

Part 3. Relationships with Internal and External Offices

President's Office

Alumni, government officials, and other individuals may attempt to influence the medical school's decisions about a student by communicating directly with the university president. A staff member in the president's or board of trustees office may contact the Student Affairs office to follow up on an inquiry, not to influence the Student Affairs officer, but to be helpful to the constituent and, often, to alert the Student Affairs officer of the contact. The Student Affairs officer should establish procedures for staff members' handling of such inquiries. If the source of influence on the president's office is so powerful or persuasive that the president exerts pressure on the medical school to make a specific decision, then the matter should be discussed with the dean.

Dean's Office

The dean of the medical school has the ultimate responsibility for activities of the Student Affairs office through an associate or assistant dean for Student Affairs. The Student Affairs officer should have a strong, positive relationship with staff in the dean's office, and he or she should insure that there are effective and reliable means of communication, such as regular meetings and telephone consultations between the dean and the Student Affairs officer. The Student Affairs officer should also establish a procedure for immediate notification of the dean in the event of emerging problems that could become significant and/or require the intervention of dean's office staff.

Office of the General Counsel

Student Affairs officers should work very closely with their institution's general counsel. It is advisable to have the legal counsel review the school's academic or educational policies and procedures as they are developed and implemented. Policies for promotion and dismissal, in particular, should be reviewed by legal counsel to ensure that they include appropriate due process, consistent with the university's related policies and procedures. It is also advisable to make your legal counsel aware of any impending student dismissals because of the risk of litigation. Since the institution's legal counsel is the person who would defend the institution if litigation ensues, it is appropriate that he or she have the opportunity to review the school's intended actions, in advance. Legal counsel should also review policies regarding the appropriate treatment of medical students because these policies must be consistent with other university policies, such as those concerning sexual harassment and discrimination.

Other areas in which Student Affairs officers may need to consult with their institution's legal office include development of policies for handling criminal background checks and drug testing, malpractice insurance and risk management education for medical students, and assurance that the medical school is in compliance with federal laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Alumni Office

Most institutions depend on alumni contributions to provide financial support for the medical school and other programs of the parent institution. There is, therefore, a desire to maintain positive relationships with alumni. When an alumnus or donor, for example, requests a “review” of a son's/daughter's/neighbor's/employee's/friend's academic situation, the alumni office will naturally wish to assist the donor, and will likely contact the Student Affairs office. The Student Affairs officer should establish ground rules with alumni office personnel for these situations, and he or she should emphasize that all student records are confidential according to Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines. Strong relationships between alumni office personnel and their Student Affairs office counterparts should be positive, but appropriate, for both constituencies.

Financial Aid Office

A cooperative relationship between the Student Affairs office and the financial aid office is essential to students' financial well-being, both during medical school and after graduation. This relationship should be based on the medical school's mission, administrative structure, and institutional culture. Financial aid may be handled by personnel in a central university office or in a stand-alone medical school office. In order to establish positive and collaborative relationships:

- All students should be encouraged to use the services of this office. Although not every student in medical school receives financial aid, every student should have a financial plan and understand the implications of his or her educational financing decisions.

- A continuous exchange of information should occur between the Student Affairs and financial aid offices.
- The school should consider having an emergency financial aid/loan fund to provide students with short-term funding if problems arise with the timeliness of receipt of financial aid awards. At some schools, monies for this emergency loan fund result from alumni contributions.
- Both Student Affairs and financial aid offices should collaborate to create institutional policies and procedures that ensure the best use of scholarship and grant funds.
- Clear institutional guidelines should exist regarding the locus of decision-making for educational loans, internal scholarships and grants (e.g., named scholarships), and external scholarships and grants (e.g., those provided by a non-institutional community foundation), as well as for merit and need-based awards.

Office of Information Systems and Technology

Emerging processes of information management and communication are profoundly transforming the nature of the medical education enterprise. Descriptions of the institution provided to prospective students; information transmitted to students by faculty members, administrative staff, and others; access to extensive knowledge and other data resources; and even simple everyday communications—all now occur through a bewildering array of (hopefully integrated) electronic media. It is essential that the Student Affairs officer have (or develop) some familiarity with the information technology (IT) resources in place at her/his institution, that he or she be well-acquainted with the individuals responsible for the development and maintenance of IT resources at the institution, and that he or she play an active role in making recommendations about the content and navigability of those information systems accessed by students. Proactive decision-making in the area of IT, such that institutional IT personnel understand up-front the desires and needs of students and Student Affairs personnel, is extremely important, as it is very difficult and expensive to revise and repair IT systems that were developed in the absence of clear expectations and on the basis of poor communication and planning.

Marketing and Public Affairs Office

A clear and concise message is fundamental to schools' marketing and public relations strategies and activities. Most marketing and public affairs offices can help medical school departments and administrative offices to convey a unique message within the school's framework. For that reason, Student Affairs officers should consider enlisting the assistance of school marketing and public affairs office staff with event planning, design and development of publications, news releases, public service announcements, selection of program speakers, and program evaluation. The Student Affairs officer can, in turn, assist public affairs personnel by identifying potential stories of interest about students and graduates who have fulfilled the institutional mission, who have made extraordinary contributions to medicine and society, or who have compelling personal and professional stories. Such collaboration can assist both the institution as a whole and the Student Affairs office to convey messages important to their short-term and long-term goals.

Office of Academic Affairs/Medical Education

Although the organizational structure of the academic affairs or medical education office varies among institutions, the major purpose of this office is to assure that the academic standards of the school have been established and are being maintained. Since many common areas of involvement and interest exist between the offices of academic affairs/medical education and Student Affairs, it is imperative that a collegial and cooperative relationship be sustained. The offices may work together, for example, to improve curriculum, develop technical standards for admission and graduation, create policies and procedures, and/or define and provide accommodations for students with identified disabilities. While, at times, it may appear that these offices are in opposite corners on other issues (e.g., dismissal hearings or decisions about disciplinary action), it is important that institutional administrative staff members in both offices remember that both offices have the same end goals—providing a quality medical education for all students and ensuring that all students meet institutional, societal, and professional expectations.

Admissions Office

It is sometimes assumed that the admissions office is a solo operation that has minimal interaction with the Student Affairs office. There are, however, many ways in which admissions officers and offices can interact effectively with Student Affairs officers and offices to ensure that matriculating students experience a seamless transition into medical school. Examples of such collaborative efforts include:

- Communicating with financial aid personnel to ensure that the financial aid needs of incoming students are well understood and that resources are made available in a timely fashion
- Identifying any admitted students who may be at academic risk so that they may be referred to appropriate academic counseling, if and when necessary
- Assisting incoming students who document a disability and who request accommodations and modifications under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Having Student Affairs office staff participate in recruitment events to demonstrate to applicants and accepted students the existence of ongoing and effective support systems within the institution
- Having admissions office staff participate in Student Affairs-sponsored events, including orientation programs, Match Day festivities, educational programming, and graduation ceremonies.

Minority/Multicultural Affairs/Diversity Office

It is extremely important for the Student Affairs and minority affairs offices and officers to have a close and effective working relationship if institutional diversity initiatives are to be successful. Many of the activities that the minority affairs office supports are closely related to those supported by the Student Affairs office. The minority affairs office is frequently involved in student retention activities, and these activities should be available to both students from groups underrepresented in medicine and majority students. The success of these efforts can be enhanced by the collaboration of both offices and a free exchange of information for the benefit of all students.

Student Records/Registrar's Office

The location and role of the medical school registrar's office also vary among institutions. Nevertheless, the main purpose of the registrar's office at all institutions is the maintenance and retention of students' and graduates' medical

education records and institutional adherence to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines. These offices are also generally responsible for providing training to those with access to student academic records and with responsibility for the verification of a graduate's medical education to external parties (e.g., state medical licensing boards, hospital medical staff offices, and medical specialty certification boards).

When a student matriculates into a medical school, a current student file is created and maintained in the registrar's office. Certain documents from the application file are transferred from the admissions office to the registrar's office, and sometimes also to the Student Affairs office. Documents related to the student's medical education may be maintained in the current student file of either or both offices. The student file may be in electronic format and/or consist of paper records. The student file can include:

- A copy of the Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE)
- Course and clerkship grades
- Clinical rotation schedules
- Narrative evaluations of clerkship/elective performance
- Letters of commendation and/or notifications of honors
- Information about leaves of absence
- Combined degree program enrollment information
- Scholarship award letters
- Special registrations
- Score reports from USMLE Step examinations
- Records of disciplinary actions
- Documentation related to transfer to or from the medical school and of withdrawal and/or dismissal.

Maintenance of a complete student education record is essential for composition of the MSPE, as well as for future verification of completion of an undergraduate medical education and receipt of the M.D. degree. It is essential that the Student Affairs and registrar's offices maintain excellent communication. Verification of medical education for hospital privileges, licensure, loan deferment, and letters of good standing is generally the responsibility of the registrar, as is the provision of the student's official medical school transcript to appropriate parties upon the request of the student/graduate.

Basic Science and Clinical Science Faculty

The course of instruction leading to the Doctor of Medicine degree typically extends over a four-year period. The first two years of the curriculum are generally devoted to mastery of the basic medical sciences and fundamental clinical skills; they serve as a foundation for the clinical work completed in the final two years of medical school. Although there are curricular differences among medical schools, a student typically will take Step 1 of the United States Licensing Examination (USMLE) after satisfactory completion of the second year of medical school. Students entering the fourth year of study will generally take Step 2 of the USMLE. Many schools require that a student achieve a passing score on USMLE Step 1 to be eligible for promotion to the third year of medical education, and many schools require documentation of a passing score on one or both examinations as a criterion for graduation. Additional information about school policies in this area can be found on the AAMC Curriculum Directory Web site at: <http://services.aamc.org/currrdir/start.cfm>. The Student Affairs office should maintain close relationships with basic science and clinical faculty members and all course and clerkship directors to identify and assist students in need of academic remediation and personal counseling.

Student Health and Mental Health Services Offices

Student health services personnel can assist medical students in a variety of ways: outpatient and inpatient care for episodic illnesses, emergencies, and chronic illnesses; immunizations; medications; and mental health services. The costs of these services are supported in a variety of different ways at various schools, including specific fees for student health services and medical insurance programs. Most schools require that, prior to matriculation, a student demonstrate completion of a required set of immunizations and a medical history and physical examination to ensure that the student's health is adequate for the performance of academic assignments and clinical duties and that the student would not place patients at risk. The Student Affairs office must regularly communicate with student health services offices to ensure students' adherence to the health-related policies of the institution, while also maintaining students' confidentiality as required by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and other federal and state laws and regulations.