

Building an Advisory Community that Links Distance Campuses

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Background

AAMC data indicate that in the United States there are 53 regional campuses responsible for the entirety of the third and fourth years of the medical curriculum. However, the distance separating regional and main campuses makes providing consistent faculty advising difficult. The UAMS College of Medicine, which is establishing learning communities for the first time, has such a regional campus. Because about 10% of each class elects at freshman orientation to transfer to the regional campus at the beginning of their third year, a learning community is being designed to accommodate these students across all four years of their training.

Program Description

The primary goals of this learning community are to improve academic performance, to provide reliable, longitudinal academic and career counseling, and to foster fellowship among students and faculty. Planned activities include biannual meetings with clinical advisors, monthly "brown bag" lunches using an interactive video network linking the two campuses, and occasional trips between campuses by students and faculty to build continuity.

Program Evaluation

In addition to a centralized college-wide survey, 1) a separate survey, 2) focus groups and 3) individual interviews were used to assess the effectiveness of video networking and other strategies used to bridge the 200-mile distance between the main and regional campuses.



At right are four second-year students on the central Little Rock campus during orientation week for entering first-year students



At left are some of the 32 third- and fourth-year students that study at hospitals affiliated with the Northwest Regional campus in Fayetteville.

Institutional Goals and Interview Results

College of Medicine Goals for Academic Houses

1. Academic Support
2. Improved academic performance
3. Better perception of learning environment
4. Early identification and assistance for those having trouble
5. More "meaningful contacts" between faculty and students
6. Career counseling
7. Increased number of "meaningful" individual sessions with faculty advisor focusing on career
8. Wellness
9. Lower rates of depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, lower rated stress
10. Higher measure of cohesion, community, resiliency

College of Medicine Objectives for Academic Houses

1. Provide reliable, longitudinal academic and career counseling for UAMS COM medical students and medical students
2. Provide opportunity for development of a strong mentor-mentee relationship between faculty and medical students
3. Provide consistent advising for the residency selection and matching process for all students
4. Provide formal opportunities for peer advising/mentoring. Each academic house has students from all four classes.

Focus Group and Interview Results

Student Concerns and Ideas on Two Regional Campuses

1. Set up a Facebook page
2. Permit members on the two campuses to arrange separate, social and invited speaker events
3. Provide clinical advisors on both campuses
4. Issue: How to provide continuity between the preclinical and clinical phases of the curriculum
5. Preparation for USMLE Step-1. Near peer advising
6. Timing of USMLE Step-1: Before or after transition to regional campus
6. Information about housing options on both campuses

Regional Medical Campuses by Region in the United States	
Northeast	29
Central	35
South	35
West	12
Total	111
Clinical Model Years 3 and 4, in entirety	53

At top right is a State map showing the site of the two campuses, which are separated by 200 miles.



Discussion

Beyond the primary advisory goals, the hope is to utilize specialized resources on both campuses to foster community service and a dedication to excellence. For instance the main campus offers opportunities related to public health and global medicine, whereas the regional campus has a unique multidisciplinary research center focused on Pacific Islander health, a related student-led clinic, and diverse community-based clinical experiences.

Conclusions

Beyond the primary advisory goals, the hope is to utilize specialized resources on both campuses to foster community service and a dedication to excellence. For instance the main campus offers opportunities related to public health and global medicine, whereas the regional campus has a unique multidisciplinary research center focused on Pacific Islander health, a related student-led clinic, and diverse community-based clinical experiences.

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