

The Comprehensive Cost of Applying to Plastic Surgery: Unveiling Financial Burdens Along the Pipeline

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Background

A competitive application requires significant investment: conferences, interviews, away rotations, fees, ± research year (RY) – often unpaid

Some studies suggest costs approaching \$10,000, though accounting for a limited number of factors

Costs incur variable burdens on some: consider family income, COL differences, pursuit of RY, etc.

What is the comprehensive, longitudinal cost of pursuing a career in PS?

Methods

PS applicants were surveyed (2023-2024 cycle)

Variables included:

- Demographics
- Personal finances
- Networking experiences
- Research involvement
- Away rotations
- Residency applications

Attitudes/opinions on the cost of a career in PS

Median costs for each variable were summed

Results

n = 90 (RR: 29%)

- 49.4% had no home program
- 35.5% did a RY
- 35% reported a household income of \$50,000 - \$100,000 at <18yo

Costs Associated with Research

41% of RYs were unfunded

- If paid, 53.3% earned <\$30,000/yr

28% paid out-of-pocket publication fees (median: \$500 - \$1,000)

31.1% attended >5 conferences

- 70.9% received funding (63.4% from their schools)

Away Rotations

Most students did **3 away rotations (39.4%)**, followed by 4 (24.6%)

Only 16.7% received scholarships

Scholarships covered the entire COL during the away rotation only 50% of the time

Summary of Median Costs

Item	Median Cost	Frequency
Medical degree	\$200,000 - \$300,000	20.1%
Debt (prev. degree)	\$0 - \$25,000	66.7%
COL during RY	\$24,000 - \$30,000	22.2%
Total conference fees	\$2,000 - \$3,000	34.3%
COL for away rotations	\$6,000 - \$9,000	38.3%
Away rotation fees	\$100 - \$500	63.4%
ERAS/PSCA	> \$1,000	40.7%
Interview-related purchases	\$200 - \$500	41.2%

Total Estimated Cost: \$235,000 - \$372,000

Attitudes on the Cost of Pursuing PS

59.6% feel that finances, work/life balance, length of training are **greater barriers in PS** than in other fields

49.4% feel the cost is **excessively high**, while 47.2% feel it is too high

However, **51.6%** believe the cost is **definitely worth it**, and 41.6% said it is probably worth it

Conclusions

Despite PSCA reducing costs of applications, students are still paying for ERAS-only programs

RYs increase inequity in the field; they are more accessible to those with greater financial means

Conferences and away rotations are a large cost, but students are willing to pay for opportunities to network and build relationships in the field

Students pursuing PS are immensely determined

Interview-related costs were not considered (survey distributed prior to interview invitations)

Future Directions

Further reduce application fees by shifting entirely to PSCA

Promote opportunities for students to do research early and longitudinally to avoid costs of a RY

Students should consider prioritizing only relevant conferences if they are budgeting

Programs and conferences may consider additional efforts to sponsor students and offset travel costs

Encourage student loan forgiveness program given the length of PS training