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Recommended Citation
Casale, Fiore; Sally Midani; Elizabeth Lawrence; Felisha-Rohan Minjares; Rebecca Williams; and Rebecca Hartley. "COVID-19 in 2020: Defining Medical Student Roles During the Pandemic." (2021).
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COVID-19 in 2020: Defining Medical Student Roles During the Pandemic

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Introduction
• The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted medical education globally.
• In the early months of this pandemic, medical students stopped clinical rotations to minimize exposure and to preserve personal protective equipment.
• Strategies for online teaching, sharing information about CoVid-19, and engaging students in clinical work are still evolving as the pandemic continues.

Objective
• Design a course at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine to address the educational needs that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

Methods
• Rising 3rd and 4th year medical students participated in a 4-week course designed to:
  • Prepare students for leadership
  • Communicate emerging knowledge about the SARS-CoV-2 virus
  • Prepare for the societal impact of the pandemic
  • Maintain student wellness
  • Provide opportunities for service, education, research, and reflection
• Students completed an end-of-course evaluation and a pre-post retrospective survey.

Table 1. Quantification of projects in each service track, and number of students and faculty who contributed to their success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Track</th>
<th>Number of Projects</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Number of Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service to Patients and Healthcare Workers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to Self and Peers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service to Humanity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and Creativity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Distribution of student response to the prompt “I will use the information learned from components of the course in patient care as a medical student or a physician.”

Table 2. Comparison of average rising third- and fourth-year medical students’ assessment of utility of information gained from each teaching modality used in the curriculum, utilizing a 5-point Likert Scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Modality</th>
<th>4th Years, Ave.</th>
<th>3rd Years, Ave.</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Didactic Lectures</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online References</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups Discussions</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Tracks</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.030*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes statistically significant difference

Results
• Students completed 96 service, education, and research projects during the course.
• 63% (133/245) of students completed the end-of-course evaluation and 20% (41/210) completed the pre-post retrospective survey.
• Majority of students indicated that the course met its objectives.
• Significant increase in agreement with the statement “I understand how I can contribute to patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic” (mean increase 0.51, p =0.006).
• Significantly greater agreement among rising 3rd years with the statement “I believe my service projects have added value to my medical education” (mean difference 0.41, p =0.047).

Discussion
• This course successfully helped develop a greater student appreciation for the role of service-learning in medical education.
• Rising 3rd and 4th year medical students demonstrated a strong understanding of the risks they may face as physicians and are eager to contribute to patient care despite those potential risks.
• Service-learning offers valuable opportunities for medical students to influence the health of their communities while away from clinical duties.