social events for their Academic House members. Students receive frequent individual advising from their Academic House faculty advisor, and students and faculty develop a sense of community that fosters friendship, guidance, support, and academic and professional success. (Only one in 10 medical schools in the United States have a program like this, which supports students during their medical school years.)

Current SOM Academic Houses:

- Galen
- Blackwell
- Maimon
- Osler