

# The Accessibility and Quality of Online Information for all 92 Hand Surgery Fellowship Programs in the USA

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## Introduction

- Medical fellowship programs are increasingly using the internet as a marketing tool to recruit applicants.
- The suspension of in-person interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic further elevated the vital role of fellowship program websites to convey clear and accurate information.
- Previous analyses of hand surgery program websites showed they were inconsistent and often lacked desired information.

## Project Objective

- To perform an updated assessment of the accessibility and content of hand surgery fellowship program websites.
- To assess whether recruitment and education content on fellowship program websites varies based on program characteristics such as geographic region, number of fellows, affiliation with a top orthopaedic hospital, and affiliation with a top medical school.

## Methods & Materials

- ASSH fellowship directory used to acquire list of 92 hand surgery fellowship programs.
- Fellowship websites were evaluated for the presence of 13 recruitment and 13 education criteria.
- Fellowship programs were stratified by geographic region, number of fellows, affiliation with a top orthopaedic hospital, and affiliation with a top medical school.

## Tables and Figures: Website Content Scores

**Table 1:** Recruitment and Education Criteria on Hand Surgery Fellowship Websites.

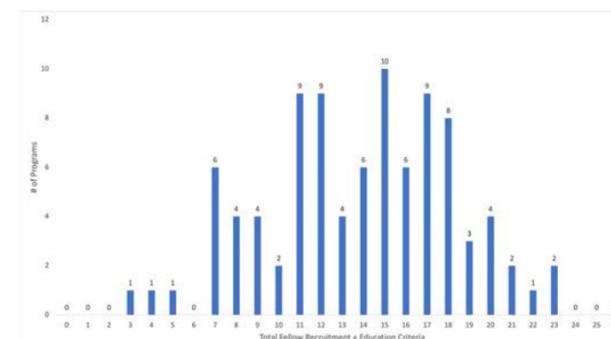
Category	Mean (SD)	Low	High	Criteria	n (%)
Recruitment	5.6 (2.5)	1	11	1. Social Media Links	73 (79.3)
				2. Application Requirements	70 (76.1)
				3. Application Due Date	64 (69.6)
				4. Application Link	55 (59.8)
				5. Current Fellow(s)	46 (50.0)
				6. Salary	42 (45.7)
				7. Interview Dates	39 (42.4)
				8. Past Fellows	32 (34.8)
				9. Location Description	31 (33.7)
				10. Video Content	29 (31.5)
				11. Geographic Placement of Graduates	24 (26.1)
				12. Selection Criteria	7 (7.6)
				13. Association Links	2 (2.1)
Education	8.2 (2.8)	2	13	1. Program Description	92 (100)
				2. Affiliated Hospital Information	83 (90.2)
				3. Operative Experience	83 (90.2)
				4. Faculty Listing	73 (79.3)
				5. Academic Meeting Attendance	75 (81.5)
				6. Journal Club	68 (73.9)
				7. Didactics	67 (72.8)
				8. Research Requirement	62 (67.4)
				9. Rotation Schedule	61 (66.3)
				10. Microsurgical Training Course/Lab	47 (51.1)
				11. On-Call Requirements/Daily Schedule	34 (37.0)
				12. Evaluation Criteria	9 (9.8)
				13. International Opportunities	7 (7.6)

SD: Standard Deviation

**Figure 1:** Accessibility of hand surgery fellowship program websites from the American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) online directory.



**Figure 2:** Hand Surgery Fellowship Program Websites Sorted By Total Website Content Score (Recruitment Criteria + Education Criteria).



## Results: Website Content Scores and Program Stratification

- All 92 hand surgery fellowship programs listed on the ASSH database had functional websites that were accessible via independent Google search when using either of the search parameters included in this study: “program name + hand fellowship” or “program name + hand surgery fellowship.”
- Hand surgery fellowship program websites contained a mean  $\pm$  standard deviation of  $13.9 \pm 4.4$  (range 3-23) out of the 26 total fellow recruitment and education criteria.
- Larger fellowship programs with two or more current fellows included more fellow recruitment ( $p = 0.031$ ) and fellow education criteria ( $p = 0.001$ ) on program websites than smaller programs with one current fellow.
- There were no differences in website recruitment or education content when stratifying programs by region, affiliation with a top orthopaedic hospital, or affiliation with a top medical school.

## Discussion

- Hand surgery fellowship program website content is highly variable.
- All programs, regardless of affiliation, size, or region, have room for content improvement which will benefit applicants.
- A website incorporating elements examined here can serve as a more effective recruitment tool, providing consistent baseline info to aid applicants when deciding where to apply.
- The enhanced social media presence of hand surgery fellowship programs reflects the increasing importance of social media as an information source for applicants.
- A prominent social media presence is especially important in the era of COVID-19, where social media platforms offer a unique opportunity to communicate with prospective applicants.

## Conclusions

- There is potential for improvement with regards to both the accessibility and content of hand surgery fellowship program websites to meet the needs of current applicants.
- This study provides an impetus for fellowship programs to update their websites so that they can achieve full information potential, which can help applicants make informed decisions about which programs align with their career goals.