



Take 3 with Mary Heim

Match Day

Mary Heim, MS LPC, Program Manager in MCW's Office of Student Affairs, shares a behind-the-scenes look at Match Day ...

What was the most memorable Match Day-related experience you've ever had?

While it may not be the most outwardly cheerful Match memory, certainly the most significant Match experience was finding out just a few days prior to Match 2020 that this previously-far-away-feeling virus had impacted our plans and was, very quickly, forcing us to pivot. I recall sitting in a room (so wild, now, to think that we were all in such close proximity, that no one yet knew this was likely the last time we'd be in a large group, unmasked, for years to come) with a group of M4s as they all found out that we'd be canceling their Match celebration in just a few short days.

Needless to say, the emotion, frustration, and pain in the room was palpable. Over the course of the following few days, we watched COVID change things rapidly – what we initially thought could maybe be a small gathering with just our M4s was similarly decided too risky, and in the best interest of keeping everyone safe – was wiped off the table. Our team went into overdrive, pulling together messages of congratulations from the entire MCW community to be compiled into a virtual celebration only days later. Even now, that memory feels like whiplash. Even now, I can still remember watching these congratulatory messages from home with tears in my eyes – seeing the community come together in support of a class (who would be the first of unfortunately many) to have the expected experiences of their M4 year ripped away from them.

But behind the tears wasn't just grief, but this overwhelming feeling of community – we weren't together, but we were all *together*. The unused box of decorations for that event sat in my car for weeks after the fact, frozen in time – but the memory of watching everyone cheer on our graduates from afar in those early, dark and uncertain days – lives in my heart as something I don't think I'll ever forget.

What preparations are there for your office that no one knows about or truly understands?

As with any event, there are so many logistical pieces required to pull together an event like this that it would be like reading three years' worth of grocery lists to type them all out here. But I think that something that's easy to forget from the outside – to those not intimately involved (student, staff, and faculty alike) in the process is that we are not just preparing for celebration. Certainly, we are focusing our time and energy into coordinating a celebratory event, but we are also preparing to hold space, work quickly, and support strongly those students who don't end up matching and need us to carry them through an incredibly difficult and unexpected time during the SOAP.

We are preparing to cheer, hug, lift up the stories of students on Match Day who are thrilled about their next steps, who are seeing their dreams realized exactly how they imagined them – but we are also preparing to hold space for those who open their envelopes on Friday and see a future they envisioned, a plan they worked so hard to obtain just crumble in front of them if their match isn't what they'd hoped. It isn't easy to hold space for all of these potential incredibly valid and complex experiences all at once.

Luckily for us – we are surrounded by an incredible team of fellow staff and faculty who work to make sure that no student feels neither un-celebrated nor un-supported during the week leading up to Match. Like everything, it's a collective effort, and we all do our absolute best to weave the net of support so tightly that no one feels that they've fallen through. And hopefully, at the end of it all – we'll be able to welcome everyone into the celebration they've worked so hard to earn on Friday.

What always surprises you about being part of many Match Days?

I think I am just continually humbled by the chance to get to be a part of Match Day. You would think that the excitement, the tenderness, the sheer magnitude of experiencing the match would dull over time, but it simply hasn't. To bear witness to so many student doctors who now hold in their hands the roadmap to where they'll go next, this culmination of all they've worked towards is incredibly humbling and such an honor to get to witness. I love to get to experience the joy, but it is just as powerful to be present for the vast array of emotions that can arise on Match Day and just be with our students through it all. To think of the many roads our learners, our not-too-future doctors take from that day forward is really mind boggling, and it is just – cheesy as it may sound – really an honor to get to be there for that big, pivotal moment.

We are especially lucky within Student Affairs to get to be the ones that welcome students in our doors here at MCW on day one and, four years later, watch them walk back out into the world as doctors. I don't think the joy and magnitude of that experience will ever wear off.