

Career Counseling in Anesthesiology

Frequently Asked Questions

This booklet has been prepared by the Department of Anesthesiology in response to questions frequently asked by medical students who wish to explore the training and career opportunities in this field. We hope that it will be helpful to students and serve as a basis of discussion in individual meetings with faculty members and residents.

- Can you give me a brief description of the field? What are the key elements of this field that define it?
Anesthesiology is a specialty focused on preoperative, intraoperative and postoperative medicine. A good deal of our work involves providing adequate amnesia, analgesia and sedation for patients undergoing both surgical and medical procedures in the operating rooms, radiology suites and other locations in hospitals and ambulatory care facilities. Anesthesiology requires an in-depth knowledge of respiratory and cardiac physiology, pharmacology and the ability to care for both very healthy and critically ill patients. Specialty fellowship training opportunities are available in Critical Care Medicine, Pain Medicine, and Cardiac, Neurosurgical, Obstetrical, Pediatric and Regional anesthesia. Anesthesiologists function as perioperative specialists in hospitals.
- What is the patient population that I will encounter?
The patient population varies tremendously as we provide anesthesia for many different surgical and medical subspecialties.
- Will it include both children and adults? **Yes**
- Will there be emergency work?
Yes, we are often called upon to care for patients requiring emergency procedures in all specialties and trauma care. We are the specialists in securing airways for patients in severe respiratory distress.
- What types of technology will I encounter?
Anesthesiology is a very technology-driven field. We rely on technically sophisticated monitors and anesthesia machines, ventilators, ultrasound, and TEE to provide care for our patients.
- Is it possible to describe the personality characteristics of many physicians in this field?
The stereotype is an easygoing, affable, vigilant and detail oriented individual. An important characteristic is an ability to be very adaptable and able to respond to rapidly changing situations.
- How long is the training program/residency? **Four years (PGY-1-4).**

- Are there fellowships available after residency?
Anesthesia has fellowships in Pain Medicine, Critical Care, Regional Anesthesia, Cardiothoracic Anesthesia, OB Anesthesia and Pediatric Anesthesia. At this time all fellowships are one year in length post completion of residency.
- How do I know if my academic record/grades will make me a suitable applicant?
Anesthesiology is generally considered moderately competitive but appears to have been getting more competitive in the past ten years. The more grades of Honors and High Pass you have the more competitive you will be.
- What is the role of my USMLE Step 1 score?
The USMLE Step 1 score is an important part of your application.
- What is a competitive score to qualify for an interview?
A score as far above 200 as possible.
- If I failed Step 1 what are my options?
Failing Step 1 will make your application rather uncompetitive, don't do it.
- Should I take Step 2 early?
Most applicants take Step 2 early. Scoring well is important; so only take it if you are well prepared.
- Do I need a Step 2 Clinical Knowledge score to be screened for an interview?
No To be ranked? Yes
- Is there anything that I can do in my rotation or elective experience in this field to enhance my qualifications?
Work hard and get honors in your anesthesiology electives. Consider electives in fields important to the practice of anesthesiology such as cardiology, pulmonary medicine and critical care medicine.
- Should I take outside electives in other institutions?
Only if you will benefit from the experience.
If so, how many are advised and allowed? **No specific numbers**
- If your field requires a preliminary year what are your recommendations regarding that year?
"Categorical" programs in anesthesiology will provide you with the full four years of training. "Advanced" programs will train you for the PGY 2-4 years and you will have to match separately for your PGY-1 year. This is most commonly done in internal medicine but can be done in surgery, ob-gyn, pediatrics as well.
- Is a research experience important in my application to this field? **Yes**
- Do I need to do a one-year research experience? **No**
- Will research offset a low Step 1 score? **No**
- Should I have publications to qualify for your field? **No**

- Is community service important in my application to this field?
Being involved in the community, demonstrated leadership and participation in extracurricular activities can substitute for lack of research activities. Most anesthesiologists are well-rounded and involved in more than just their education.
- What do you advise on obtaining letters of recommendation?
Get letters from people who have worked with you and know you personally.
Should they all be from the field? **Not all, but certainly at least one.**
How many should I have? **3**
Do I need a chair's letter? **No**
If so, how do I obtain that letter?
Schedule a meeting with Dr. Cottrell to discuss your interests in anesthesiology. Bring your CV and any important information you would like him to know about you.
- How do I meet with residents in the field and ask them to share their experiences and advice? Can I find residents with educational backgrounds similar to mine?
Contact our residency education office coordinator, Ms. Jacqueline Dowling at x1926, and she will be happy to arrange a meeting with one or more of our residents. You will also be able to speak with our anesthesiology residents in the operating rooms, L&D, and critical care units.
- If I want to learn more about the field, can you recommend how I do that?
Contact Dr. Constance Hill or her assistant, Karen A. King, in our Student Education Office at x 3765. They have a listing of departmental advisors who will be happy to speak with you.