

FACULTY IMPACT ON UNDERGRADUATE HEALTH PROFESSIONS ADVISING

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Purpose: While the benefits of prehealth advising for undergraduate students have been well described^{1,2}, the structure of advising programs varies greatly among institutions. Though the most effective method of advising may be the “intrusive” approach³, with consistent one-on-one contact between advisors and students, some large institutions may lack the resources to provide personalized counselling. At NC State University, a single advising office is responsible for supporting students pursuing all prehealth professions. Additionally, universities like NC State may be disadvantaged by the lack of affiliation with higher level health professions graduate programs that could assist undergraduate faculty advisors. This qualitative pilot study was designed to assess the interest of pre-health professions undergraduates in a large-group counselling program facilitated by volunteering health professions faculty at nearby institutions.

Methods: We developed three hour-long large-group counselling seminars for pre-health professions undergraduates at NC State University. Seminars were delivered to NC State’s Pre-Health Club by faculty from Duke and Wake Forrest Universities every 3-4 months during the 2016-2017 school year. Each session addressed a unique aspect of health professions higher education; the first reviewed admissions and interview techniques; the second involved a question-and-answer session with a panel of graduate students; and the third addressed maintenance of health and wellness during graduate training. At the end of the year, pre-health club students were surveyed to determine whether faculty presence improved their prehealth advising experience.

Results/Outcomes/Improvements: Between 30 and 75 undergraduate students attended each of the three sessions. Of those who participated, 16 completed the end-of-year survey. Eleven identified as pre-MD, pre-DO or MD/PHD; three identified as pre-PA, one identified as pre-DDS, and one was undecided. Of note, informal surveys of attendees during seminars identified good representation from future RNs and PTs as well. All those who completed the survey enjoyed visits from faculty and felt the seminars were productive and appropriately timed. For the 2015-2016 academic year, 5/8 students (~62%) identified their experience in the pre-health club as 8/10 or better, and 2/8 (25%) rated it 5/10 or below. In comparison, for the 2016-2017 year, 11/15 (~73%) rated their pre-health club experience as 8/10 or better, and none rated it below a 6.

Significance/Implications/Relevance: Preliminary feedback from pre-health club student leadership and participants was generally positive. Events were well-received, and informal feedback from participants demonstrated an interest in the presented subject matter and appreciation for the program. A small improvement in student-reported experience with their pre-health club was noted, although the poor survey response rate limits interpretation of this finding. It is unclear whether the improvement can be attributed to faculty participation, but it may demonstrate the potential for positive impact that programs such as this one can have on local institutions with competitive students but limited institutional graduate counselling resources. Similar projects should be conducted at institutions like NC state with increased participation from interprofessional faculty and rigorous survey methodology to better assess the impact of faculty-driven large-group counselling on undergraduate perceptions of graduate education, as well as likelihood of matriculation.

References:

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