Five Years in the Era of the *AFMC Student Portal*:
Canadian Medical Students' Experiences and Recommendations

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Five Years in the Era of the AFMC Student Portal: Canadian Medical Students' Experiences and Recommendations

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POSITION PAPER

Summary of Position Paper

The functionality of the *AFMC Student Portal* has been a longstanding concern for students. In April 2019, the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) general assembly passed a motion to form a working group mandated to propose constructive recommendations to improve the Portal. Through two surveys of the CFMS general membership, the Working Group identified shortcomings of the Portal, prioritized issues, and produce actionable items to reduce barriers and stress that students experience using the Portal. The overarching recommendation from this Working Group is a need for standardization in multiple areas of electives application policies across all Canadian medical schools. The recommendations presented propose that the AFMC address students' concerns in four areas: response times to applications; portal costs and refund policies; capacity reporting for electives; and the portal's general functionality. Furthermore, Medical Student Societies should share knowledge and advocate for improvements to the system at the local level.

Principles / Stance

1. Selecting and booking electives allows Canadian medical students to increase their exposure to disciplines and locations to guide their residency choice and expand their professional experiences;
2. Modern technology should be leveraged efficiently to reduce administrative workload for students and schools;
3. The process to select and book electives should not be an undue burden on Canadian medical students' finances and mental health.

Concerns

1. Over 60% of Canadian medical students do not apply to electives they want because of issues (including cost and delay of responses) with the Portal, therefore limiting their exposure and hampering their education;
2. On the Working Group's survey, 87% of respondents declared their satisfaction rating with the Portal as being 6/10 or less;
3. Variability in the use of the Portal at each school leads to delay in response times, high costs of application, and different document requirements, and causes significant distress to most Canadian medical students.

Introduction / Background

At the Canadian Federation for Medical Students (CFMS) Spring General Meeting (SGM) in April 2019, fifteen medical student society presidents of the Presidents' Round Table (PRT) initiated discussions on the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada (AFMC) Student Portal (hereinafter, "the Portal"). To support the ongoing work of the CFMS Director of Education and Education Attaché, a motion for a student working group mandated to issue constructive recommendations to the Portal (hereinafter, "the Working Group") was put forward [1] and passed.

The Portal was developed for medical students in response to an observed lack of a national database for elective placements. It was piloted to a small number of schools in summer 2014, at which time it was open to Canadian and international medical students for a one-time fee of $150 [2]. Regretfully, multiple CFMS roundtables have independently evaluated that the Portal continues to fall short of its student-centered goals five years after its inception.

Many challenges have come to light regarding the use of the Portal. Notably, discussions at CFMS roundtables have included variable and slow response times from schools, high and hidden costs, inconsistent refund policies, inflexibility to changes in elective choices and dates, non-user-friendly interfaces, and an overall inconsistency in policies and requirements between schools, despite the Portal's original intent of standardizing the elective registration process.

Challenges of electives registration remain regretfully similar to those identified prior to the creation of the Portal, despite its intent to improve the electives registration process. For example, Jesse Kancir, then Past-President of the CFMS, outlined his hopes in 2014 that the Portal would lead to Faculty standardization of requirements for placements [2]. This standardization has yet to come to fruition (see Appendix A).

It will take time and national participation for positive change to occur. This Working Group aims to initiate this process by formulating prioritized recommendations to the AFMC and promoting student-led negotiations in a coordinated and efficient manner. The Working Group's objective is to advocate for timely and responsive improvements to the Portal.

Current CFMS advocacy efforts target increasing AFMC transparency on the high costs of electives application and adopting a refund strategy to help mitigate financial burden on students. However, it has been recognized that, although the Portal is used by each school, each use the system differently, which makes its use unnecessarily complex.

The Working Group sent surveys to all Canadian medical students who had used the Portal (Classes of 2019 and 2020, as well as 2021 at certain schools). The aim of the surveys was to understand which shortcomings to prioritize, identify unknown issues, and eventually distill out actionable items that will help to reduce the burden and stress that students experience using the Portal (see Appendix B for

methodology). It is hoped that with survey-proven data, this will help strengthen the perspective and the voice of students' concerns with the Portal and allow CFMS to tailor advocacy to improve it.

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1. Over 60% of Canadian medical students do not apply to electives they want because of issues (including cost and delay of responses) with the Portal, therefore limiting their exposure and hampering their education;
2. On the Working Group's survey, 87% of respondents declared their satisfaction rating with the Portal as being 6/10 or less;
3. Variability in the use of the Portal at each school leads to delay in response times, high costs of application, and different document requirements, and causes significant distress to most Canadian medical students.

Recommendations

Please see Appendix A for a summary table of all school requirements on the Portal, Appendix B for methodology and Appendix C for results from Survey 2.

The CFMS recommends the following to the AFMC:

Response Times

- Mandate a standardized maximum response time from schools and/or open applications for electives closer to the elective start date.
- Identify and report factors that impact response times associated with electives applications to facilitate quality improvement and procedural transparency;
- Implement a national standard for cancellations with leniency for unexpected life events / personal emergencies.

Ninety-five percent of survey respondents indicated that one of the challenges they had faced when using the Portal was the variable response times by schools regarding their application to an elective. In fact, response times for electives' application from administrators was rated as the top priority to address by medical students across the country. Ninety-seven percent of students agreed or strongly agreed that standardizing schools' response time would help them better plan and obtain electives they wanted (see Appendix C). Students reported cancelling their applications to electives because of the delay in answering.

As per the *AFMC Student Portal Data on Visiting Electives 2017-2018: National Report*, the shortest average time students had waited for an answer from a school was 8.51 days, and the longest average time students had waited for an answer from a school was 101.78 days [3]. This seems to be in concordance with what was self-reported in the surveys. As per the respondents, the longest wait time was on average 14 weeks (median 15 weeks), and the shortest waiting time was on average 1.9 weeks (median 1.0 week). Understanding where this variation comes from would be helpful to work on quality improvement to aim that slower responding schools approach the faster ones, especially considering that specific schools have been consistently singled out as being quicker or slower to answer students. These could align with the national processing time average (31 days) or median (19 days) [3].

Although students must send applications to schools at least 16 weeks before the elective start date, schools may wait up to 8 weeks before the elective start date to accept or decline a student for the elective. It was reported that some schools waited until even closer to the elective start date to communicate this to students. As a result, students may not have a confirmed elective before the application deadline, forcing many of them to double book in case their application gets rejected. Additionally, multiple respondents identified concern that schools may cancel an elective without a refund at any time in the process, whereas a student most often cannot cancel an elective without financial or academic consequences.

It is our opinion that if response times can be standardized and enforced, many of the other complaints about the Portal would be resolved.

Portal Costs & Refund Policies

- Minimize costs per application;
- Publish and update a list of all fees expected to be incurred before and after receiving the confirmed elective;
- Reduce major discrepancies in application fees between schools;
- Offer partial or full reimbursement for cancelled electives.

Ninety-four percent of survey respondents indicated high costs as one of the challenges they had faced when using the Portal. When the analysis of respondents' answers was done with priority scoring, high costs came out as the second priority for students. Ninety-one percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had experienced financial stress as a result of applying for visiting electives

through the Portal. Additionally, 94% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to see standardization of fees across schools (see Appendix C).

Perhaps more worrisome, however, was that 65% of respondents chose not to apply for one or more electives due to high costs (see Appendix C). Multiple students also shared that they had chosen not to apply for an elective because of the lack of refund policies. It is thus evident that high costs remain an important barrier to access electives and career development opportunities for medical students across Canada. In fact, as one respondent put it: "It is very disheartening and frustrating [to go] through this process. The Portal is another way that medical education discriminates against those who are less wealthy. Colleagues of mine who come from wealthy parents were able to apply for multiple electives where I could apply for two. [...] The process creates a lot of stress and financial burden and makes the elective experience less enjoyable."

As per the *AFMC Student Portal Data on Visiting Electives 2017-2018: National Report*, on average, Canadian medical students apply to 4.7 electives for 5.5 elective weeks at 3.4 medical schools, and the average cost per application shouldered by the students is $138.53 [3]. This means that on average a student spends around $650 on application fees per year. The above recommendations allow the AFMC to acknowledge and reduce the financial strain that electives applications inflict on students and demonstrate a commitment to ongoing financial transparency.

Furthermore, multiple respondents expressed frustration with hidden costs of the Portal such as having to become a member of the provincial College, or tuition fees. Other recurring comments focused on the lack of transparency of fees to use the Portal. Every institution should list all fees for each elective on the Portal including those before and after receiving the confirmed elective. Additionally, by reducing major discrepancies in fees between schools, the AFMC will promote equal opportunity for host schools to receive applications.

Capacity Reports

- Mandate medical schools to regularly publish updated capacity reports during the application time period; and/or
- Enable an option for an elective to appear as "fully booked" on the Portal in a timely manner;
- Offer full and timely reimbursement of application fees in the event that an application cannot be considered due to lack of capacity.

Processing applications after reaching capacity inflicts unmerited financial strain on students and increases burden for students, staff and administration. These solutions would help students plan and choose which electives to apply to for specific elective periods. Additionally, we strongly believe that these steps would decrease the number of applications, therefore reducing burden and decreasing response times for elective applications from administrators, which was rated by respondents as the top priority to address for medical students across the country.

As per respondents, another important challenge to address is the lack of a way to identify an elective as being full. Multiple students expressed frustration at applying to an elective which may already be at full capacity, especially knowing some schools don't offer refunds in these cases. It was reported as well that, at some schools, it was even against the rules to ask about availability before applying to an elective.

Elective Applications / Portal Functionality

- Standardize the required documents to apply for electives across the country;
- Clearly mark schools who use extra-Portal confirmations;
- Consider alternative systems for prioritizing applicants to replace the current first-come-first-serve nature of the Portal.

Standardizing the required documents to apply for electives was identified as the third highest priority country wide by the survey (see Appendix C). Almost half of the students that responded to the survey included additional comments, insights and suggestions for the Portal. Above are a few themes and common suggestions worth consideration by the AFMC Student Portal Steering Committee.

The CFMS recommends the following to the Medical Student Societies across Canada in partnership with Career Planning Offices at their respective schools:

Knowledge Dissemination

- Distribute resources such as statistics on costs and response times on the Portal for students;
- Provide clerkship students, for example through their Class Presidents, with a timeline of steps in applying to electives through the Portal;
- Communicate to students the selection criteria and processes from different schools, as recommended by the AFMC-endorsed Best Practices in Applications & Selection (BPAS) report [4].

Sharing of information is a necessary process to facilitate advocacy and positive change, and to promote a collaborative relationship between the AFMC and medical students. We believe that regular knowledge dissemination is critical to informing students of the present concerns and successes, so students can better prepare themselves for the challenges of using the Portal and engage in meaningful advocacy to contribute to the Portal's improvement.

Advocacy Efforts

- Work with local Undergraduate Medical Education (UGME) offices to pass a visiting electives policy which reflects the above recommendations and to suggest alternatives to punitive policies for late cancellations by students;

- Highlight the successes at individual medical schools to advocate for improved practices nationwide;
- Hold administrations accountable for money garnered from electives fees to ensure they are being re-invested in students.

The information and recommendations provided herein require follow-up in order to be acted upon. Continued advocacy from student representatives will keep this issue at the forefront of decision makers' minds. While the AFMC oversees and regulates the Portal's operation, it is the individual medical schools' responsibilities to enforce policies. Persistent and diligent effort at local levels is required in order for advocacy efforts to result in real change.

Conclusion

Visiting electives are an integral part of the clerkship experience. They help us create a medical community across Canada by encouraging students to explore programs and practices far from their home schools. These experiences add to the educational experience and provide opportunities for mentorships and friendships across city lines and provincial borders. Despite the progress to date, there is work needed within the current Portal system. As a result of ongoing issues, medical student wellness, finances, and access to learning opportunities are needlessly suffering. The problems are apparent, and so are the solutions.

Our overarching message is a need for standardization in multiple areas of electives application policies across all Canadian medical schools. This paper is a guiding document for the AFMC, UGME Electives Offices, and Medical Student Societies (MSS). By identifying tangible and achievable solutions to the current challenges with the electives system, we hope to improve the situation for all stakeholders.

This is also a call to action: we ask the AFMC and every medical school to attain SMART goals surrounding our recommendations, to be transparent about these efforts, and to share their successes and challenges. To achieve our common goal of a better system we must employ both a top down, AFMC-driven, and bottom up, MSS/UGME-driven, approach.

References

[1] Canadian Federation of Medical Students. 12. Motion - AFMC Portal advocacy.pdf [Internet]. Ottawa; 2019 [cited 25 Aug 2019]. Available from: https://www.cfms.org/files/meetings/sgm-2019/resolutions/12.%20Motion%20-%20AFMC%20Portal%20advocacy.pdf.

[2] Vogel, L. New national medical electives portal. CMAJ. 2014;186(12):902-902. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.109-4835.

[3] The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada. AFMC Student Portal Data on Visiting Electives 2017-2018: National Report [Internet]. 2018 [cited 25 Aug 2019]. Available from: https://afmc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/en/Publications/2017-2018-AFMC_StudentPortalDataVisitingElectivesNationalReport_EN.pdf.

[4] Bandiera, G. et al. Best Practices in Applications & Selection [Internet]. Postgraduate Medical Education (University of Toronto); 20 Sept 2013 [cited 25 Aug 2019]. Available from: https://pg.postmd.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BestPracticesApplicationsSelectionFinalReport-13_09_20.pdf.

Appendix A: Summary of Each School's Requirements

Table 1: Requirements for Canadian medical students to book electives at Canadian medical schools

School	Email	Phone number	Fees	Refund Offered?	Cancellation Policy	Contacting preceptor beforehand?	Limit on number of applications	Required documents	Additional Notes
*A: Recent and clear headshot, B: AFMC Immunization Form, C: Proof of N95 mask fitting, D: Police Records Check for Service with Vulnerable Sector									
University of British Columbia	visiting.electives@ubc.ca	N/A	$200 at time of application ($100 non-refundable, $100 electives fee)	Yes, $100 if an elective is not confirmed by 8 weeks prior to the elective start date	6 weeks before	No	Max 8 applications	A + B 1. Professional Standards Acknowledgment Form (UBC-specific) 2. English Language Proficiency Scoresheet (UBC-specific) for Ottawa U French, UdM, Laval & Sherbrooke	If none of the 8 choices is available, the students will be sent an availability report with the invitation to submit 8 (?) new choices for free or to remain waitlisted for their initial ones.
University of Alberta	visitingelectives@ualberta.ca	+1 (780) 492-1514	$150 ($50 admin non-refundable fee, $100 electives fee)	Yes, $100 refundable if unsuccessful	6 weeks before	No	Max 15 applications, with a max of 6 confirmed applications/12 elective weeks	A + B + D	
University of Calgary	visiting@ucalgary.ca	N/A	$100 (paid once the elective is confirmed by the Department)	No	6 weeks before	Yes (must do this)	1 choice per application, max 8 weeks combined	A + B + D 1. Confirmation note from Placement Contact (Calgary-specific)	Steps to apply for elective: 1. Email visiting@ucalgary.ca on or after Feb 1 to ask for contact information of the departments 2. Email departments to request elective 3. Department emails to confirm and elective is considered confirmed 4. 10-28 weeks before the elective, apply on AFMC Portal, uploading the confirmation email
University of Saskatchewan	med.electives@usask.ca	N/A	$100 (non-refundable)	No	6 weeks before	No	Max 2 electives, max 3 choices for each, cannot be more than 8 weeks combined	A + B + C	
University of Manitoba	electivesugme@umanitoba.ca	+1 (204) 789-3291	$100 (non-refundable) + $198.13 once accepted	No	6 weeks before	No	Max 2 electives, max 1 choice for each, cannot be more than 8 weeks combined	A + B 1. Resume/CV 2. Copy of provincial health card	
Northern Ontario	electives@nosm.ca	N/A	$200 (non-refundable)	Yes, in full if not offered, in half if unsuccessful	8 weeks before	Yes, but discouraged and should not	Max 1 elective, max 3 choices	A + B + C 1. Letter of good standing from home school	

School of Medicine				8 weeks prior to elective start date		confirm final dates independently			
Western University	electives @schulic h.uwo.ca	N/A	$100 (non-refundable)	No	6 weeks before	No	Each application can accommodate 3 elective choices	A + B + C 1. Criminal record disclosure and consent (Western-specific) 2. Proof of current year's influenza immunization (post-application, for electives Nov – March)	Letter of unprofessionalism may be sent to home school if student contacts preceptors individually $1000 late fee if application submitted less than 16 weeks prior to start of first requested elective.
McMaster University	hrsadmin @mcmas ter.ca	+1 (905) 525-9140 ext. 22249	2-week elective: $150 ($50 admin fee, $100 elective fee) 4-week elective: $200 ($50 admin fee, $150 elective fee)	Yes, between $100 - $150 refundable if unsuccessful	6 weeks before	No	Can provide up to 6 choices of specialties and/or dates per application	A + B + D 1. Copies of lab results for HIV and Hepatitis C (post-application)	Letter of unprofessionalism may be sent to home school if student contacts preceptors individually
University of Toronto	medicine .electives @utoron to.ca	N/A	$200 (partially refundable)	Yes, partial refund if unsuccessful	6 weeks before	Yes (encouraged)	Max 1 elective per application, with the option to list up to 6 additional choices	A + B + C + D 1. University of Toronto Police check disclosure (completed by applicant)	May seek elective opportunities at http://medsis.utoronto.ca/electives/index.cfm?fuseactio n=SearchElect.showsearchmask Must still apply via Portal Priority placements are given to UofT students
Queen's University	medelect @queens u.ca	+1 (613) 533-2542	$100 (non-refundable)	No	6 weeks before	No	3 different choices should be submitted, max 7 applications	A + B + C 1. Resume/CV 2. Copies of lab results for HIV and Hepatitis C (post-application)	
Ottawa University	uoportal @uottaw a.ca	+1 (613) 562-5800 ext. 3459	$100 (non-refundable)	No	6 weeks before	No	Max 6 choices per application, max 6 applications per year	A + B + C + D 1. Self-declaration form (Ottawa-specific) 2. Module completion attestation form (Ottawa-specific) 3. Consent to Release Information 4. Proof of a valid CPR-HCP or BLS certification 5. Copies of lab results for HIV and Hepatitis C	Letter of unprofessionalism may be sent to home school if cancellation occurs less than six weeks prior to the elective start date
McGill University	electives. med@mc gill.ca	+1 (514) 398-5390	Up to 2 weeks: $250 ($75 admin fee, $175 elective fee) Up to 4 weeks: $350 ($75 admin fee, $275 elective fee) Up to 6 weeks: $450 ($75 admin fee, $375 elective fee)	Yes, between $175 - $375 if unsuccessful	8 weeks before	No	Up to 3 elective choices per application, and a maximum of 5	A + C 1. Resume/CV 2. Proof of health insurance 3. Student Acceptance Form	Letter of unprofessionalism may be sent to home school if cancellation occurs less than eight weeks prior to the elective start date

			Up to 8 weeks: $450 ($75 admin fee, $375 elective fee)				applications can be submitted.		
Dalhousie University	CdnElectives@dal.ca	N/A	$150 (non-refundable)	No	6 weeks before	Only from a select list (see additional notes)	Maximum of 3 applications are allowed	A + C 1. Pledge of confidentiality (Dalhousie-specific)	Students may contact preceptors from the departments of Anesthesia, Psychiatry, Sports Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Radiation Oncology and Surgery. Letter of unprofessionalism may be sent to home school if student attemps to ask or submit another application after the maximum of 3 is attained.
Memorial University of Newfoundland	ugme.electives@med.mun.ca	+1 (709) 864-6362	$100 (non-refundable) + $50 once accepted	No	4 weeks before	Not specified on institution profile or website	Max 1 elective, max 1 choice, max 4 weeks	A + B + D 1. Resume/CV 2. Proof of health insurance	Police records check with vulnerable sector screening must be dated no more than 8 months prior to the elective start date (whereas this is 12 months for most other schools)

Appendix B: Methodology

The AFMC Student Portal Working Group membership consists of eight student representatives from the following Canadian medical schools: the University of Toronto, Queen's University, McGill University, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Saskatchewan, and the University of British Columbia. Members were selected to be a diverse group composed of both clerks and pre-clerks. The CFMS Ontario Regional Director & Education Attaché, Rishi Sharma, was also a periodic consultant in this Working Group.

A literature search on undergraduate medicine clerkship electives application portals was conducted to understand the context for the Portal's creation, and identify available data on visiting electives at Canadian medical schools. Student consultation was then carried out in a two-step process through two surveys.

Survey 1 was created with input from members of the working group and the Canadian Federation of Medical Students (CFMS) Board. Survey questions were designed to collect qualitative data on the student experience of using the Portal to obtain electives. The survey was sent only to clerkship student leaders at each Canadian medical school, and collected responses from May 26th, 2019 to June 9th, 2019. A total of eight responses were received, seven from students who used the Portal to book some but not all their electives, and one from a student who used the Portal to book all their electives. Thematic analysis of narrative responses identified common concerns. The survey was then reopened until August 11th and collected an additional nine responses for a total of 17.

Results from Survey 1 informed the design of Survey 2, with additional input from members of the working group and the CFMS Board. Survey 2 questions collected quantitative and qualitative data on students' experiences and opinions regarding challenges identified with the Portal. The survey was sent on July 28th, 2019 to all current clerkship students through the Vice-President Education/Academic Affairs at each Canadian medical school via the CFMS Academic Roundtable (ART), and collected responses until August 11th, 2019.

Qualitative data from Survey 1 underwent thematic analysis with the purpose of identifying benefits and challenges students encounter when using the Portal. Specifically, using NVIVO, common themes were identified using a word frequency query, displaying the 20 most words with a minimum length of 5 letters. Common or conversational words were removed (eg. their, it, and). Remaining words were then used to develop common themes for each question. Sentences from each respondent were then coded numerically and used to generate bar graphs illustrating the most common themes. Comments were only removed from analysis if they provided identifying material or were single word answers (eg. N/A).

Data from Survey 2 is summarized using descriptive statistical methods. Percentages, means, and medians reported were calculated using the aggregate data collected. Priority scores were calculated in the following way: respondents ranked challenges from 1-3. Any item ranked 1 was assigned a score of

3. Any item ranked 2 was assigned a score of 2. Any item ranked 3 was assigned a score of 1. The total was counted for each item and each rank and summed to provide a "priority score". Comparison tables were used to highlight the contrast between wait times and refund processes. The comparative ratio was calculated using the percentage of responses rather than the actual value to compensate for differing number of responses between questions. Qualitative data was summarized through thematic analysis without the use of NVIVO.

Survey questions and raw data from Survey 1 and Survey 2 supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon request.

Appendix C: Survey 2 Results

Please note: Raw data from supporting the findings outlined below are available from the authors upon request.

1. Respondents by Medical School:

University of British Columbia	28
Western University	25
University of Toronto	20
University of Saskatchewan	17
University of Calgary	16
McGill University	15
Queen's University	13
Northern Ontario School of Medicine	7
University of Alberta	4
Non specified	5
Total	**150**

Some schools are unrepresented which could sway certain results. It is possible that students from a particular school are more likely to apply for electives at a subset of specific schools. (i.e. students from western schools may be more likely to book electives at other western schools). While it would be preferable to have respondents from every school, the results gathered still indicate the need for advocacy in the areas recommended. If more data is required in the future, more time may be allocated to ensure responses from all schools.

2. Students' Use of the Portal:

Have you ever used the AFMC Electives Portal to book a visiting elective?

151 responses

98.7%

- Yes
- No
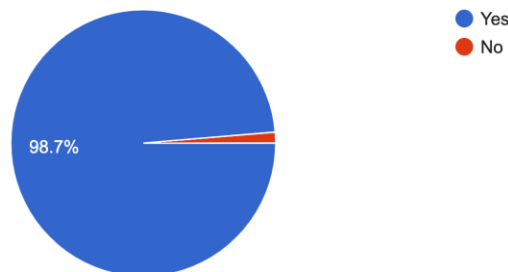
There were two negative responses. One respondent answered the other questions in a manner that suggested they had actually used the portal. The other did not and will be excluded from the data below.

3. Challenges Faced with Respect to the Portal:
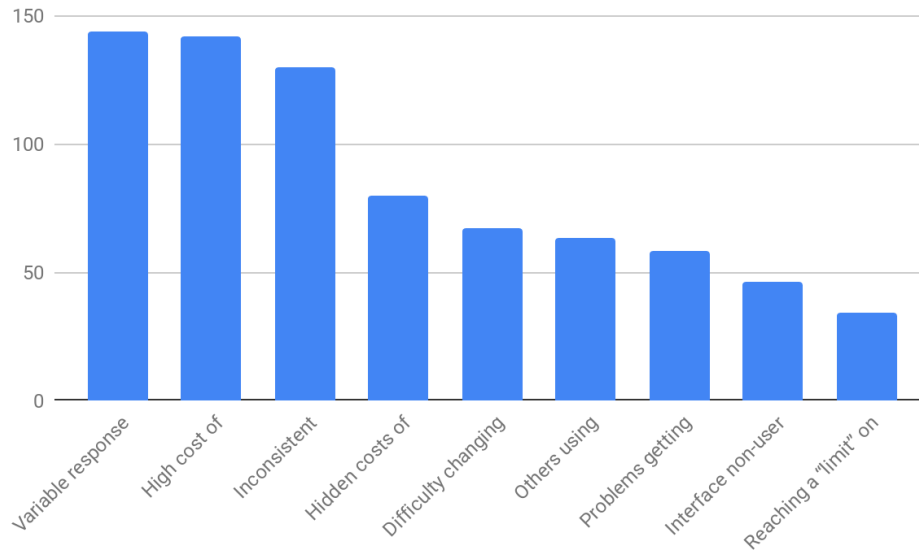
Variable response time by school	144
High cost of applications	142
Inconsistent requirements from each school	130
Hidden costs of electives not stated (eg. medical board registration)	80
Difficulty changing electives' dates / choices	67
Others using methods outside of the portal to secure electives	63
Problems getting refunds	58
Interface non-user friendly	46
Reaching a "limit" on the number of applications per school	34

The three most common selected challenges from the available options were: (1) Variable response times by school, (2) High cost of applications, and (3) Inconsistent requirements from each school. Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated that the variable response times from schools was a challenge they faced when using the portal.

Other comments themes included: electives on the portal that are already full, misleading students to apply for an elective they cannot have; delayed responses from schools and cancellation of electives from schools without notice to the student; inability to follow-up with schools and unexpected requirements from schools after elective is approved; and frustration with first-come-first-serve process.

4. Challenges Organized by Priority to Students:

Priority Score for Responses
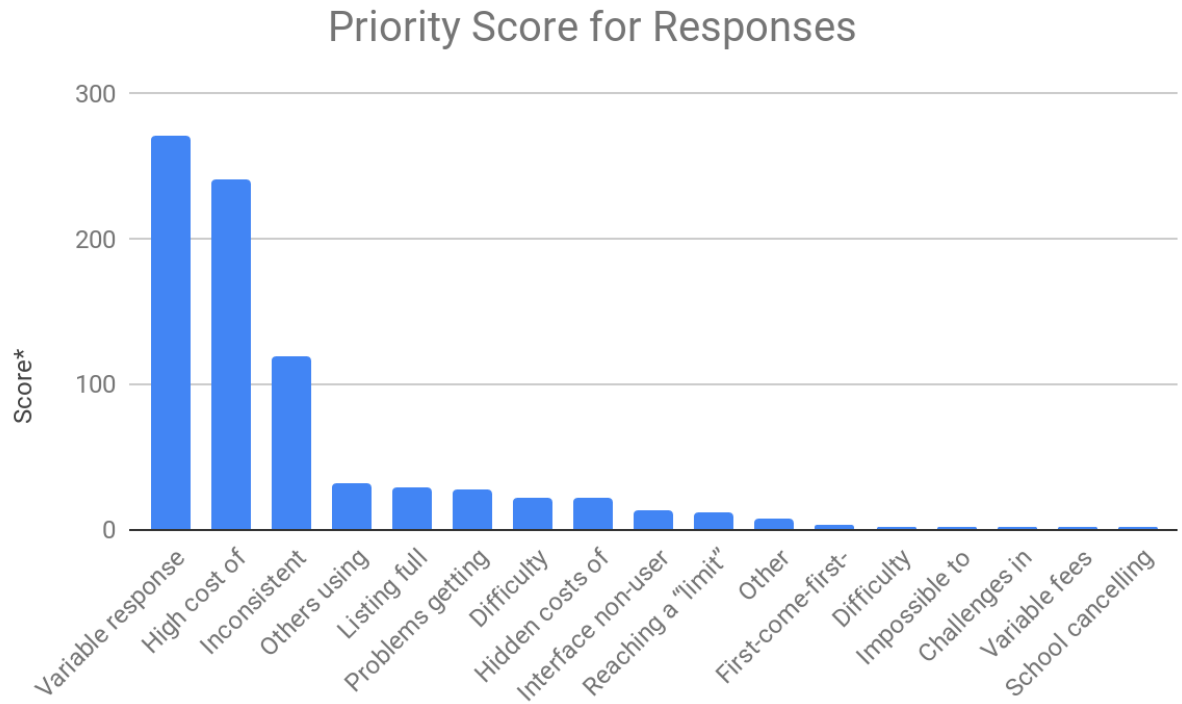
*Score: see Appendix A

After compiling a priority score, it solidified the findings from the above question, but emphasized that the variable response times from school and the cost of applications were the biggest concerns. 'Variable response time by school' was the most common concern listed as a priority, followed by 'high cost of applications'. 'Inconsistent requirements from each school' was the next highest priority. Interestingly, the fifth highest priority, according to calculated scores, was a concern with the portal not listing when electives are full (allowing students to apply for an elective even when it is not available). This accounted for 29/36 'Other' responses and was therefore separated and given its own column.

The results indicate that the first priority should be addressing the inconsistent system of approving electives. There is variability both between schools and within schools that must be addressed. Adding an "elective full" notification or eliminating full electives on the Portal could be a fast fix that is still important to students.

5. Longest Wait for Response (including school):

The mean longest wait time self-reported by students is 14 weeks with a median of 14.5 weeks.

Following is a table showing the number of times the school was the slowest to respond to a student.

School	Count	%
McMaster	40	38.5
Ottawa	14	13.5
U of A	9	8.7
U of M	9	8.7
Dalhousie	6	5.8
MUN	5	4.8
UBC	4	3.8
U of T	4	3.8
U of C	4	3.8
UdM	3	2.9
Sherbrooke	2	1.9
Western	2	1.9
NOSM	2	1.9

6. Shortest Wait for Response (including school):

The mean shortest wait time self-reported by students is 1.9 weeks and the median is 1 week.
Following is a table showing the number of times this school was the fastest to respond to a student.

School	Count	%
U of T	26	22.2
UBC	14	12.0
Ottawa	12	10.3
U of C	12	10.3
U of A	11	9.4
Dalhousie	11	9.4
U of S	6	5.1
McMaster	6	5.1
Western	6	5.1
Queen's	5	4.3
U of M	4	3.4
Sherbrooke	1	0.9
Laval	1	0.9
MUN	1	0.9
NOSM	1	0.9

Comparison of 5. To 6.:

It is useful to compare the responses of 5 and 6 to determine the school's overall performance. The possibility exists that a school is both fast in some cases and slow in others.

School	Fastest:Slowest	%Fastest:%Slowest	%Fastest/%Slowest
U of S	6:0	5.1:0	+
Queen's	5:0	4.3:0	+
Laval	1:0	0.9:0	+
U of T	26:4	22.2:3.8	5.8
UBC	14:4	12:3.8	3.2
U of C	12:4	10.3:3.8	2.7
Western	6:2	5.1:1.9	2.7
Dalhousie	11:6	9.4:5.8	1.6
U of A	11:9	9.4:8.7	1.1
Ottawa	12:14	12:12.4	1.0
U of M	4:7	10.3:13.5	0.8
Sherbrooke	1:2	0.9:1.9	0.5
NOSM	1:2	0.9:1.9	0.5
MUN	1:5	0.9:4.8	0.2
McMaster	6:40	5.1:38.5	0.1
UdM	0:3	0:2.9	-

Column B indicates the direct comparison of 'fastest' responses to 'slowest'. Column C indicates the percentage of the total of fastest responses compared to the percentage of slowest responses for each school. Column D is the calculation of the ratio represented in Column C. The schools were ranked according to this ratio, meaning that the schools nearest the top have more 'fastest' responses compared to 'slowest responses'.

The University of Toronto has a comparatively high ratio. The students included some comments with their responses. Some of these responses indicated that the electives were confirmed over the phone or by email, then the portal was used only after the aforementioned confirmation. The University of Calgary responses had similar comments, and their ratio is also very favorable. It appears that circumnavigating the portal provides the fastest responses.

Schools with a ratio approaching 1 indicate that there is variability within schools as to how quickly they respond to the electives' applications.

McMaster University had the lowest comparative ratio. In some instances, they were the fastest, but they had by far the most 'slowest' responses and the lowest ratio.

Schools not listed had no responses by survey respondents.

7. Most Straightforward Refund Process:

School	Count	%
McMaster	11	30.6
UBC	6	16.7
U of A	6	16.7
U of T	4	11.1
Dalhousie	2	5.6
McGill	2	5.6
U of C	2	5.6
U of S	1	2.8
Western	1	2.8
Ottawa	1	2.8

There was limited response to this question. Many respondents indicated that they did not get a refund.

8. Most Challenging Refund Process:

School	Count	%
McMaster	8	22.9
Ottawa	7	20.0
Dalhousie	7	20.0
Queen's	3	8.6
Western	2	5.7
U of T	2	5.7
U of A	2	5.7
U of S	1	2.9
U of M	1	2.9
U of C	1	2.9
UBC	1	2.9

There was limited response to this question. Many respondents indicated that they did not need a refund.

Comparison of 7. To 8.:

It is useful to compare the responses of 7 and 8 to determine the overall picture of each school's refund process according to students. The possibility exists that a school's process is both straightforward to some and not for others.

Comparison	Best:Worst	%Best:%Worst	Ratio
McGill	2:0	5.6:0	+
UBC	6:1	16.7:2.9	5.8
U of A	5:2	16.7:5.7	2.9
U of T	4:2	11.1:5.7	1.9
U of C	2:1	5.6:2.9	1.9
McMaster	11:8	30.6:22.9	1.3
U of S	1:1	2.8:2.9	1.0
Western	1:2	2.8:5.7	0.5
Dalhousie	2:7	5.6:20	0.3
Ottawa	1:7	2.8:20	0.1
U of M	0:1	0:2.9	-
Queen's	0:3	0:8.6	-

The data is limited. We currently do not have an analysis on the explanations as to why the process was straightforward or challenging.
Our data suggests that UBC overall has the most straightforward refund process while Ottawa has the most challenging.
It is interesting that McMaster had the most responses for both most straightforward and most challenging. Further information from students would be necessary to understand this phenomenon.

9. Students Experiencing Financial Stress:

I experienced financial stress as a result of applying for visiting electives through the AFMC Student Portal.
148 responses

Strongly Disagree
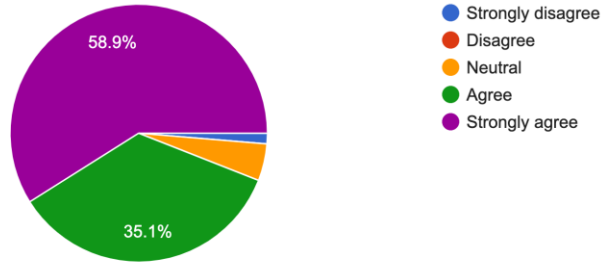Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

48%
42.6%
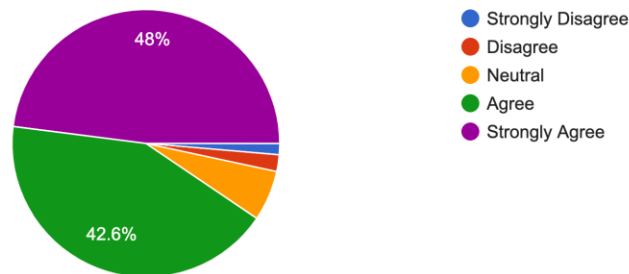
90.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced financial stress as a result of applying for visiting electives through the AFMC Student Portal.

10. Standardization of Fees:

I would like to see standardization of AFMC Student Portal fees across schools.
151 responses

58.9%

35.1%

- ● Strongly disagree
- ● Disagree
- ● Neutral
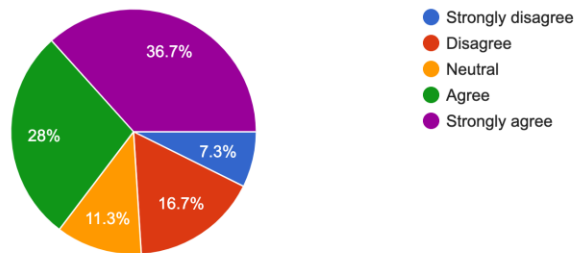- ● Agree
- ● Strongly agree

94% of students agree or strongly agree that they would like to see standardization of portal fees across schools.

11. Cost Influence on Elective Booking:

Due to high cost, I chose not to apply for one or more specific visiting electives.
150 responses

36.7%

28%

7.3%

16.7%

11.3%

- ● Strongly disagree
- ● Disagree
- ● Neutral
- ● Agree
- ● Strongly agree

64.7% of students agree or strongly agree that they did not apply for a specific elective due to the high cost.

12. Standardization of Response Times:

Standardizing visiting elective response times (the time it takes for schools to respond to my applications) across s...tter plan and obtain electives I want.

151 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

78.1%

19.2%
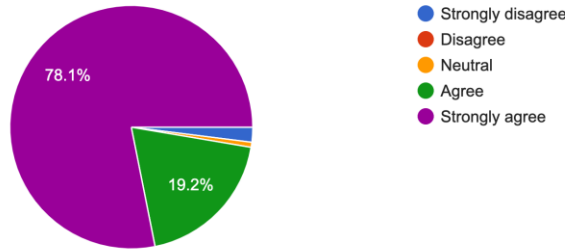
97.3% of respondents agree or strongly agree that standardizing response time from schools after ans elective has been applied to, would help them to better plan and obtain the electives they want.

13. Reasons for Cancelled Electives:

Reason	Count
Obtained another elective you wanted more	96
Switch in career aspirations	22
Too much of a delay in response	13
Personal circumstance	12
Other	8

The number one selection from the 'select all that apply' options was that they cancelled an elective because they obtained another that they wanted more. Interestingly, we did not include a response to indicate a slow response time, but we added it as a category after looking at the other responses. 13 of the 21 other responses were related to time of response from the school. 12 responses in 'personal circumstance' indicate that it is not uncommon for something in a student's personal life to prevent them from attending an away elective. Other comments themes included: rearranging electives after a cancellation or approval of an elective; giving up; and responding to a school's changes in the elective after it was confirmed.

14. Problems with Refunds:

| Problem	Count
No refund offered	77
Inconsistency between schools	23
Delayed or no responses from admin	19

Delay in getting refunded	13
Refund never processed	9
Other	6

The most selected option regarding problems with refunds is that the students were not offered a refund. One of the other responses indicated that a certain school did not cancel the elective on the AFMC platform, even after the supposed time of the elective. They cited the fact that it hadn't been cancelled on the platform as the reason they could not refund.

15. Standardization of Required Documents:

Standardizing the required documents across schools would help decrease the stress associated with applying for visiting electives.

149 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree
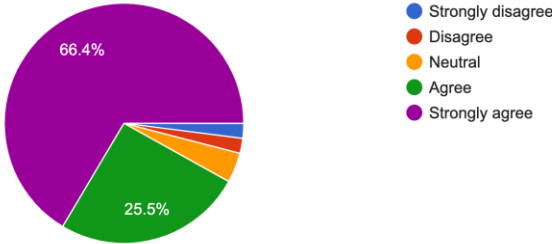
Ninety-two percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that having standardized requirements for electives would decrease the stress involved in the application process.

16. Portal Interface Update Priority:

Inability to save incomplete applications with missing information	49
Lack of specificity of the searching tool in the "visiting electives guide"	19
Inability to open 2 tabs at the same time	7
N/A	46

Forty-six respondents chose the N/A option. Of the respondents who chose an option as a priority to be addressed in the platform's interface, the most selected option was to correct the inability to save an incomplete application with missing information. Other comments themes included: approval of the current platform and interface; slow speeds on the Portal; certain problems on devices like tablets. Of the other responses, one that stands out as a possible quick fix is needing to select an elective to put on a wish list before you can apply (this could be changing the name of 'wish list' to 'Planned List' or something of the sort).

17. Additional Comments:

The most common trends in the additional comments echo the themes discovered in the priorities question. Many students suggest that we have a standard response time from schools. Concerns were voiced about students' struggles and frustrations with booking and securing electives with difficulties in communication, etc. with the schools to which they were applying. Students feel that is unacceptable that the portal includes electives for which there is no space. False advertising of electives costs students hundreds of dollars and is unnecessary. The cost of electives should be evident and affordable. If there are costs after an elective is confirmed, that information should be available prior to an application. There were many concerns with the cost of electives including travel and accommodation, especially when the elective is perceived as necessary to obtain a desired residency. There are also many stories about the lack of refunds when the circumstances seemed to warrant one. Standardized requirements for electives was suggested as an improvement to the system. According to the students, inconsistent requirements make it challenging to organize and prepare for their desired electives. Responses included many anecdotal stories from the student perspectives that describe the difficulties they have had.

It is our opinion that should a response time process be standardized and enforced, many of the other complaints about the portal would be resolved. Essentially, although the portal does not operate as smoothly as many other similar products in today's tech-savvy world, it does the job it is designed to do. The problem lies in the schools uses of the portal.

18. Portal Satisfaction Rating

Overall, I would rate my level of satisfaction with the AFMC Student Portal as:

150 responses
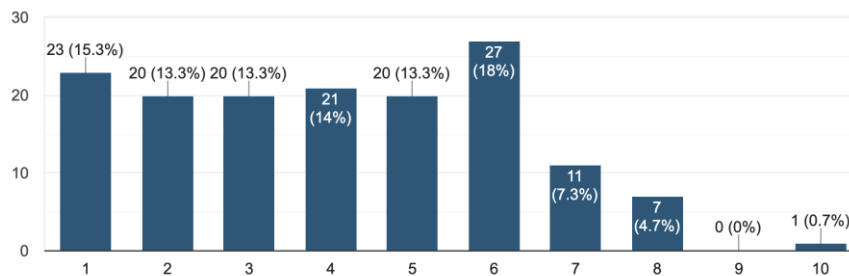
The mean satisfaction rating of the portal is 4. Many people are dissatisfied with the service being provided to them, and this is the only service option.