



“We don't know what we don't know”

A Qualitative Study of Medical Student Perceptions of Student Affairs

Molli Fromke¹, Brooke Starr¹, Antwione Haywood, PhD², Emily Walvoord, MD³, Krista Longtin, PhD⁴
Indiana University School of Medicine (IUSM)

1:Medical Student, 2: Department of Radiation Oncology, 3: Department of Pediatrics, 4: Faculty Affairs, Professional Development, and Diversity

Project

Each year, the AAMC administers the Graduation Questionnaire to graduating medical students. The survey measures many things, including students' satisfaction with their personal and professional development (PPD) as well as their relationship with the Office of Student Affairs. The LCME uses these responses to inform their accreditation decision for each medical school.

Achieving high levels of satisfaction in these measures across nine campuses is a unique challenge for IUSM. The goals of this study were to gain a better understanding of how second-year medical students view IUSM PPD programming and their relationship with the Student Affairs Office, as well as learn about student ideas for future enhancements.

Method

Focus groups serve as a valuable form of qualitative research, observing the interactions between participants to gain insights into their ideas, perspectives, and feelings surrounding a certain topic (Stalmeijer et al, 2014). This study was advertised to all second-year students using flyers, email, and GroupMe messaging. Seven semi-structured focus groups were conducted to explore the following:

1. What students expected before starting medical school
2. How students define PPD and describe experiences that promote their development
3. How students describe their relationship with the Office of Student Affairs

Researchers MF and BS recorded and transcribed group discussions and used Nvivo qualitative analysis software to perform thematic analysis according to steps described by Braun & Clarke (2006). MF and BS initially coded transcripts individually and then collaborated to finalize codes and identify and define themes. Participants received refreshments, an IUSM t-shirt, and stickers for their contribution.

Themes & Examples

It's a Two-Way Street

Definition:

Students expect accessibility to faculty who can affect change, and ongoing responsiveness about inquiries that have been submitted.

Example:

"And that [request] has been sitting on someone's desk since then...I don't know whose desk that is, and I won't ever know where that's sitting..."

Idea for Improving Responsiveness

"[IUSM could say], 'Hey, we heard that this is happening. We are currently taking steps' and then saying the steps that they're taking...And then when it gets resolved, either tell us, 'Hey, we fixed it' or if it's been a couple of months and nothing has happened, send an update."

Guidance For The Future

Definition:

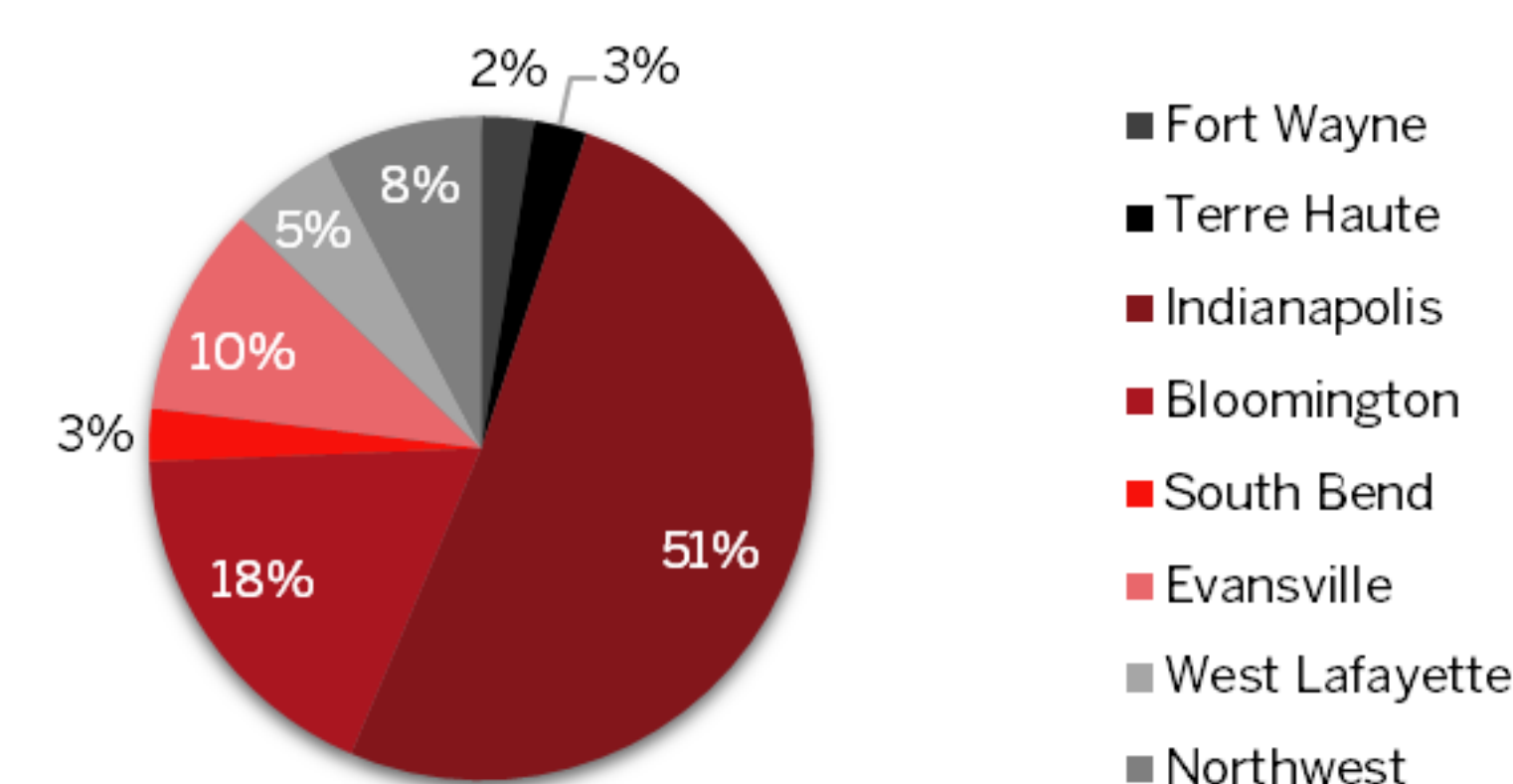
Students desire mentorship by individuals who truly understand a physician's career path.

Examples:

"And having someone...who has walked through your shoes and knows what the journey is like it can be really helpful when setting personal goals for yourself or setting like priorities on what you want your career to look like."

"And I kinda wanted advice of what I could do as a student to better my chances of getting to this residency...I also kind of felt uncertain because during the meeting he...did not offer up points of conversation...I was like, 'What do you usually do with your students when they...come for career advice with you?'"

Participants by Home Campus (n=39)



Proximally-Relevant Information

Definition:

Information students define as pertinent and ideas about communicating more effectively.

Example:

"My advisor had said at the beginning of the year... 'Sometimes we don't mention applying for residency...when you're first starting out because people may get overwhelmed by it.' But the bottom line is like, that's the reality of the situation... and so, I think that while they might think that it overwhelms students, I also think it helps students because you can't lose sight of...the ultimate goal."

Ideas for Improving Communication

- Talking about plans for residency sooner rather than later
- Weekly video announcements during Foundations of Clinical Practice (FCP) course
- Shared calendar of volunteer opportunities and PPD events
- One form for all concerns, ideas, and requests that gets "triaged" to right department

In The Classroom & Beyond

Definition:

Topics and formats students associate with PPD.

Example:

"...I don't know how many people have worked at the clinic in Indy...but the interactions that I've had there taught me more than any PowerPoint slide could have ever taught me because...I was working with patients that were our neighbors and that were different from me and practicing and learning to speak with them and learning how to interact with [them]."

Idea for New PPD Programming

"Have different modules...where we just talk about current events in medicine. We never talk about current events. It's so weird that I'm reading news articles and my professors aren't saying anything about them."

Existing Valuable Programming

Experiences and events that students enjoyed and would like more of

- **Learning about details of clinical practice** during Professional Development Sessions in FCP
- **Hearing first-hand accounts** about healthcare from patients and families
- **Hands-on clinical experience** via FCP preceptors, standardized patient practice, and student outreach clinics

Conclusions

- In preparation for their professional careers, **students prioritize clinical experience and discussion of current events in healthcare**
- Students have **concerns about comparable opportunities/resources** at all campuses
- **Quality mentorship and guidance are most helpful** in planning for the future
- In their relationships with the Office of Student Affairs, students appreciate being heard but **regional students feel there are not sufficient channels to communicate concerns** to faculty at the main campus
- When Student Affairs faculty acknowledge an issue, **students desire more robust responsiveness about steps to resolution**

Results of this study can be used to shape future programming for medical student development and improve communication with students at all campuses. A deeper understanding of IUSM medical student needs and experiences will allow more meaningful steps to be taken to bolster its effectiveness, including improving students' sense of agency and understanding of the system.

Acknowledgement

This project was funded, in part, with support from the Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute funded, in part by UL1TR002529 from the National Institutes of Health. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.