

The Fellowship Process: A Guide to Obtaining a Podiatric Fellowship



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Getting Started

First, decide whether a fellowship is right for you and what type of fellowship you want to pursue. It is important to determine which area you are most interested in before applying. Once you have identified your preferred fellowship type, narrow your search by location by considering proximity to family as well as financial factors.



Reasons to pursue a fellowship:

- Further hone your surgical skills or specialty
- Differentiate yourself from your peers
- Facilitate your transition into private practice
- Required for positions in orthopedic groups
- Learning billing and coding practices
- Access to research opportunities
- Preparation for teaching roles

Reasons not to pursue a fellowship:

- If you feel adequately prepared from residency for your career plans
- The competitive and costly nature of the fellowship process
- If you do not see significant added value in pursuing a fellowship

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The differences between fellowship and residency:

- Fellowship more closely resembles private practice
- Fellowship typically involves working one-on-one with a few attendings, rather than many as in residency
- In a fellowship, you are responsible for taking calls and can book cases independently
- Call schedules vary depending on the program



The various fellowship types and specialties:

- ACFAS-supported fellowships (ACFAS offers surgical fellowships – these are widely considered the gold standard in foot and ankle fellowships)
- CPME-supported fellowships (CPME offers only accredited fellowships, meaning that it's technically the only approved fellowship process by CPME, which is the governing board for residencies)
- AAPSM-supported fellowships (AAPSM provides sports medicine fellowships, primarily on the west coast and requires active involvement in the organization)
- Foot and ankle reconstruction
- Sports medicine
- Trauma
- Wound care
- Research

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Timing & Application Process

Ideally, you should begin considering fellowship applications at the beginning of your second year of residency. Start visiting programs in January of your second year and visit as many as possible to gain a broad perspective. After deciding on how many to apply for, complete applications and have them sent no later than May 1 of your second year. Each fellowship has their own deadline of when the application is due, but do not use this date. This deadline is more like a deadline for when they pick their fellow, not really an application deadline. The earlier you get the application in, the better off you are and the higher chance of you getting an interview.

Applications deadlines:

- Application deadlines vary by program
- Check program-specific dates on the ACFAS website <http://www.acfas.com/availablefellowships/> or the
- CPME website <http://www.cpme.org/fellowships>



Completing and submitting applications:

- Decide on the number of programs to apply to, and aim to submit all applications by May 1 of your second year
- Use the centralized ACFAS application when available
- Ensure all required materials are included, as incomplete applications may not be considered
- Add a personalized letter of interest to each application

Tips for application submission:

- Personalize each letter of interest by addressing it to the director and mentioning their faculty by name
- Submit applications both by email and mail; use a brightly colored, labeled folder for mailed copies to help your application stand out
- Include all documents and an unofficial transcript to start the process while waiting for the official copy, but you must request an official copy from your school

Note for NYCPM students and alumni: Contact the individual handling transcript requests before sending your forms and expect a fee per transcript.

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Letters of recommendation:

- Begin requesting letters early, as this can be a time-consuming process
- Obtain three letters, including one from your director and two others
- Personalized letters addressed to each director are highly effective – for example, if you apply to five fellowships, have them write a letter addressing each fellowship director specifically – this makes the fellowship feel that you are only applying to them
- References can send letters directly to programs or to you for forwarding



After submitting applications:

- Program directors or current fellows will contact you to arrange interviews; response times can vary from immediately to several months
- If you do not hear back within a month, follow up with the current fellow or the program via email
- Some programs require a visitation before an interview; confirm requirements with current fellows
- If you have not received an interview invitation, follow up monthly via email or text

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Interviewing & Acceptance Notifications

Interviews for fellowships are not like residency. There is no centralized process for fellowships. The ACFAS website has current/past fellows names and you should start sending emails to those contacts beginning in January. Fellowships are very intimate, meaning that you will be spending a lot of time with the director. They need to like you, and more importantly, you need to like them. Some programs will have a set interview time to ask you questions, some will ask you questions throughout the day. The fellow will usually tell you what they prefer.

Don't stress – these interviews are not like residency – they might even be enjoyable. You will likely be taken out to lunch or dinner, as well.

The interview process:

- Interviews are typically held at the respective hospitals or offices of each program
- You must travel to each program individually for interviews, which can make the process expensive
- Prepare financially for travel, application fees, transcripts, and mailing costs
- Start early – contact current fellows in January of your second year to arrange visitations and begin visits by March
- Make sure to have vacation time/days off prepared because some residencies will not give you extra days and you may need to use vacation time
- Speak to residency director and let them know you are pursuing a fellowship



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Researching current and past fellows:

- The ACFAS website lists current and past fellows
- The email provided may belong to a secretary or director; use it to request contact information for current fellows
- Speak with current and past fellows to gain insight into the fellowship experience – the more people you speak to about a fellowship, the better picture you get
- Prepare questions for your conversations to maximize the value of these interactions
- Email current fellow to set up visits
- Get current fellow phone number to speak with them in person

Qualities sought by program directors:

- Academic achievement
- Residency program ranking
- Research involvement
- Extracurricular activities and volunteer work
- Personal interview performance, including presentation, communication, professionalism, and compatibility with attendings
- Most importantly, directors need to feel a personal connection with you



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Preparing for interviews:

- Respond promptly and gratefully to interview invitations
- Schedule the earliest interview date possible, as it keeps you memorable
- Interviewing early allows time for follow-up visits to programs you favor
- Book travel accommodations close to the interview site and rent a car for convenience
- Dress professionally and bring printed copies of your application
- Read and bring printed articles authored by program directors/fellows and reference them during your interview to demonstrate interest – you can even highlight them or take notes on them
- Most will ask you about what surgeries have done, what have you seen, and what you do daily – when you are in the OR with them, they will ask “how do you do this in your residency?” or “what procedure are you doing to fix/correct?”
- Most fellows will give you the surgeries that you are doing before you visit, so make sure to study up on those and know how you do them in your residency
- Prepare and bring a thank you card to mail immediately after the interview



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Interview day tips:

- Arrive on time
- Dress professionally
- Bring application copies and relevant articles
- Be yourself – personality fit is crucial – don't try to be someone you're not, because a year is a long time to keep up an act
- Engage actively during surgical observations and office visits and ask questions about the procedures that they are doing
- Don't be on your phone
- Don't ask questions in front of patients – wait to leave the room
- When in office, ask about their treatment plans for patients
- Express gratitude to all involved at the end of the interview



Post-interview steps:

- Mail your thank you card before departing
- Text the current fellow 2-3 days after the interview to express appreciation
- Email the director about a week later to reiterate your interest
- If you are especially interested in a program, request a follow-up visit about 1.5-2 months after the initial interview – going back to visit the programs you love can seal the deal
- Contact the program monthly to maintain awareness of your interest
- Notification of acceptance:
- Incoming fellows are notified on a rolling basis, often via a phone call from the program director

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Managing Offers

The fellowships are hard to get and very competitive. Most spots have 20 or more applicants per position. Once you accept an offer, send an email to all other places you interviewed to thank them and to withdraw your name from the applicant pool. This step is not necessary but very much appreciated by all members. This is a small profession, and people talk. Make sure you are always seen in a positive light.

Receiving and responding to offers:

- Offers are typically extended by phone call
- Given the competitive nature of fellowships, consider accepting the first offer you receive
- Only decline if you are certain the position will not make you happy
- Thank all program staff after accepting an offer
- Notify other programs of your decision to withdraw your application

Managing multiple offers:

- If you receive an offer but prefer another program, request up to 24 hours to respond, citing family discussion
- Contact your preferred program to inquire about your status
- If rejected, accept your existing offer; if accepted, notify both programs of your decision and express gratitude
- If your status is uncertain, it is advisable to accept the offer you have

If you do not receive offers:

- Continue periodic contact to maintain awareness – this makes them think of you, and makes them feel bad for not having contacted you yet
- Some programs may not contact you if you are not selected
- If you don't get any offers, it's fine – there are very few good fellowships
- If you don't receive an offer, focus on pursuing other opportunities and prioritizing your happiness

