

Ogul Uner-Incoming PGY0 @ Casey Eye

What should applicants be working on at this stage in the application process? (April-May)

Contacting letter writers and start writing their personal statement. Thinking about which and how many programs to apply to and start talking about advisors about those programs.

How did you find your mentors? Can you give us practical tips on successfully getting to know them?

Mix of serendipity and determination. I was lucky to connect with my first mentor over a research article I read. I found my other mentors through them. I think you need a mentor for different aspects in life. Research, clinical, life advice, personal, etc. I think the best way to find a mentor is to reach out via email or in person and establish a relationship face-to-face. Send them an interesting article you read or text them to see if they need help with anything. Ask upperclassmen about people in the department seeking mentees. Having set goals and stating what you will bring as a mentee will empower the mentor, too. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. If it does, great. If it doesn't, it is important to acknowledge that and not stress too much about it.

How did you approach the personal statement? Does it have to be about interest in ophthalmology?

I told my story- started with how I discovered the field and then tackling a particular challenge I saw. Given its a personal statement, it needs to be personal. People reading your statement already know why ophthalmology is the best field. Rather than talking about why it's great, I'd recommend focusing on your adventure.

Any pearls succeeding during ophthalmology clerkships?

Come to clinic early. Be professional and ask how you can help. Talk to residents to clarify your role for that day. Bring Wills Eye Manual to read up in your downtime in clinic. Know the basics of the surgery you will be seeing the next day. Have fun!

How many ophthalmology recommendation letters did you obtain? Can you share the timeline of when you asked, how often you reminded letter writers, and when the letter writers submitted?

I obtained all 3 from ophthalmology. I asked all of them late spring/early summer and reminded them early July and late July, encouraging them to submit by August 15. All of them did by that date. Our timeline was different than prior years due to the pandemic, so I'd check the SF Match deadlines for the most accurate information.

What do you feel like were the biggest strengths of your application? What do you feel like were your biggest weaknesses? (How were you also able to overcome these weaknesses?)

I had a compelling story, from coming to the U.S. at a teenager and discovering ophthalmology via serendipity. Many interviewers commented on how my PS read like a chapter from a story and liked that I took a risk with it. I also was a strong candidate academically. Some of my biggest weaknesses were my international status (required a visa and I was mainly interested in the H1B worker visa that not many programs give) and that I did not have many publications as I applied, with most of my papers coming out mid-way into the application season. I debated on taking an extra year, but did not want to given my immigration status. I tried overcoming these by talking about my work in progress confidently and asking programs how they felt towards international applicants. Talking to program coordinators about visa status during interviews was also important. I realized that many international applicants are in the same boat, which boosted my confidence.

What were you the most afraid of?

Not being able to match at my dream program because of my international status. While few, there are ophthalmology programs that do not sponsor visas altogether. Med school applications are also tough for international students, but I realized residency applications were not as hard on us compared to med school apps.

When did you submit your SF match application?

I submitted on August 31, a day before programs could view applications.

Looking back, what are three things throughout the application process that helped you succeed?

- 1) I was myself in the application and interview; positive attitude and enthusiasm go a long way.
- 2) I knew my application in and out; you feel confident when you're prepared.

3) I made friends during the process; though Zoom interviews seem lonely, you get to connect with future colleagues on interview day and on social media. Talking about different programs and getting peer advice was also very helpful.