ANO\NATOMY OF A REQUIRED SCHOLARLY PROJECT – FROM CONCEPTION TO REALITY

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Purpose: Analytical thinking is a critical skill needed by medical students who face ever increasing amounts of information. To help our students develop these skills, the University of Pittsburgh requires students to complete a Scholarly Project (SP). The SP may include traditional research or other scholarly work that involves mentored activity completed longitudinally throughout medical school. This paper describes the educational and administrative structures put in place to assure that students complete high quality scholarly activity and receive appropriate mentorship and guidance.

Methods: Building a successful scholarly requirement into the medical school curriculum necessitates a balance of centralized oversight to maintain uniform programmatic standards and individualized attention to and oversight of student learning. Mentors provide the most important level of individualized attention for the student. A multidisciplinary team of researchers called the Scholarly Project Executive Committee (SPEC) provides the second layer of oversight for each individual member’s assigned students. The Deans for Medical Student Research provide the final level of oversight. Using individual learner-based websites, each student selects a mentor and a project based on area of interest. Students electronically request mentor approval of the SP proposal, collaborate and communicate around the project, complete quarterly reports automatically emailed to the mentor, and request mentor approval of the final SP report. Both SPEC and SP Director activities are supported by automated notices when students or mentors post to a student’s project site (electronic collaborative learning portfolio) as well as automated reports for summaries of student-mentor activity. The web-based structure also integrates an active summer research program and SP elective months and/or a year off to complete research. The administrative process and oversight is documented through web-based flow charts and procedures.

Results: Currently 450 students in three classes at the University of Pittsburgh are actively involved in the SP. These students demonstrate excellent productivity in terms of abstract and paper production and have won numerous national awards for their SP work. The oversight structure identifies students who are not meeting requirements, experiencing difficulty with their mentor, or having questions. SPEC and SP Director oversight improves the intellectual rigor of the students’ SP.

Conclusions: We have created an innovative structure for administering a large scale SP that promotes student engagement in the educational process, and facilitates communication, feedback, and documentation so that this required activity will be enjoyable and rewarding for our students.