

# Away Electives FAQ

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## TYPES OF ELECTIVES OVERVIEW

### *ISMMS Clinical Electives*

Clinical electives are taken during Year 3 and Year 4 of your MD program at ISMMS. Students can register for clinical electives using the Empower student information system.

### *Clinical Tailor-Made Electives*

Clinical tailor-made electives are electives in an area of interest not listed in the Empower system. Students must identify a mentor to oversee the elective.

### *Tailor Made Research / Non-Clinical Electives*

Non-clinical tailor-made electives include writing (case study, medical humanities paper, literature review, drafting/editing manuscript); online courses; learning clinical topics more in depth; research. Topics may include anything that is not considered clinical care or shadowing.

### *Away Electives*

Electives taken at other institutions. Students may apply through the Visiting Student Learning Opportunities (VSLO) (formerly VSAS) system or may apply to electives at other institutions not listed in the VSLO system.

### *Global Health Electives (abroad)*

Students can only take international electives that are offered in the elective catalog on Empower and must register at least 60 days before departure. Many electives require external applications and some require an internal application. Please contact [darinka.gadikota@mssm.edu](mailto:darinka.gadikota@mssm.edu) with any questions regarding these electives.

This guide will review the away elective application process. For more information about all electives students should go to the Electives Page on Blackboard.

## FINDING AN AWAY ELECTIVE

Not all medical schools and teaching hospitals use VSLO so you will need to research to find out what's available. You can search for electives in VSLO and program websites.

On VSLO you can save programs to your account and receive notifications about deadlines. Students should also be checking the system regularly for updates.

## I. *Visiting Student Learning Opportunities (VSLO)*

You will receive an email from VSLO with instructions to activate your VSLO account in December. This invitation expires in 30 days so it should be activated as soon as it's received. Please search for this email. If you are unable to find your login, please email [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

You can search for electives based on institution, location, specialty and more.

### **To search for an elective:**

1. Log into the [application service](#)
2. Select *Find Electives*
3. Use filters to find electives based on your search criteria
4. Click *Learn More* to view a description, application requirements and available dates for each elective
5. Click *Save* to save electives for future consideration
6. Select *Date* and click *Apply Now* to begin application process

When you fill out the application, it will ask for a contact at ISMMS. When putting contact information for the school (ISMMS), please put [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

### **VSLO Application Process:**

We strongly recommend watching this [video](#) to learn how to navigate VSLO.

1. Access the VSLO Application Service (December)
2. Complete your profile
  - i. personal and academic info
3. Review Host Institution Information
  - i. includes application dates
  - ii. Host institutions usually open catalogs with electives around March but this can vary
4. Search for and save electives
  - i. can view dates, description and requirements
  - ii. Peak application time: April through June
5. Complete Host Requirements
  - i. Requirements vary across institutions
  - ii. CV and Transcript are required for all institutions

6. Pay, submit and track your applications
  - i. application fee is a flat fee of \$15
  - ii. Once you submit your application it then gets sent to Registrar who verifies your information and fulfills any requirements that they are responsible for, such as your transcript
  - iii. Once complete, Registrar then sends your application to your Host institution and students can track their application status

## II. *Program Websites*

If you are interested in a specific medical school not in the VSLO system, you can search their website for visiting student electives.

## WHEN TO APPLY FOR AN AWAY ELECTIVE

Once you receive your VSLO login information, you may browse the VSLO offerings. While each institution has its own timeline for when they open their catalog and begin accepting applications, many schools open their catalogs in March/April. For those applying to more competitive electives, start checking early in the year (e.g. January or February) and speak with your specialty mentor about the ideal timing of applications. Once schools open their catalogs students can start applying for electives.

For programs outside VSLO, please check application requirements on the institution's website.

## HOW TO REGISTER YOUR AWAY ELECTIVE FOR ISMMS ELECTIVE CREDIT

Once you accept an away rotation, you **MUST** complete the [Sinai form](#) **two (2) weeks prior** to the start of your elective. **Students *will not* receive retroactive credit.**

## GRADING FOR YOUR AWAY ELECTIVE

Electives are graded: Honors, Pass, Fail

- It is your responsibility to ensure your elective is graded. Students must submit an elective evaluation/grade form to your preceptor for grading. The form can be found on the [Registrar's website](#) or [here](#).

The form should be completed by you first and then it will be automatically sent to the email address you add to the 'Evaluator/ Faculty Email' Section once you submit. A form from the host institution is also acceptable.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *How Do I Access VSLO and When Will I be Able to Log In?*

The [VLSO website](#) lists medical student elective opportunities. You may browse the system without logging in, but with your individual login, you will get more information and be able to apply to electives.

You will receive your login information in December of your third year (expires in 30 days if not activated). Please search for this email, which comes from VLSO (search "VSLO" in your email). If you are unable to find your login, please email [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

If you are interested in completing an elective at a specific school and the elective is not available yet you can save the school to your account and you'll receive an alert when the specific school's catalog is released.

### *How Many Away Electives Can I Do?*

We are following the [Coalition for Physician Accountability guidance](#). There is no limitation to the number of away electives students can do.

### *How Many Electives Should I Apply To?*

For the more competitive specialties (e.g. Orthopedic Surgery, Neurosurgery, Emergency Medicine, ENT, Ophthalmology, Dermatology, OB/Gyn) to yield one away elective, it has been recommended students apply to 6-7 per specialty they are interested in. However, this varies depending upon the individual student and the specialty into which the student is applying. Programs may prioritize students whose home institutions do not have the specialty. Students should check with their specialty advisor(s) for specific guidance.

### *I am Unsure Whether I Should Do an Away Elective. Why Will it Benefit Me?*

Some specialties highly recommend an away elective, which serves as an audition elective for the program: historically audition electives have been required for competitive specialties such as Orthopedic Surgery, Neurosurgery, Emergency Medicine, ENT, Ophthalmology, Dermatology, OB/Gyn, and others.

In addition to using away electives as an audition elective, students interested in a specific program or looking to relocate (e.g. want to be on the West Coast) may benefit from an away elective.

Students should check with their specialty advisor(s) for specific guidance.

### *Host School Dates Don't Match Our Block Schedule, What Do I Do?*

Other schools have different block schedules and this happens all the time. This is one of the reasons that we give you flexibility in the fourth year. If you need to switch a required clerkship, you can complete the Clerkship Change Form- these must be done within our block dates. If you have consecutive months of elective time you can complete away electives off cycle.

### *Who at ISMMS Do I Put as a Contact for My Application?*

Please put [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu) as your contact. This email is managed by multiple individuals in the Registrar's office who manage the paperwork for upload in VSLO.

### *How does my transcript get uploaded to VSLO?*

Your transcript is uploaded to VSLO by the registrar team. Once you have submitted your application, before it is sent to the host school, it is first sent to the registrar team to upload any remaining requirements and verify your information. Once all requirements are uploaded your application will be released to the host school. Any questions regarding uploading documents should be sent to [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

### *How Do I Request a Letter of Good Standing and Other Paperwork Needed for my Application?*

For VSLO related document requests, email [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu) For electives at institutions not participating in VSLO, you should use the “**Request a Document**” Link on the Registrar page, found on the right-hand side of the screen (or bottom, if on mobile).

Make sure to request the “**Outside Electives Application Letter of Support**” in addition to any other documents that are required for your electives application, such as an official transcript.

The **Letter of Support** contains the following:

1. Good Standing Status
2. Malpractice coverage and amounts

3. Verification of:
  - a. HIPAA training **verification**
  - b. OSHA training (Infection Prevention and Control) **verification**
  - c. Mask-Fit testing **verification**
    - i. **If you need your Mask-Fit certificate, you should receive this via email after completion.**
  - d. Verification of Passing Step 1, if taken (but NOT the actual score)
  - e. Verification of completion a background check at matriculation

Students will also be able to upload any additional forms that need completion by selecting the “**Attached forms to be completed by Registrar and/or Associate Dean**” option. If you have questions regarding uploading any documentation to VSLO reach out to [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

### *Where Can I Access Proof of HIPAA and OSHA Training?*

Each year, students are required to complete yearly PEAK training for HIPAA and OSHA, along with a few others. The timelines for when Compliance reaches out regarding these trainings and when you need to have the trainings completed for away electives may not align. If you need your completed HIPAA or OSHA physical certificate you can download that on your [PEAK](#) account. These need to be renewed yearly so if yours expired you can complete the training on PEAK. Below are the names of the PEAK training courses to search for.

#### **PEAK Trainings**

OSHA: MSHS Infection Prevention and Control Bloodborne Pathogens (YEAR)

HIPAA: Information Security and Confidentiality: Annual HIPAA Education (YEAR)

### *Am I Covered by Malpractice Insurance?*

Actively enrolled students at ISMMS are covered by malpractice insurance. The coverage is 1.3M per occurrence/3.9M aggregate. This information is included in the letter of good standing uploaded by our school. You can request a copy of the certificate at [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

### *Where Can I Access Proof of BLS?*

BLS cards are provided directly to you upon completion of your training. If you do not have a copy of your card, you can follow instructions below. For questions, please email Annie Jiang at [annie@cpr123.com](mailto:annie@cpr123.com).

1. Login to this [website](#)
  - a. Type in first and last name

- b. Type in email address
  - c. Click Search
2. Enter security questions
3. Click on CPR & First Aid Instructor Network
4. On the Dashboard page, click on eCards
5. To find a specific student, click on the dropdown MANAGE ECARDS select Search eCards
6. If you are unable to resend, click View eCard and send the student the PDF that is downloaded when you click on View Full Size.

### *How Do I Request My Immunization Information?*

Many schools use the [AAMC Health Form](#). Some schools have their own form. Student Health Center (SHC) requests that you complete as much of the form (including all demographic information at the top) by accessing your vaccine and titers on MyChart. Upon review, if SHC determines you are missing requirements, the nurse will email you to schedule an appointment.

Please submit your form to Student Health at [AwayElective@mssm.edu](mailto:AwayElective@mssm.edu). If you are uncertain which form to use, you can submit the AAMC form and Student Health can add an addendum should there be other requirements. Please allow for 7-10 business days for processing.

### *I need a toxicology screening. How Can I Obtain One?*

ISMMS only provides a toxicology screen upon matriculation at the School. You should check the requirements for the program you are applying for.

If they accept an 8-panel, you can request a paper form from [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu). You will take the form to the nearest MedQuest lab. The School does not provide a 10-panel or 12-panel test, and many schools require this. For a 10-panel or 12-panel toxicology screen, you will either need to pay for it out of pocket or get a prescription from your doctor and see if insurance will pay for it. For questions, email [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu).

### *Am I Covered by Health Insurance?*

All current students are covered by health insurance, whether through the schools plan or an outside plan. Students should check their plan for network coverage in the state traveling to. Students may be responsible for any out of network costs.

### *How Do I Request a Background Check?*

You can request a background check [here](#) and use the code: MTSINAISOMINV. Note that some institutions that require a background screen have time limits and often expect that it is done within 12 months of your rotation.

### *How do I Upload Letters of Recommendation?*

Letters of recommendation where you have waived your right to see can be sent to [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu) and the school will upload on your behalf. Be sure to check the requirement for each program you are applying for, as some programs may request LORs be emailed directly to them.

### *How do I Upload Board Scores?*

You should have received a transcript of your board scores, and you can upload this to the VSLO system. If they ask the school to upload your transcript, email [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu) with the request. The school will also verify your scores if the host school asks for verification.

### *ISMMS Does Not Have an Affiliation Agreement with the School I want to Visit. What Do I Do?*

Email [electives@mssm.edu](mailto:electives@mssm.edu) with the program you wish to attend. The Registrar will work with the other institution to draft an agreement that then needs to be signed by the Dean's office. The creation of the affiliation agreement takes some time, so please inform the Registrar with as much notice as possible.

### *What do I need to do once I am accepted into an away elective?*

Once you are accepted into an away elective, you will need to provide documentation (a copy of your acceptance email and a description of the elective) and complete the [Registration for Clinical Elective at Other School or Institution](#) form which will be submitted to the Director of Medical Student Electives and the Registrar for processing and approval.

This form **MUST** be submitted, and your elective approved by the Director of Medical Student Electives **PRIOR** to the start date of your elective to receive credit for it. To allow sufficient time for approval, students must fill out the form **two weeks in advance** of the elective start date. **Retroactive credit will not be granted.**

## **TIPS AND MORE INFORMATION**

- Programs on VSLO approve students on a rolling basis.

- Programs will not see your application until all required documents are submitted. Make sure you fully submit everything!
- Many programs appreciate if you email after you've applied to show your interest if you haven't received an acceptance.
- When you save electives from a specific program to your account you can receive notifications about deadlines. Students should also be checking the system regularly for updates.