Abstract

Title: Learning Communities at a New Medical School with a Small Class: Lessons Learned After the First Year of Implementation

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Introduction/Aim(s): We anticipated that specific aspects of our curriculum (widely distributed clinical education, strong emphasis on self-directed learning) would present challenges for academic and personal advising as well as monitoring professionalism. We designed learning communities (LCs) to proactively address these challenges.

Program Description: We divided our inaugural class of 64 students randomly among four LCs, each led by an MD-faculty advisor (LCA). LCAs monitored all aspects of academic performance and provided academic and personal counseling for students at risk of failing an exam or course. The LCA, student and course director collaborated to design remediation plans. LCAs addressed professional development by reviewing formative narrative peer and faculty feedback and coaching students in developing learning plans for their portfolios.

Program Evaluation: We are developing objective benchmarks, narrative summaries and focus groups to identify the impact of LCs on academic success and professional and career development. In the first semester, LCAs spent an average of 40 hours with their students in both pre-determined and ad hoc meetings and an average of 10 hours counseling students requiring remediation. Taking into account all LCA duties, the average LCA effort was 20% full-time equivalent (FTE). LCA comments include: students felt supported in the LC structure; faculty and administrators were readily accessible and approachable; the most important function of the LCA was to help students interpret academic and professional expectations and peer and faculty feedback; open discussion of the peer and faculty feedback stimulated student self-reflection and the development of plans to modify negative behavior. Students who failed an exam similarly felt supported and appreciated that remediation was not punitive but rather focused on supporting their success.

Discussion: Based on the actual effort of our LCAs, we decided to add two additional LCs and LCAs when our second class matriculated in fall 2012, in order to keep the projected total percent effort at 20%. With six LCAs, each will have ~42-44 students in his/her LC once the four-year program is implemented. The LCs served as an excellent structure for students to receive support on their academic and professional development. The close relationship between the LCAs and students has facilitated the development of a learning environment that supports formative feedback, self-reflection, and a positive, proactive approach towards addressing academic and behavioral challenges students may encounter.

Academic Societies & Learning Communities

- Academic Societies are the main mechanism for student advising and mentoring.

- Each Academic Society is led by a Society Dean (SD) from the Office of Student Affairs; entering students are divided evenly between the Societies.

- Each Society is further divided into three Learning Communities led by Learning Community Advisors (LCAs).

- The Academic Societies and Learning Communities provide each student with two dedicated faculty guides who develop a deep understanding of the student's strengths, challenges and career goals and focus on the intellectual and professional growth and development of the student over time.

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Academic Society 1          Learning Community A
N=32                        N=26 (M1 10, M2 16)

                            Learning Community B
                            N=26 (M1 10, M2 16)

                            Learning Community C
                            N=12 (M1 12, M2 0)

Academic Society 2          Learning Community D
N=32                        N=25 (M1 10, M2 15)

                            Learning Community E
                            N=26 (M1 10, M2 16)

                            Learning Community F
                            N=12 (M1 12, M2 0)
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Role of the LCAs: MD faculty members who are involved with the MD curriculum, but are not *directly* responsible for final grades in any course of clerkship. The *primary* role is to monitor and support learning (the student's academic and professional performance within the scope of the 4-year educational curriculum).

LCA Faculty Effort

LCA Faculty Effort

- Faculty effort is estimated at 20% full-time equivalent (FTE). When all 4 years are implemented, the student:LCA ratio will be ~42-44:1

- During the first semester, LCAs spent ~ 40 hours with students, ~10 hours counseling students at academic risk of failing a course

Learning Community	Academic Society 1			Cumulative N	Academic Society 2			Cumulative N
	A	B	C		D	E	F	
2011-2012	16	16		32	16	16		32
2012-2013	10	10	12	64	10	10	12	64
2013-2014	11	10	11	96	10	11	11	96
2014-2015	10	11	11	128	11	10	11	128
2015-2016	11	11	10	128	11	11	10	128
Approx. Total in 2014-2015	47	47	34	128	47	47	34	128
Approx. Total in 2015-2016	42	42	44	128	42	42	44	128

Academic Advising

Roles of LCAs in Academic Advising

- Track student performance across the 4-year MD curriculum

- Identify students "at-risk" academically and/or professionally

- Assist in the collaborative development of academic remediation plans

Supporting academically "at risk" students and students who fail a course

- Students "at risk" of failing a course are proactively identified by the Office of Medical Education, the SD and the LCA. Recommendations and learning and/or tutoring resources are provided to the student.

- Students who have failed a course require remediation to be eligible for promotion to the next academic year. Course Directors collaboratively create remediation plans with the individual student and his/her LCA. These plans target specific disciplines with proposed study strategies and assessment tools.

- As a result, students who failed an exam felt supported and appreciated that remediation was not punitive but rather focused on supporting their success.

Medical Student Individualized Remediation Plan

Date of Remediation Plan Meeting:
Student:
Learning Community Advisor:
Course Director:
Names of Other Individuals Present at the Meeting:
Date(s) for Follow-up Meeting(s):

Briefly summarize the course objectives and competency domains in which the student's performance does not meet the benchmark.

Describe the student's difficulty with each of the course objectives and competency domains identified above.

Was the problem brought to the student's attention previously, and by whom?

What steps have the student already taken to rectify the problem(s)?

What steps have already been taken by the learning community advisor and/or the course director to address the problem(s)?

Competency Domain/ Course Objectives	Student's Responsibilities/ Actions	Faculty Responsibilities/ Actions	Expectations for Acceptable Performance	Timeframe for Acceptable Performance	Assessment Methods	Dates of Evaluation	Consequences for Unsuccessful Remediation

Negotiating Academic & Professional Expectations

Student Peer Feedback: Students are asked to write comments about the performance of each of the other students in their PBL group for each competency area listed below. Comments remain anonymous unless students choose otherwise. Peer feedback is viewed only by LCAs and the individual student to facilitate the development of strategies to improve professional behavior and skills.

Behaviors	Targeted Areas for Improvement	Areas of Competence and Strengths
Professionalism: Interpersonal Skills		
• Respects peers' ideas and questions		
• Listens attentively to others		
• Accepts suggestions about how to contribute to group		
• Gives feedback to the group		
Professionalism: Work Habits		
• Helps peers clarify ideas		
• Accomplishes tasks assigned by group		
• Shows initiative in study of case		
• Shares knowledge with group		
• Facilitates group process		
• Attends sessions regularly/is punctual		
Global Assessment Comments:		

Faculty feedback: Faculty are asked to write comments about the performance of individual students in their PBL group for each competency area (see below). The professionalism competency areas are identical to those for student peers.

Behaviors	Targeted Areas for Improvement	Areas of Competence and Strengths
Research Skills		
• Generates hypotheses based on facts		
• Develops answerable questions for independent study		
• Uses appropriate resources to obtain information		
Reasoning		
• Prioritizes data when solving problems		
• Justifies reasoning process using case		
• Synthesizes information pertinent to case		
• Presents well-organized information relevant to case		
Professionalism: Interpersonal Skills		
• Respects peers' ideas and questions		
• Listens attentively to others		
• Accepts suggestions about how to contribute to group		
• Facilitates group process		
• Gives feedback to the group		
Professionalism: Work Habits		
• Helps peers clarify ideas		
• Accomplishes tasks assigned by group		
• Shows initiative in study of case		
• Shares knowledge with group		
• Attends sessions regularly/is punctual		
Global Assessment Comments:		
Overall Assessment (End of Course only): Satisfactory / Unsatisfactory.		

Role of the LCA: LCAs are instrumental in helping students understand and interpret the academic and professional expectations reflected in the competency areas listed below. LCAs lead open discussions of peer and faculty feedback to stimulate student self-reflection. LCAs and individual students then develop plans to modify negative behavior.

Lessons Learned

- LCs serve as an excellent structure for students to receive support on their academic and professional development.

- The close relationship between the LCAs and students has facilitated the development of a learning environment that supports formative feedback, self-reflection, and a positive, proactive approach towards addressing academic and behavioral challenges students may encounter.