

Interview Innovations: Creating a Virtual Second Look Day for Applicants

INTRODUCTION:

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic brought many unknowns to the field of medicine and the education of trainees. Similarly, the selection process for fellowship candidates was impacted when a working group representing three major medical societies recommended that “all programs commit to online interviews and virtual visits for all applicants, including local students, for the entire [2020-2021] cycle.”⁽¹⁾ Additionally, the group recommended that programs “commit to creating a robust digital environment and set of tools to yield the best experiences for programs and applicants.”⁽¹⁾ On May 15, 2020, the Association of Pulmonary and Critical Care Program Directors (APCCMPD) released a similar statement recommending an “all-in” approach to virtual interviews.⁽²⁾

At the beginning of the 2020 interview cycle, we designed a digital interview experience, the Virtual Second Look Day, to ensure applicants a non-evaluative, multifaceted view of our fellowship program. We report the results of our first and second years piloting this program.

ABSTRACT PRESENTATION

METHODS:

For the 2020 and 2021 interview cycles, the interview day format included a pre-interview dinner with current fellows the night before and four faculty interviews, one of which was behavioral-based following an information session by the program director on the day of the interview. All interviewees in the combined pulmonary and critical care, pulmonary disease, and critical care medicine programs were offered an invitation to the virtual second look day consisting of various events (Figure 1). Attendance at the optional day had no bearing on applicant rank as the committee had finalized the program’s rank list; committee members were not involved in the day’s activities. Feedback was provided by an internal review committee consisting of the program leadership during the first year of implementation. Following the second year of implementation, attendees were surveyed to enhance feedback.

RESULTS:

During the first implementation year (2020), 28.4% of interviewees attended the Virtual Second Look Day. Feedback themes from our internal review consisted of technical difficulties, specifically in the audio and visual quality of digital rounding.

During the 2021 interview cycle, 37.0% of interviewees attended the Virtual Second Look Day and were surveyed the day after the event. Fourteen applicants responded (51.9% response rate). Most fellowship applicants (71.4%) were not offered optional non-evaluative, virtual open house days or second look opportunities from other programs. All of the aspects of the day were regarded by applicants as being beneficial with greater than 70% positive response, with the exception of the “Tour of the Town” (only 69.2% believed to be beneficial). Forty-three percent of survey respondents did not attend the faculty panel as the last event of the day. Overall, 64.3% of those surveyed said that the experience improved the program’s position on the applicant’s rank list (Figure 2).

DISCUSSION:

The second look experience is beneficial to the applicants by providing a unique view which allows the applicants to assess if they could thrive in the current culture of the program. Comments provided by those surveyed included that “the ICU rounds were very helpful because it allowed [the applicants] to picture [themselves] actually on rounds at Mayo which made it feel more familiar. Especially in this virtual environment, a feeling of familiarity is very important.” A tour of the facilities was suggested as an area of improvement.

CONCLUSIONS:

The optional, virtual second look day has been a positive addition to our program’s interview season. As virtual interviews continue to be recommended by national organizations, fellowship programs will need to continue to build and consider refining digital experiences to produce the best alternative to the in-person interview experience for the applicants.

Figure 1: Schedule/Flow of the Day

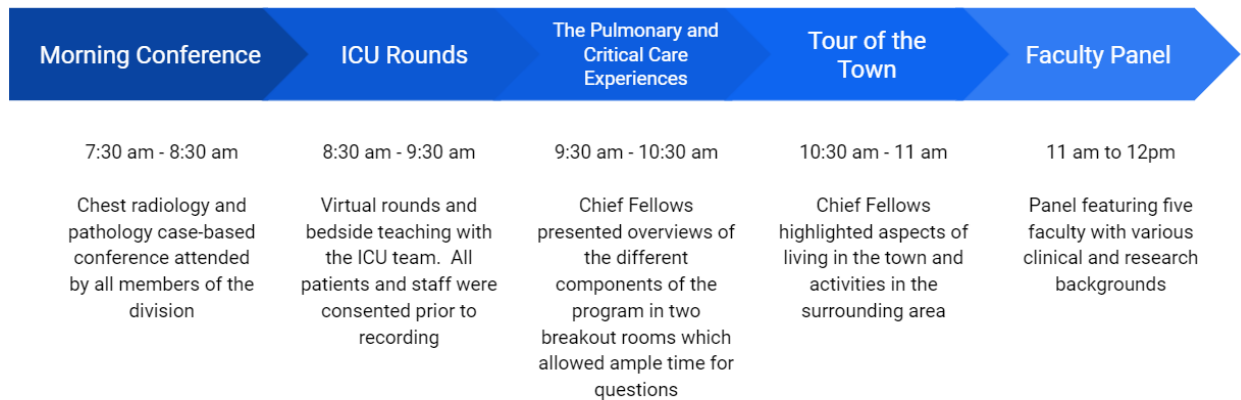
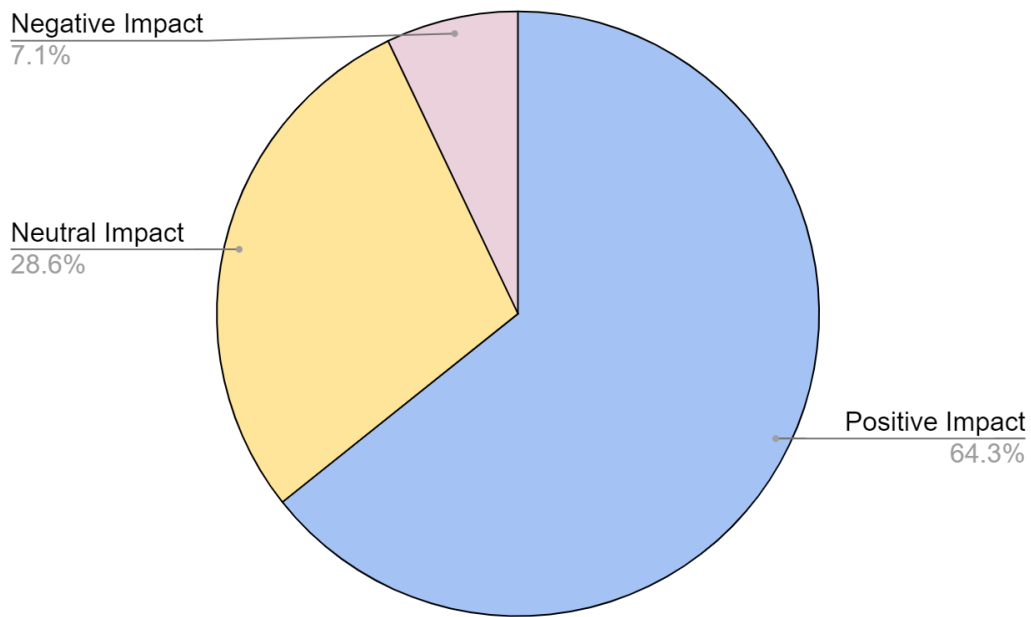


Figure 2: The impact of the Virtual Second Look Day on an applicant's rank list



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