1. Any advice for newly graduated MHA beginning the administrative fellowship process with no health management work experience, what can we do to stand out as applicants?

Payton Isner: A fellowship is just the place for you! There’s no better opportunity to learn and gain mentorship. I found leaning into my lack of healthcare experience was the best way for me to stand out. While it’s easy to have impostor syndrome, your prior experiences outside of healthcare will be invaluable as the system undergoes unprecedented change. Think about what unique skills you have and use those to your advantage.

Judah Soray: Try as best as you can to gain experience through Internships. It would be helpful to work on projects that are of interest to you, but also projects that can teach you transferable skills, to showcase your talents on paper. While helping you grow as a young professional.

1. Did any of your fellowships provide any relocation assistance?

Payton Isner: Yes! UPMC offers relocation assistance and UPMC partners with many local housing agencies for waived/reduced fees in your search.

Judah Soray: My current fellowship at Brigham & Women's Hospital did not provide relocation assistance.

1. What were your goals for your administrative and have them been fulfilled/on track to be fulfilled? How did you approach making sure you can achieve these?

Payton Isner: I had two main goals: I wanted broad exposure to healthcare and mentorship from senior leaders, and I wanted opportunities to lead and manage initiatives and people. Both have been fulfilled in my fellowship immensely. The best way to set yourself up for success is telling your mentors your goals, and advocating for yourself. Say yes to opportunities even if you’re unsure whether you’re qualified. You can and should ask questions and for support from content matter experts, it’s the best way to learn.

Judah Soray: My goals are to gain meaningful experience across the organization while exploring both areas of interest, and areas where I felt the need to learn more. Thus far, I feel like I am accomplishing these goals through my fellowship. I have the ability to seek out projects that are of interest to me and learn so much about the operation of an academic medical center. Intertwining research, patient care, and education.

1. Are there any fellowship opportunities in value-based care organizations?

Payton Isner: Yes, and many health systems are in the midst of changing towards VBC. Many systems that are IDFS have components of VBC, so they might be great places to begin a search.

1. As someone who is working full time while completing their MSHA, do you think it is possible to work on an MPH while doing fellowship?

Payton Isner: While it’s likely possible, this would depend on the program specifically. I would caution against starting them simultaneously. I’d at least take a few months to settle into a fellowship and make connections.

Judah Soray: Personally, I would not pursue another graduate degree during my fellowship, I feel that my bandwidth might stretch too thin and take away focus from maximizing the fellowship opportunity. However, it depends on your ultimate goals for your career – I think there needs to be a balance between education and experience to make you a well-rounded candidate, and so, weighing your options of further studies, or meaningful work experience would need a bit of thought.

1. Is there anything you found out during the fellowship that you did not know before applying?

Payton Isner: This question can vary between every organization. Something I think that applies to every fellowship I learned was that it’s okay, and encouraged, to make mistakes. The entire point is for you to learn. You just have to be ready to accept mistakes and work to correct them.

Judah Soray: I was pleasantly surprised to find out that my fellowship (Brigham & Women's Hospital) provided generous Benefit Time (Paid time off). Coming into the fellowship, and given my prior work experiences, I assumed I would not have any vacation or time off through the one-year fellowship. However, we accrue almost 4 weeks of time off. This, to me, says a lot about an organization's commitment to employee well-being, and work-life balance.

1. How would someone who is currently pursuing an MHA and working full-time at a healthcare organization make themselves a more competitive candidate for a fellowship upon graduation?

Payton Isner: If you’re applying at the same organization: NETWORK! If you’re applying somewhere else: ALSO NETWORK! No better way than making connections. Use your experience at that organization and your accomplishments/skills to set yourself apart from the others.

Judah Soray: Leverage both your school & work experience to highlight your unique skill set. What projects have you worked on that helped you to learn a new skill? Highlight your ability to multi-task and handle such a large workload. Showcase your competencies through work experience, and how your MHA has helped to open your mind up to exploring new ways of improving healthcare.

1. What did everyone’s GPA, and extracurricular activities look like?

Payton Isner: Being on both sides of the process now, I can honestly say my GPA was never once discussed. At this point in your career, your GPA is less of a weighting factor on your applications and more of a checked box as to if you passed or not. Your connections, organizational fit, and professional/academic achievements will be much more important. I was heavily involved in several campus healthcare organizations, and had my internship, but nothing especially noteworthy!

Judah Soray: I was fortunate to pursue my MHA full-time and maximize my grad school experience. I graduated with a 4.0 GPA and was highly involved in extra-curricular activities; Competing in multiple case competitions, serving as the leader of my MHA program's Graduate student network, actively participating in our local ACHE chapter, and volunteering at the local food bank. These experiences I believe not only help mold you into a good member of society but also provide opportunities to network & nurture the skills necessary to be a knowledgeable & empathetic leader.

1. How did you make yourself stand out during the interview process?

Payton Isner: Be authentic and genuine. This is easier when you’re genuinely excited about the organizations you’re applying to. Be specific in your application and interviews and come prepared to specifically talk about why that org. is the best place for you to learn and grow and why.

Judah Soray: The interview process was a bit intimidating for me, but ample preparation I felt was the key to being confident. Know who you are, and what you stand for. Importantly, know what you can offer to the organization, and how you can benefit from that particular fellowship. Once you have gotten past the paper application process and are offered an in-person (or virtual) interview, know that the organization likes your skillset, and what you can offer as a fellow. To stand out at the interview stage is to truly be yourself – showcase your unique talents, and your personality, highlight personal experiences, and how well you can communicate those to new people you are meeting for the first time. Those things I believe make you stand out as a candidate. If you are your true self and do not pretend to be what you think the organization is looking for, you are more likely to find the best match.

1. Would you recommend accepting the first offer you receive, even if your top choice has not yet announced their fellow(s) yet?

Payton Isner: This is a more complicated question in my opinion – you should only apply to places you can see yourself at. So if you get an offer from an org, you should be ready to take it. Many will only allow a few days tops. If you want to hear back from another organization, you’ll need to be ready to accept the risk. This is why I advocate for only selecting a few programs you’re very excited about.

Judah Soray: The benefit of using the NAFCAS process is the ability to keep one offer on hold while you wait for another that you might desire more. So, no, I don't think you are doing yourself justice if you accept the first offer you received while still waiting to hear back from others.