EY 2020 Applicant Survey

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Executive Summary

TMDSAS surveyed 7,818 individuals who completed and submitted an EY 2020 application about their applicant experience.

What: The survey consisted of 52 questions, covering the following topics: Communication, Application Strategy/Preparation, Application Resources, Application Usability, TMDSAS Support Features, and Self-Identifying questions.

Who: The survey was sent to the 7,818 applicants and was completed by 626 (approx. 8%) of the applicant pool.

When: The survey window was from Feb. 19 to Mar. 9, 2020

How: The applicant survey was sent via email.

Why: The purpose of the survey was to learn the ways in which TMDSAS applicants are using TMDSAS as an application service, to test our assumptions about the ways applicants interact with the various resources provided by TMDSAS, and to improve the sphere and efficacy of these resources.

What We Learned

The EY 2020 survey was the second of its kind and helped TMDSAS see trends in applicant experience and applicant behavior with the application and supplemental resources. As widely known, TMDSAS serves a diverse applicant pool with unique backgrounds and circumstances. We know that most applicants will reach out to TMDSAS for support throughout the application cycle, but there was an increase in the reported rates of communication with TMDSAS, and the results of the survey led us to ponder what factors contributed to this upward trend: a more personalized application processing approach, a greater need for resources, or something else? We also learned that while more applicants report accessing our resources, more education may be needed about how to make effective use of them. As TMDSAS works to meet the needs of the pre-health community in Texas, we will continue to seek feedback from applicants and other key stakeholders to effect organizational learning and improvement.

While TMDSAS surveyed applicants on multiple features of the applicant experience, we have highlighted statistics related to communication and resource use with comparative EY 2019 data.

Part I: Communication with TMDSAS

Who communicated with TMDSAS and was there a change in communication trends between the EY 2019 and EY 2020 cycles? Similar to the EY 2019 spring applicant survey, TMDSAS surveyed applicants on the following: numbers of communications, modes of communications, and reasons for communicating with TMDSAS. Applicants were also asked to evaluate TMDSAS on the quality of communication, particularly the courtesy, effectiveness, and ease of communication they experienced.

Unique Applicant Background: Did the rate of reported communication change depending on an applicant's unique background? Across the board, the rate of communication stayed fairly consistent.
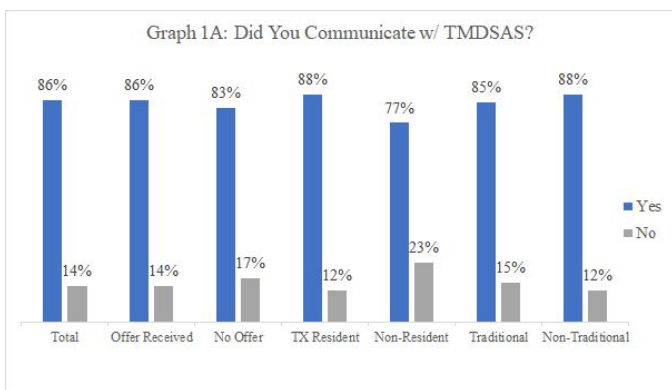
Graph 1A represents the percentages of applicants who reported communicating with TMDSAS. Regardless of an applicant's admissions status, residency classification, or identification as a non-traditional applicant, applicants reported communicating with TMDSAS at a consistent rate.

Possible conclusions: Although applicants come from diverse backgrounds, and are completing the application under unique circumstances, we can expect that the overwhelming majority of applicants will reach out to TMDSAS for support or guidance throughout the application cycle.

Changes Over Time: Did the rate of reported communications to TMDSAS change from one cycle to the next? Yes, with marked increases along some factors.
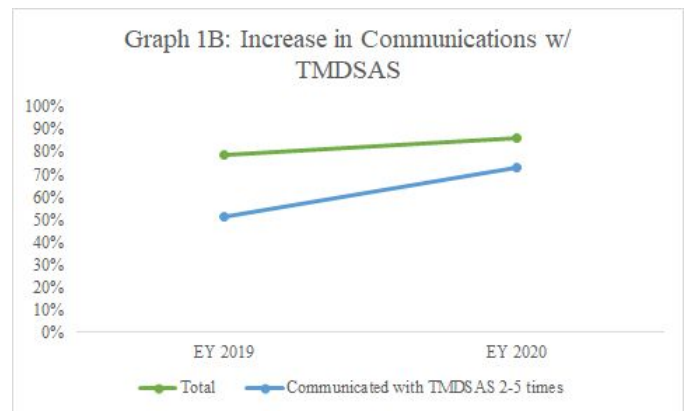

Graph 1B presents the percentage increase in communications from applicants across the EY 2019 and EY 2020 cycles.

TMDSAS also surveyed applicants on the number of individual communications, ranging from 0-10 or more. Consistently, most applicants reported communicating with TMDSAS between 2-5 times, with a sharp increase in EY 2020, as depicted in the table above.

Conclusions: EY 2020 marked a change in application processing and communication strategy with TMDSAS. A high touch approach was introduced this cycle, and each applicant received a personalized welcome message outlining the following: introduction to their Applicant Liaison, update on the status of their application and supporting documents, and detailed specific action items. It might be suggested that this new approach encouraged applicants to reach out to TMDSAS staff more consistently.

Quality of Communication: How did the perceived quality of TMDSAS' communication stack up over time? According to the data, there were improvements.

Graph 1C: Applicant Experience Communicating w/ TMDSAS
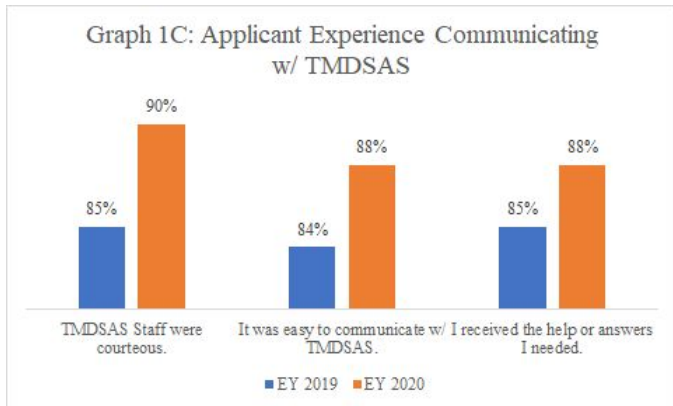
Applicants evaluated TMDSAS on the following communication qualities: ease, courtesy, and effectiveness. Most respondents rated TMDSAS favorably in these measures and Graph 1C shows that there was some improvement in these measures across the two application cycles.

Part II: Application Resources

Are applicants utilizing the resources we created? If so, to what end? Applicants were surveyed on their use of TMDSAS/TXHES resources, including: FAQs, Application Handbook, APPLY, prescribed course listings, instructional videos, *Inside Health Education* podcast, social media pages, and the TMDSAS website. Here we take a closer look at use of the handbook and course listings.

Application HandbookAwareness: Did applicants know that a step-by-step guide to the application existed? Overwhelmingly, yes!

Graph 2A: Percentage of Applicants that Accessed the Handbook
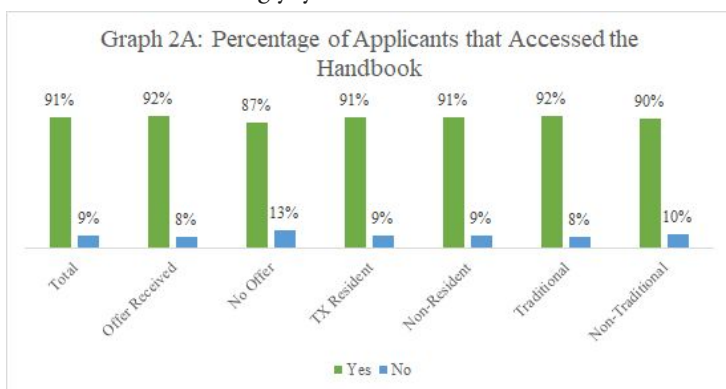
Graph 2A shows that the overwhelming majority of applicants accessed the handbook, regardless of their background or admissions outcome.

Conclusions: One of our takeaways from the EY 2019 applicant survey, was that greater visibility of our resources was needed in order to promote effective utilization. Based on the feedback from our surveyed EY 2020 applicants, we see that more applicants are using this resource.

Handbook Trends: Has the use(fulness) of this resource changed over time? EY 2020 saw an increase in the use and perceived usefulness of the TMDSAS Application Handbook.

Graph 2B: Handbook Usefulness Over Time
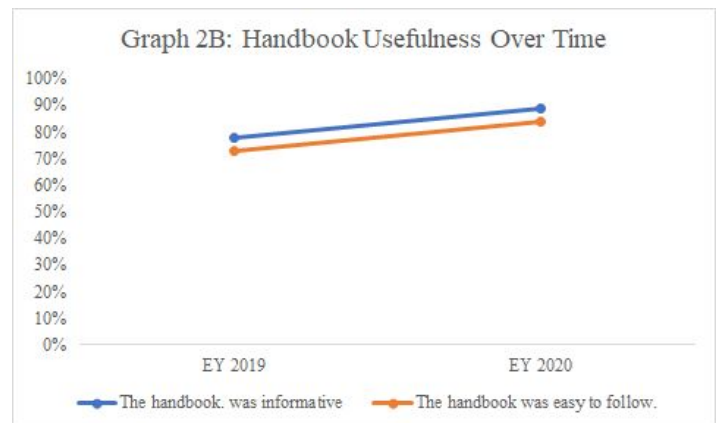
Graph 2B shows that applicant use of the handbook increased measurably, as did their evaluations of how informative and easy-to-use the guide was.

Conclusions: Targeted efforts were made to highlight the existence of the handbook - prominent display on the website, social media posts, education during application workshops, collaboration with undergraduate advisors. In short, we saw that not enough of our applicants were utilizing this resource, and we can see that the message to do so was received.

While the handbook is updated prior to the start of every application cycle to reflect changes to the application, feedback from our applicants and other members of the pre-health community drive regular (at times weekly!) updates to ensure clarity. The data show that over time, applicants have found this resource to be more beneficial.

Prescribed Course Listings: Did applicant background (i.e. Texas resident, non-traditional, etc.) impact their use of the prescribed course listings? TMDSAS saw slight variations on the use of this resource.

Graph 2C: Precribed Course Listings Use Based on Applicant Background
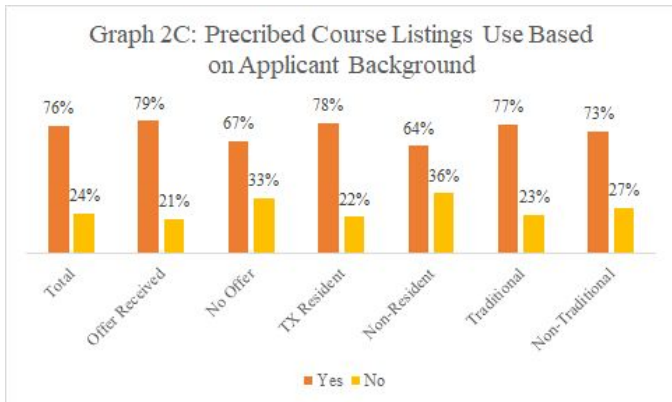
The prescribed course listings were created to aid students in coding their prescribed coursework within the application. As noted in Graph 2C, applicants that identified as traditional vs. non-traditional used this resource more or less equally, but there were variations in utilization among Texas residents and non-Texas residents, as well as between applicants who had received an offer of admission and those who had not.

Conclusions: TMDSAS hypothesized that applicants from divergent backgrounds might not refer to this resource consistently. As noted, there was some disparity, suggesting that more Texas resident applicants, as well as more successful applicants (those with offers) took advantage of this resource.

What's more? Based on responses to the question "*How can we improve this resource?*" The number one response from applicants was to expand and/or update these listings. The second most common response was to make them more visible. TMDSAS will continue to work with undergraduate institutions to expand this resource as well as solicit feedback from applicants to provide more in-depth analysis.

Trends in Resource Use: How has the reported rate of usage of applicant resources changed over time? EY 2020

saw growth in the percentage of applicants that reported regular use of the resources.

Graph 2D: Comparative Use of Resources Based on Background
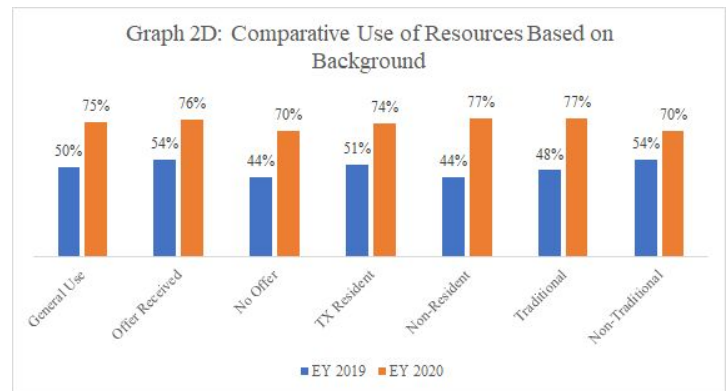
TMDSAS wanted to know how applicants were making use of the resources made available to them. Graph 2D illustrates the increase between the two cycles in the number of applicants who reported having "*at least one resource on hand*" when filling out the application.

Conclusions: A concerted effort has been made between TMDSAS, TXHES, and the undergraduate advisors to promote use of the applicant resources. Although EY 2020 saw positive growth around utilization of these resources while completing the application, we still see opportunities for further growth. Additional research questions may include identifying a link between more successful applicants and resource use, as well as determining how greater resource utilization impacts the number of errors within applications as identified during processing.

Lessons for Future Improvements

Takeaway #1: Create Greater ~~Visibility~~ Understanding of Application Resources. TMDSAS has worked to make resources more accessible to applicants, and EY 2020 witnessed growth in total numbers of applicants using them. However, more education is needed about how to effectively use them when working through the application.

Takeaway #2: Understand *Why* Applicants Reach Out. A big part of what TMDSAS does is to provide support to applicants while they work through the application. Based on the data, we know that most

applicants will reach out for guidance at some point. So understanding applicants' needs may allow us to enhance our resources to promote confidence and self-sufficiency among applicants. ◻