Voluntary Leadership Development Sessions to Document Student Perceptions, Motivations, Experiences, and Goals

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Background

Research by Bennis & Thomas (2002) and Densten & Gray (2001) has demonstrated a connection between reflection and leadership growth and development. 1 2 3 This relationship formed the basis of a voluntary leadership development activity created by the authors and outlined in this research.

Objectives

The primary objective of this research was to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their personal and leadership related perceptions, motivations, experiences, and goals. A secondary objective was to identify the unique needs and goals of the Class of 2015 to provide a better and more effective development.

Methods

Student attendance for each one-hour session was voluntary. Sessions were conducted in small groups of no more than ten students to create an intimate and open environment facilitated by the faculty advisor. 3 Each student submitted responses to two to four open-ended questions generated to document perceptions, motivations, experiences, and goals. Student attendance and question responses were recorded and analyzed for overarching themes.

Results

Over two-thirds of the Class of 2015 on the Duluth campus attended five or more of the six voluntary sessions offered. The overall class participation rate per capita was greater than 77% of the 53 students who were enrolled on campus during each offering. Students described the type of leader they aspired to be and goals they wanted to accomplish during their time in the program. Common responses referenced a desire in some way to utilize their a) “scientific and medical knowledge” (67.3%), b) “help people” (63.5%), and c) “make a difference” (40.4%).

Student Comments from the Sessions:

Which of your originally identified leadership goals, aspirations, and/or accomplishments program did you achieve after your first 3 years in the Pharm.D. program?

• “My communication skills have improved considerably. I... seek out experiences and further learning that... will contribute to my goal of becoming a trustworthy and caring pharmacist.”

• “[I feel] successful in developing my leadership abilities as well as gaining experience and knowledge.”

• “[I’ve become] a leader that can learn, teach, and motivate my peers when they are struggling or having self doubt...”

What’s the most important thing you learned in pharmacy school?

• “To always keep the patient in the center of your thought process. Also, how and where to find information in order to make the clinical decisions for patient care.”

• The leadership classes; particularly the different models and practices of leadership [as well as] the reflection process [the classes] make you go through.”

• “To be confident in my knowledge and recommendations.”

• How to take initiative in learning the things you don’t know and need to know. [Also] how important it is to create a positive outlook.

• “Connection, critical thinking, and ability to integrate/apply knowledge in real life practice.”

Timeline:

A personal leadership development focus group was designed and offered once a semester over three years for all students in the Class of 2015 at the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy on the Duluth campus.

Timeline:

Session Attendance Timeline

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<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>(Oct-11)</th>
<th>(Feb-12)</th>
<th>(Oct-12)</th>
<th>(Feb-13)</th>
<th>(Oct-13)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Student Attendance Timeline

n = 53

Implications

The high rate of attendance for a voluntary activity over the course of three years amongst the academic, work, and other life demands on student’s time implies that students found these sessions valuable. Although no objective measure of student leadership skills was utilized, students attendance and responses demonstrate that these sessions created a conducive environment for reflection, a necessary component in leadership growth. It also provided insight into how students were prioritizing their involvement in academic, extracurricular, service, work, and family activities. As opposed to traditional courses, these sessions required minimal time and expenses. Based on student responses, these sessions have led to greater fulfillment and individualization of the class’s goals and needs (per comments specified in the objectives).