

Health Professions Education Institute (HPEI)

Title: Using Google Analytics to Inform Fellowship Website Development and Recruitment Strategies During The COVID-19 Pandemic

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MEDICAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

Background: Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, fellowship programs redesigned their recruitment strategies to provide applicants a meaningful remote experience. To our knowledge, there is no published research illustrating the value of data analytics in evaluating fellowship programs' website traffic.

Objectives: This study sought to determine the utility of Google Analytics in analyzing fellowship program viewership data. Furthermore, we sought to use this data to provide insight as fellowship program leadership tailors web pages to maximize viewer engagement.

Methods/Design: Google Analytics was used to compare data from all Internal Medicine Subspecialty Fellowship program websites from three recruitment seasons; 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 (through December 2021). Website page views, time spent on the pages and bounce rate—a gauge of interactivity—were analyzed to understand the importance of program websites during virtual fellowship recruitment. Data was compared based on being pre-pandemic (2019-2020) and pandemic (2020-2021 and 2021-2022) recruitment seasons.

Results: All program websites were viewed 31,956 times in 2019-2020, 71,338 times in 2020-2021, and 66,593 times in 2021-2022. When comparing pre-pandemic to pandemic seasons, page views increased by 53.7%. Peak traffic occurred from July to November accounting for an 55.1% of total yearly views pre-pandemic and 74.3% of views during the pandemic. While page views increased, average time spent per view was relatively unchanged pre-pandemic compared to during the pandemic at 74.8 and 70.7 seconds per view, respectively. Despite viewing time being flat, bounce rate improved markedly from 40.9% pre-pandemic to 24.4% during the pandemic.

Conclusions: With the change to virtual fellowship recruitment, websites are more important than ever. The data presented here shows much greater website activity since onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and details a viewership peak from July to November. An unchanged total viewing time suggests websites have similar amounts of time to draw interest while a drastic decrease in bounce rate suggests applicants are more willing to interact with content posted on fellowship websites. Google Analytics collects robust and easily analyzed data. It has efficacy in tracking the online presence of fellowship programs and providing information on the value of digital adjustments on viewer engagement.