Observations from an ERAS-PWDS web-based beta-tester

**What Works Well**

- It can be easily accessed from anywhere you can get on the internet.
  - While technically not yet supported on the iPad, I was able to access it.
- You can email directly back and forth directly within ERAS – though that will not necessarily change the habits of your colleagues or applicants.
- Great opportunity to decrease paper, so the PD and faculty can access applications directly from the website—theoretically no need to send PDFs.
- You can have interviewers enter their comments directly into system, making it easy to keep everything in one place.
- It’s easy to quick-sort and resort within results—by name, by AAMC ID, by residency program, and I would suspect also by medical school for core programs.
  - It was great to be able to easily group (and then compare) people from the same institution—or to look for a specific institution.
- The main page view for each application is much cleaner, making it easy to tab through personal stuff, education, etc. You really only need to quickly scan the complete ERAS application to make sure you don’t overlook anything amiss.
- You can develop a scoring system for applications and interviews and easily use it for each application.

**Challenges I Faced**

- Still some technical issues... I intermittently have had trouble signing on, accessing documents, etc. I have been noticing an increased number of error messages and instances of freezing. This could especially cause issues during interviews.
- The “Help” section is not currently robust or easily searchable.
- I have had inconsistent customer service and phone support – long hold times and I have not always been able to solve issues on behalf of my faculty.
- I had to recreate all my filters. I am hopeful that we will be able to import the ones we were instructed to save from the old PDWS, but in the meantime, I am using mine as a guide.
- While the main view of each application is nice, be mindful when viewing exam results.
  - Only the passing grades are shown on the main view.
  - If an applicant failed, you’ll see a little red circle with an exclamation point by “Exams” which indicates that you need to pull up the official document from the document section.
  - **UPDATE:** I realized that one of our applicants had failed his/her COMLEX 1 on the first try, but there was no note of this on the summary page (i.e. no exclamation point)—only realized it when I looked on the official transcript.
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(Challenges continued…)

• Many of the scanned PDFs (i.e. letters especially) were upside down, but can be temporarily fixed by rotating them.

• As a PD, you may have to teach your faculty how to access and use the system. Change is hard – especially for your faculty.
  o First of all, you need to make sure they accept the invitation to ERAS, which looks very similar to other communications from the AAMC or may be automatically sorted into a spam folder.
  o Second, once they have accepted the invitation, I have found that it is apparently not intuitive for them to use.
  o Many reverted to sending me written evaluations rather than importing or typing directly in to the section in ERAS. (I suspect some of this was habit or inexperience.)
  o Be prepared that your faculty may ask for PDF copies of applications.

• “Roles” are not well-defined and still have a few kinks that need working out.
  o As PD, you are a superuser – you can see and do all (based on the permissions granted by the DIO). From there you have to decide on interviewer 1, 2, 3 or reviewer 1, 2, 3 profiles for faculty. Some challenges faced include:
    ▪ I had difficulty finding definitions of these roles and their associated rights/restrictions in the help section.
    ▪ Additionally, the roles feel a bit too “all or nothing.” For example, I did not want my faculty to be able to read each other’s notes, but in limiting their ability to do so, I also removed their ability to view USMLE/COMLEX scores.
  o Creation of unintentional role conflict.
    ▪ If assigned 2 roles (i.e. PD and interviewer), I found that the role with fewer rights (interviewer) superseded the other (PD).
    ▪ Personal Anecdote: One day I signed in and panicked—it appeared as though I had lost all of my applications. I thought that when we put me on the schedule as an interviewer, I lost my PD superuser view. Fortunately, I was able use my superuser rights to revoke my role as an interviewer and then my applications were again visible.