Do away electives really give students an edge in the Match? Before committing to an away elective or audition, review these five key facts about away electives to help you make an informed decision. Plus, check out an infographic to help you break down the average cost of away electives.
Cost of away or audition electives

- 42.1% < $1000
- 23.5% $1000-$2000
- 16.1% $2001-$3000
- 11.1% $3001-$4000
- 2.6%
- 2.4%
Authors of a recent study published in Academic Medicine surveyed 1,367 students about away electives and auditions. The study found that:

The primary reasons students pursued away electives were to evaluate specific residency programs and increase their chances of matching to their program of choice. In fact, 90 percent of students agreed that the primary reason to pursue an away elective is to evaluate the residency program and 81.8 percent agreed that increasing the likelihood of matching at that residency program should also motivate students to pursue away electives.

Most students took away electives, and the number of students taking them varied by specialties. “More than half of the students completed at least one monthlong away or audition elective in their career specialty of choice,” the study authors wrote. “The number of students taking away electives varied by career specialty, ranging from approximately 42 percent for internal medicine to approximately 89 percent for emergency medicine,” the study said. “Overall, surgery and emergency medicine applicants were significantly more likely to complete an away elective than students applying to all other specialties.” Study authors also noted that away electives were more expensive for students taking electives in nonprimary care residencies.

Electives aren’t cheap—some students had to limit their options. “The majority of students who completed away or audition electives spent between $1,000 and $4,000 to complete these electives,” according to the study. Approximately 35 percent of students reported limiting the number of away electives they took because of financial constraints.

Away electives significantly impacted how students ranked their programs. Nearly 89 percent of students who completed an away elective felt that the elective affected their ranking of a program. This didn’t vary significantly across specialties, according to the study. While away electives influenced how students ranked their programs, their impact on the Match is still unclear. Among students who completed an away elective, 34.1 percent matched to the programs at which they had done an away elective. “As only approximately one-third of students matched at a program where they had done an away or audition elective, it is unclear whether these electives enhance the likelihood of matching,” study authors wrote. “It may be that so many students in certain specialties complete away electives that any potential benefit to a single student is diluted.” In the National Resident Matching Program’s 2014 Program Director’s Survey, 63 percent of program directors valued students taking away electives or auditions in their departments and cited electives as a factor when selecting applicants for residency interviews. However, only 55 percent of program directors cited applicants having completed an away rotation or audition within their specific programs as a factor when ranking applicants.
Want tips on choosing away electives or auditions? Read these answers to the top questions students asked residents about away electives and auditions.

Want more tips for applying to residency? Check out these resources:

- Review this must-have list of questions the Association of American Medical Colleges recommends students ask program directors and residents during their residency program interviews.
- Get six key tips to help you excel on video interviews for residency.
- Learn how to write a competitive CV using these six strategic steps.
- Find out how many residency programs students really apply to each year (broken down by specialty).
- Check out this essential checklist for fourth-year students featuring key tasks and deadlines to prioritize as you apply for residency.