

Career Advising- Visiting Student Learning Opportunities (VSLO) FAQ's

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1. What is VSLO (formerly known as VSAS)?

The AAMC Visiting Student Learning Opportunities™ (VSLO™) program enables medical and public health students to pursue short-term learning opportunities in the United States and globally. The VSLO program supports students through the process of searching for electives, submitting applications, and completing their resulting educational experience(s). The VSLO program includes:

- Educational opportunities, including pre-clinical, community-based global health, research, and clinical opportunities.
- The application service allows you to search and apply for opportunities.
- A global and U.S. network of participating institutions.
- The VSLO team, a group of AAMC professionals dedicated to supporting students through the application process.

2. When do we get access to VSLO?

You will receive an email invitation to access VSLO in January. Although you may have access to VSLO, you might not have the ability to apply to a particular institution since many schools do not upload their new catalog of opportunities or start their application process until sometime in the Spring, with a lot of them starting in May, but you can certainly start with building your application. Applications will not be released until the M4 Core Schedule has been finalized to ensure there are no conflicts with your required M4 Core rotations.

3. Where can I learn how to use VSLO?

The site is intuitive but you can access the tutorial at the following link: [VSLO Application Student Training](#)

4. What are the different student types?

Within VSLO, there are two student types which determine the kinds of electives you will have access to in the system:

- A. **Pre-clinical:** medical students in the M1 and M2 years
- B. **Clinical:** medical students in the M3 and M4 years

5. When should I start applying for VSLO electives?

Host institution catalogs open at different times, therefore many electives for the summer and fall may not be visible to you yet. Many catalogs do not open until late Spring. It is institution dependent. In addition, the catalog may only reflect what is available for a certain period and the rest is released on a rolling basis. That means you will have to continue checking VSLO regularly to identify electives.

6. What types of supplemental documents are required? A more detailed list can be found here: [CUNY SoM Career Advising](#)

There are 2 types of documentation:

- 1) Documentation that student must provide and
- 2) Documentation that the home institution (CUNY SOM) must provide.

Common Examples: (VSLO will specify who should provide)

- BLS certificate
- Infection Control certificate
- Proof of Malpractice
- Background Check
- Letter of good standing
- HIPAA certificate
- Mask fit testing results
- CV
- Letter(s) of Recommendation
- USMLE scores
- Official Transcript

7. Which immunizations should I get in preparation for away rotations?

Most institutions use the [AAMC Standardized Immunization Form](#) however, this is institution-driven. Therefore, some of your away rotations may have their own institutional immunizations form to complete. However, you can use the AAMC SIF as a guide and confirm each program's requirements.

8. What if the away rotation that I applied for requires a Criminal Background Check (CBC)?

The verification question will be updated by us in VSLO. If the visiting school requires actual results, it will be your responsibility to obtain a current CBC from Castlebranch. You can access their site via this link: [Castlebranch](#)

9. What if the away rotation that I applied for requires a Drug Screening (DS)?

Some institutions may have their own DS requirements, which you will be responsible for complying with and obtaining independently from your primary care provider

10. What if the away rotation that I applied for requires a copy of my BLS card, Infection Control Certificate, HIPAA Certificate or Mask Fit Certificate?

CUNY SOM will verify within VSLO that requirements have been met but you should upload these documents into VSLO if specifically requested by the host institution. You should already have copies. However, Lavasia Valentine can help provide copies if needed.

11. Is the Infection Control certificate the same as OSHA certificate?

No. It is more extensive. Courses offered to fulfill the regulations of the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) do not include all seven core elements that must be contained-at a minimum-in the NYS infection control course, which required by NYS and must be renewed every 4 years. Some institutions outside of NY may have different requirements that you will have to adhere to.

12. Are original USMLE score reports required?

Unless an institution requires that you submit an official score report from the USMLE you can upload a copy of your results. If you are unsure, then you should contact the institution directly or check the institution's website for more detailed elective application instructions. The Office of Student Affairs does not maintain copies of student score reports.

13. How do I prepare my Bio?

It is typically a short statement telling the reader about yourself and may include an overview of your education, accomplishments, professional/personal interests.

14. How do I get a letter of good standing?

We verify that you are in good standing as a part of your VSLO verification. If the program requires a separate letter, email lvalentine@med.cuny.edu with specific instructions from the program.

15. I need a letter of recommendation (LoR) uploaded to VSLO who do I contact?

Once you identify your letter writer, please instruct them to send a scanned copy or PDF of the recommendation via email directly to lvalentine@med.cuny.edu. After we receive it, it will be uploaded to your application. Please note, this LoR (if it is generic) can be used for every VSLO application that you submit that requires a LoR, unless you indicate otherwise or submit a new one with additional instructions.

Here are some general guidelines for the LoR for your **elective** applications:

- Request a letter of recommendation from a faculty member who knows you well **and has observed you clinically**
- Provide your letter writer with a copy of your CV and any other information they might need
- Letters do not need to be specialty or site specific - (**check application requirements**)
- **LoRs should support and recommend you for an elective - not for residency**
- Letter can be addressed: "Dear Elective Director"
- All LoRs must contain a faculty member's signature and be on official letterhead

16. What is a letter of intent?

Briefly, it is similar to a cover letter. It highlights who you are, your skills, credentials, education and accomplishments, why you are interested in the elective, and what you hope to gain from the elective.

17. Is my picture appropriate for the VSLO application?

You should always use a professional-looking headshot photo on your application. The photo should not have you wearing hats, sleeveless shirts, t-shirts with explicit messages, excessive jewelry, or anything that may not be considered professional. A suggestion is that you are conservative and wear a professional shirt/blouse and suit jacket for the picture. Sample Photos are available on the CUNY SoM career advising website.

18. How do I request a CUNY SOM Transcript for VSLO applications?

- Official transcripts are only sent **electronically** to host institutions via VSLO and will not be released to students.
- Submit a VSLO/ERAS transcript request form which can be found at this link [VSLO/ERAS Transcript Request Form](#)
- If the transcript is current, it will be included **in any/every VSLO Elective applications processed during a given semester**, at no cost. Therefore, usually **only one transcript** request is needed.
- If there is a HOLD on your record, the request will not be processed.
- Issues or questions related to transcripts should be directed to the CUNY SOM Registrar's Office.

19. How do I get my transcript uploaded?

Your VSLO application must be submitted first. After your transcript request has been processed by the Registrar's Office, it will be uploaded by the registrar, prior to releasing your application to the host institution. Thereafter, it will automatically be included in every subsequent application submitted during a given semester.

20. Can I take an elective that has different start/end dates than our CUNY SOM M4 block dates?

Elective dates are institution dependent. If they do not align with your schedule, you can contact the institution directly to determine if the dates are flexible. In addition, depending on your specific schedule, you may have some flexibility based on whether you have several elective or vacation blocks in a row.

21. Who do I contact once I have completed my VSLO Application?

You do not need to contact us. Once you submit an application, the CUNY SOM VSLO Administrators will receive a daily alert automatically from VSLO every morning until your application has been completed, verified and released. The CUNY SOM VSLO Administrator(s) can view each application and whether or not the requirements have been fulfilled and who should fulfill them. **Applications are completed and released on a rolling basis.** You will receive an email from us when your application is released to the host institution.

22. How long will it take my application to be released to the host institution by CUNY SOM?

If your applications is complete, once we have your transcript, the turnaround time is approximately 2-3 business days. Incomplete applications, may take 1-2 weeks longer to process.

23. What if my away rotation requires proof of malpractice (liability) insurance?

Before your VSLO application is released by CUNY SOM we routinely check to confirm if we have an affiliation agreement with the host institution. If there is an affiliation agreement, CUNY SOM students are covered at \$3,000,000 per claim/\$3,000,000 aggregate, which should be sufficient for all away rotations. If your away rotation requires a copy of the certificate of liability protection and we have an affiliation agreement, Ms. Lavasia Valentine can send a copy to you. If there is no affiliation agreement, we will automatically attempt to establish one prior to the start of the elective if possible.

24. Where can I find the CUNY SOM List of Extramural Affiliation Agreements?

The list can be found at [CUNY SoM Career Advising](#) under the **M4 elective materials** tab.

25. CUNY SOM doesn't have an affiliation agreement with an institution where I would like to apply for an elective; what should I do?

We encourage students to apply for electives at host institutions where we have an established affiliation agreement. [CUNY SoM Career Advising](#) Before releasing any VSLO applications we routinely review the list of host institutions to determine if we have an affiliation agreement. If we do not, we attempt to establish one prior to the start of the elective. If we are unable to establish an agreement, the Elective Oversight Committee will provide additional guidance if an offer is received.

26. How long does it take a host institution to notify a student if an application for an elective has been approved or denied?

The timeframe will vary by institution, and we as the home institution have no way of knowing when a particular school will send notifications. Be sure to check your email frequently during this time. If you receive an offer, most host institutions will give you 1-2 weeks to accept or decline. Once you receive an offer, it must be reviewed by the Elective Oversight Committee. Please refer to question 27 "What should I do if I receive an elective offer?"

27. What should I do if I receive an elective offer?

Important!!!!: As part of our LCME accreditation, the CUNY SOM is required to review every elective offer to determine if it meets the criteria for approval. If you receive an offer for an extramural elective, it is critical that you notify Lavasia Valentine immediately.

When you receive a VSLO elective offer:

1. Immediately email your official offer/application decision **and** the elective description to lvalentine@med.cuny.edu to obtain final approval from the Elective Oversight Committee before proceeding further. **No elective can be confirmed/accepted without Elective Oversight Committee approval.**

2. You will receive an email confirmation indicating whether your elective was approved/denied.
3. If approved, the VSLO elective will be added to your schedule for the desired block and the M4 coordinator Mbailey@med.cuny.edu will provide instructions for dropping the intramural elective for that block (if applicable).
4. **Intramural electives must be dropped no later than 4 weeks before elective start date.**

28. What if I want to apply to an established elective outside VSLO?

Some host institutions have their own applications for electives (for example NYU, UPenn, etc), that contain areas that must be completed by the CUNY SoM. Once you have completed all sections pertaining to you (including clerkship dates, bls certification, etc), please send to Lavasia Valentine for completion along with any special instructions. If you receive an offer, you must submit the offer to the Elective Oversight Committee for approval **before** you can accept the offer. This is an LCME requirement. Please refer to question 27 "What should I do if I receive an elective offer?"

29. What if I want to apply to international elective? NOT ALLOWED in 2023-2024

30. Help, I don't know what to do???!!

Please send an email to lvalentine@med.cuny.edu with your questions