



CASE STUDY

Impromptu Response to Adverse Weather: One School's Successful Application of Digital Interviewing for Medical School Admissions [version 1]

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Abstract

This article was migrated. The article was marked as recommended.

In-person interviewing is the norm during the medical school application process, but it is not always possible due to reasons such as exorbitant cost of travel, work or residence outside the country and adverse travel conditions. In January 2016 during Winter Storm Jonas in the eastern United States of America, officials at the West Virginia University School of Medicine (WVU SOM) mandated a closure of the campus resulting in the cancellation of twenty on-site medical school interviews. The impromptu solution to overcoming this obstacle to in-person interviewing is described here as a case study. The successful use of digital interviewing has already been described at the residency and fellowship level; we believe this is the first reported case study about the successful use of FaceTime interviewing at the medical school level, and it may encourage admissions officials to expand the use of this modality in medical student recruitment.

Keywords

medical school admissions, interviews, digital interviews, recruitment

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1. **Trevor Gibbs**, AMEE
2. **Michelle McLean**, Bond University
3. **Anthony David.M**, Soho

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

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Introduction

In-person interviewing is the norm during the medical school application process, but it is not always possible due to reasons such as exorbitant cost of travel, work or residence outside the country and adverse travel conditions. In January 2016 during Winter Storm Jonas in the eastern United States of America, officials at the West Virginia University School of Medicine (WVU SOM) mandated a closure of the campus on a Friday and the following Monday resulting in the cancellation of twenty on-site medical school interviews. Although five candidates had already arrived in town and were situated in a hotel, on-campus interviews were not possible. The impromptu solution to overcoming this obstacle to in-person interviewing is described here as a case study.

Case Study

In response to a campus closure, twenty medical school applicants were offered a FaceTime interview in lieu of an in-person interview during Winter Storm Jonas in January of 2016. Applicants agreeable to a FaceTime interview received emails with links to information and video presentations about the WVU SOM and its three campuses. The FaceTime interviews were conducted separately one-on-one by the Admissions Dean and the Chairman of the Committee on Admissions (COA), lasting approximately 45 minutes each. Since the inclement weather prohibited travel, the interviewers conducted the interviews in their respective homes, while the interviewees remained at their own locations in their homes or hotel rooms. The interviewers thoroughly reviewed the applicants' files beforehand and conducted their interviews in a similar style to a typical in-person interview. Unlike in-person applicants, FaceTime applicants did not have the opportunity to interact with other COA members, student services personnel or current medical students, and they were unable to have an actual facility tour. Post-interview evaluation forms of the candidates, identical to those forms for in-person interviews, were completed by the interviewers. The candidates were subsequently presented to the COA in identical fashion to those candidates interviewed in-person. Similar to candidates interviewed in-person, the FaceTime candidates completed a post-interview survey about their interview experience.

Nine of the twenty applicants (45%) chose to participate in the FaceTime interview in lieu of the standard in-person interview. Five (56%) of the applicants were situated in a hotel, and four (44%) were at home. No technical difficulties occurred, except for slight lag in message transmission during one interview. The rankings by the COA of these nine applicants were as follows: 44% were accepted and 56% were waitlisted for the Class of 2020. Ultimately, 33% of the applicants that interviewed via FaceTime matriculated. In comparison, for the 11 applicants who refused a FaceTime interview, 18% withdrew their application, 9% were accepted, 55% were waitlisted, and 18% were rejected. Ultimately, none of the 11 students matriculated. In regards to the entire applicant pool of individuals who interviewed in-person (93% of those offered an in-person interview), the rankings by the COA were as follows: 21% were accepted, 63% were waitlisted, 12% ultimately matriculated, and 17% were rejected. In comparing the three groups of the FaceTime candidates (N=9), the candidates who chose not to use FaceTime (N=11), and those applicants who interviewed in-person through the rest of the interview process (N=872), no significant differences were noted with respect to acceptance rates, waitlisted rates and rejection rates. There was a trend ($p=0.07$) favoring those who used FaceTime to eventual matriculation.

Results of the post-interview survey by the FaceTime interviewees revealed that 100% agreed that the interviewers thoroughly reviewed their applications, 100% described the interview as "just right," and 86% rated the over-all experience at "excellent," while 14% rated the over-all experience as "fair." In regards to the effectiveness of the digital interview in comparison to other in-person interviews experienced by the interviewees, 71% rated the FaceTime interview as "just as effective," while 29% rated it as "not as effective." Fifty-seven percent felt less stress for the FaceTime vs. the in-person interview.

Discussion

Although medical schools already use digital interviews for recruitment in special circumstances, the literature is scarce concerning the effectiveness of these interviews. The experience at the WVU SOM provides evidence that FaceTime interviews are a viable alternative to in-person interviews when obstacles and unforeseeable circumstances (like severe weather) preclude campus visits by applicants. The use of FaceTime for interviews in lieu of an in-person interview was considered effective for both the applicants and our institution. As digital interviewing is becoming more widely used in the general workforce, resources on the topic are becoming available (Bailo, 2014; Higgins, 2014). Travel and accommodation costs (AAMC, 2016) adding to increasing debt, inclement weather and residence in another country are sample reasons for medical schools to consider offering FaceTime interviews to certain applicants who experience these obstacles. Winter Storm Jonas was the impetus for the use of FaceTime interviews at the WVU SOM, and the interview process was successful for medical school recruiting. Although not previously reported for medical school recruiting, the use of digital interviewing has already been reported to be successful in the recruiting of residents and/or fellows in the fields of Pediatrics, Family Medicine, Anesthesiology, Urology and Gastroenterology (Nield et al, 2013;

Edje et al, 2013; Vadi et al, 2016; Shah et al, 2012; Daram et al, 2014). We believe this is the first case study report about the successful use of FaceTime interviewing at the medical school level, and it may encourage admissions officials to expand the use of this modality in recruitment.

Take Home Messages

- The case study by West Virginia University School of Medicine provides evidence that digital interviewing can be a successful modality for student recruitment.
- Although digital interviewing has been employed in just special circumstances, medical school admissions officials should consider its use more routinely as a means to decrease travel and accomodation costs for applicants, with the ultimate goal of potentially decreasing overall student debt.

Notes On Contributors

Linda S. Nield, MD is the Assistant Dean for Admissions and Professor in the Departments of Medical Education and Pediatrics at West Virginia University School of Medicine.

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Declarations

The author has declared that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Anthony David.M

Soho

This review has been migrated. The reviewer awarded 5 stars out of 5

This is an innovative and well written paper. Congratulations to the authors. I have had some experience in taking interviews via Skype for faculty positions. I find that it is a good learning exercise. Sometimes the connections are poor and can cause disruptions but most of the time it is fine. The amount of time, money and effort saved by these medical school aspirants is enormous. Perhaps it is time to consider whether Skype/Facetime interviews can replace live interviews in many situations!

Competing Interests: No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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Michelle McLean

Bond University

This review has been migrated. The reviewer awarded 4 stars out of 5

Thanks, Nield et al. for reminding us that technology can assist us. Having just lived through five days of MMIs with more than 250 students from across Australia and NZ, with many early mornings and evenings, surely there must be a more cost-effective way? Not only are there costs to the university but

students and their parents must travel and perhaps overnight near the university. The challenge will be organizing eight MMI stations remotely vs. one long interview.

Competing Interests: No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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Trevor Gibbs

AMEE

This review has been migrated. The reviewer awarded 4 stars out of 5

After running the various "Medical Education in Difficult Circumstances" activities at last year's AMEE Conference in Barcelona, it was interesting to hear of the various "difficult circumstance". For many years these focused on resource and financial issues, but now that spectrum is much wider and this paper highlights one of those varied "difficult circumstances". This paper was very clearly written and introduced a somewhat novel approach to interviewing medical students when face-to-face interviewing was not possible. I felt that the results were fascinating and showed that there was little difference from a face-to-face interview. If I was going to be critical at all about the paper I wondered if a more qualitative approach might have been more effective in understanding some of the reasons that some students passed and others failed to matriculate. I would also have liked to have heard from the interviewers as to their perceptions of the activity. Despite these reservations, I feel that this is a useful paper and I am sure we are going to hear more about these types of interviews in future years

Competing Interests: No conflicts of interest were disclosed.
