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ISSUES CONCERNING THE INTERNSHIP SELECTION PROCESS 1

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The matching of students with internship training sites has evolved over a forty year period from university dictated outcomes to an increasing balance of power in favor of students and internship sites. In the late 1970's, the APIC selection rules specified a procedure that included a Uniform Notification date. With increasing numbers of internship sites and prospective inters, these procedures have become more frustrating and cumbersome. (Plante, 1988). The use of the Clearinghouse and procedural changes attempted to improve this selection process without any examination of cost-effectiveness. In a letter published in the Monitor (Dana and May, 1988), we alerted the readers to some of the content of this study but did not address issues raised by this data.

Information on the costs of the 1987-1988 early acceptance trial internship application process for students, programs and internships was obtained after the February 1988 acceptance date from 10 APA-accredited settings, including two clinical and two counseling programs and six internships representative of all geographic regions. These settings provided data for 35 students and 38 possible internship slots.

Survey forms were sent to each graduate program director for estimates of time expenditures for meetings, letters, post-application consultation, telephone calls and for interviews and letters by faculty. Students were asked to estimate time for vita and application preparation, requests to faculty for information and letters, and telephone calls. Estimated student costs for transcripts, stamps, xeroxing, typing and site visits were obtained as well as support staff information on time for typing letters and postage. Estimated time during these periods (post brochure to receipt of applications, receipt of applications through D-day and D-day) were obtained for internships. These data included times for processing inquiries and applications, phone call interviews, folder evaluation, committee meetings and site visits.

For graduate programs, 147 faculty hours, 953 application hours and \$5844 in supportive services were provided. For internships, the faculty costs were 39 hours per accepted intern. Salaries in both settings were estimated at \$40,000 per FIE year. These figures were extrapolated across all internships (N=453+), academic programs (N=185+) and applicants (N=1900+). The estimated costs are approximately \$1,662,000 annually for internships and \$462,000 for academic settings. For students, the average estimated time expenditure is 27 hours, or the equivalent of more than one week on a half time assistantship, with out-of-pocket expenses in addition.

These figures may be compared with estimated costs of \$100,000 per year for contracting computer matching and \$8,000 to \$10,000 per year if done through APIC (Pederson and Blom, 1988). The 418 APIC member institutions processed 20,595 applications for 1,921 internship slots in 1987, a task which may be

done in one day with computerization. These authors calculated potential revenues of \$28,000 per year from projected fees if \$20 per site and \$10 per applicant.

The savings with a computer matching program would accrue from the elimination of the entire Uniform Notification Day process and possibly from fewer site visits. A reduced number of site visits would occur because "less desirable" applicants would be more likely to get a slot and the settings would have a higher likelihood that their slots would be filled. While these savings cannot be estimated in financial terms, they may be anticipated to occur at a time when there will be uniform application forms rather than the highly individualized application patterns now in use.

However, an estimate of the savings on Uniform Notification day is more feasible. For approximately 1921 internship applicants and 418 APIC member internship settings (not including captive and non-APA accredited sites) there are 47 applicants and 5 internship slots per setting on the average (Eggert et.al., 1987) It may be assumed that each setting director now spends at least one full working day on the phone with applicants in order to fill his/her slots. Using the average salary figure of \$40,000 for these 418 training directors, there is a loss of 415 working days or approximately \$67,000. This figure does not include any lost income which would have been generated by direct services on that day by training directors in the various agencies. In addition the cost of long distance telephone calls between applicants and training directors should be added. Moreover, opportunity costs for the applicant should be considered. He/she might be doing something more productive, either in terms of direct earnings or work toward the degree on that day. At present these costs are undetermined. Thus, the total minimal cost for the present offer/acceptance day process is estimated to exceed \$100,000.

Discussion: While the number of programs and students in this study's sample is small, these data provide an exemplar to suggest that the current process is too costly for all participants. With the example of medicine (NRMP directory, 1987) and the voices of concerned APIC members, it is surprising that studies of comparative costs for different methods of selection have not already been completed. Since it is likely that unwillingness to relinquish perceived power in the selection process and a belief in personal efficacy contribute to the present dilemma, this discussion will focus on what may be gained or lost in any changes in the present procedure for students, graduate programs and internships.

With computerized matching, applicants would not only have higher assurance of a slot, but might be able to forgo several costly site visits and reduce the number of (current average number is 10) applications. Students would also experience, at least potentially, the impact of a reduced role for personal bias which enters into interview based selections.

Moreover, in the originally proposed matching algorithm (Briggs, 1984) there was a specific procedure for the rare event of cross tied matches which impacted on applicant outcomes. The rare event of a cross tied match occurs whenever two internships competed for the same two applicants and rate these applicants inversely to these two applicants' ratings of them. Example:

Site A ranks Joe number 1 and Mary number 2. Site B ranks Joe number 2 and Mary number 1. However, Mary has ranked site A as her number 1 choice and Site B as her number 2 choice. Joe has ranked Site A as his number 2 choice and Site B as his number 1 choice.

If such a rare cross match occurs, then some decision rule must be implemented to "break the tie". Such a rule must therefore utilize either the site preferences as the major determinant or the applicants' preferences as the "tie breaker" determinant. The Briggs algorithm determined that if such a tie occurred, the tie would be decided by giving sites their first choices.

The Pederson and Blom (1988) algorithm would use applicant choice as the "tie breaker" determinant. They argue this decision rule by contending that the effects of specific training sites are of critical professional importance for interns because internships are time-limited transitioning experiences in which the geographic location may be the primary determinant of choice (Burstein et. al. 1981; Eggert et. al., 1987; Solway et. al., 1987).

When considering the benefit to the applicant of the tie breaking procedure, however, it must be remembered that the cross matched tie is a rare event. Most applicants will probably never experience the benefit of this particular algorithmic procedure, and even if it was experienced, the differentiation would come between assignment to two sites that were very closely ranked by the applicant in the beginning. Accordingly, because of the rarity of the event and because the applicant in question was already highly ranked by the site, it is unlikely that this decision rule will impact on sites in any significant manner. More often, it will be the case that the use of computer matching may persuade applicants to make some compromises on choices of setting, with some possible increase in an experienced fear of increased risk taking, particularly if the applicant comes from a prestigious graduate program.

For internship programs, there would be savings in time and effort that would be coupled with the loss of possible perceived benefits such as the "increased role of the program" and the "good old boy" influence network. Internship would increase their likelihood of filling all slots, particularly those sites which are "less prominent" settings or those sites with recent or provisional accreditation. However, sites may lose some minority applicants unless they specifically increased personalized recruiting efforts. Such "less prominent" internships would need to be even more explicit in describing their training programs because of potentially fewer personal interview visits by prospective interns. Of even greater import is the risk of losing the very best applicants as staff preferences derived from "paper" applications only may not be related to overall goodness-of-fit of the intern to the site.

Clearly, there are formidable pros and cons involved in any major change in the process (Zimet, 1988). While the older generation of program directors in both internships and academic or professional program settings may experience bias in favor of predictions based on clinical criteria, they also recognize that there may be little difference, or basis for distinction, among their top choices. More recently appointed training program directors may feel more competitive and regard personal interview experience as a better basis for choice, even though their own academic training may have favored statistical criteria.

While these observations are speculative, the sheer numbers of students and settings will increase the pressure for fiscal accountability and equalization of opportunity as opposed to the kind of "elitism" exercised in present application procedures. As a result of these factors, process changes in internship application procedures will occur.

In the interim, however, comparative data on different possible procedures are mandatory in addition to awareness of the procedures used by other professions in their attempts to provide cost-effective matching of students and training settings.

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