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Sample survey items to evaluate stressors in the UME learning environment

GSA COSA Working Group on
Medical Student Well-being

Association of
American Medical Colleges

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Evaluating stressors in the UME learning environment

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Background and rationale:

The UME learning environment may be the single most important factor for schools to consider when creating a well-being program for their students. Aspects of the learning environment that affect well-being include learning culture, quality and clarity of instruction, approachability of instructors, pacing of material, exam content, and curricular and clerkship schedules. Schools should consider addressing the learning environment separately and thoroughly from other well-being interventions or resources, as a primary thrust of the well-being program.

In this document, we introduce a set of survey items to evaluate stressors in the UME learning environment that are likely to impact student well-being. Schools can use and adapt these items for their specific needs. As leaders of medical student well-being initiatives and members of AAMC Group on Student Affairs (GSA) – Committee on Student Affairs (COSA) Working Group on Student Wellbeing, our perspectives are based on a literature review of student well-being initiatives published between 2010 and 2020, our research, expertise, and two years of community discussion with AAMC members on how to influence and evaluate well-being.

Any evaluation of the learning environment needs to be done in harmony with the school's stage of change and in collaboration with and with buy-in from offices such as Student Affairs, Curriculum, and Evaluation. Schools should only ask survey questions that will yield results on which they are prepared to act, so as not to frustrate the student body or lose trust.

We recommend that this survey be used in conjunction with the Sample Survey to Evaluate Stressors in UME Wellness Programs.

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Instructions for Students: This anonymous survey is designed to assess the impact of local stressors on medical students. Please rate the following experiences for their stressfulness thus far in your career as a medical student, from “not much stress” to “excessive stress.” These data will be used to make continuous changes to improve student well-being. Thank you in advance for helping us improve the well-being of our students.

Survey note: unless otherwise indicated, items are scored on a Likert scale of (0)Not applicable-(1)Not much stress-(2)A little stress-(3)Significant stress-(4)Excessive Stress

Items for PRE-CLINICAL students:

1. The amount of material that has to be learned:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify any courses with a particularly large volume of material to learn:
2. The pace at which we are expected to learn the material:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify any courses with a particularly rapid pace of learning:
3. The format in which material is taught (lecture, small group discussion, flipped classroom, team-based learning)
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify any delivery format that is particularly stressful:
4. The sequence in which courses are taught:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify what elements of the sequence of courses is particularly stressful:
5. How required sessions are scheduled (which days of the week, times of day, how many consecutive sessions):
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify any courses or blocks where the scheduling of required sessions was particularly stressful:
6. Communications about course logistics (assignments, timing, advanced notice) from course faculty or curriculum support staff:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on stress from communications from the course faculty or Curriculum Office and how we can improve:
7. Performing clinical skills in front of peers and faculty:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of performing clinical skills in front of peers and faculty and if there is anything we can do to mitigate the stress:
8. USMLE Step 1 board exam:
 - a. How has the change to pass/fail for Step 1 affected your stress level? (No change in stress/Increased stress/Decreased stress)
 - b. Does your school offer adequate support to mitigate stress around Step 1? Yes/No[If No] What additional support could the school offer?:Do you feel your curriculum adequately prepared you for Step 1? Yes/No

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- i. [If No] What could the school provide to better support your preparation for Step 1?:
9. Expectations for research activities:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of expectations of research activities:

Items for CLINICAL students:

1. Presenting cases, examining a patient, performing a procedure in front of residents, attendings, and peers
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of performing in front of residents, attendings, and peers and if there is anything we can do to help:
2. Interactions with residents and attendings:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please describe any particularly stressful interactions with residents and attendings and help us by identifying the clerkship(s) and individual(s) involved. Please remember this survey is confidential and you will not be personally identified:
3. Number of work hours expected at the clinical site:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify the clerkship(s) and site(s) that had stressful numbers of hours expected at the clinic:
4. Equitable expectations of hours worked across clinical sites:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify the clerkship(s) and site(s) with more stressful demands:
5. The length in weeks of clerkship rotations:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please describe any particularly stressful issues regarding the length in weeks of clerkship rotations:
6. Clerkship grading evaluations:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of clerkship grading evaluations and how grading can be improved:
7. Policies regarding sick time, bereavement leave, and vacation across clinical sites
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify the clerkship(s) and site(s) that had stressful sick time, bereavement leave, and/or vacation practices:
8. Policies about getting time (facilitated by clerkships) to attend medical/mental health appointments:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify the clerkship(s) and site(s) were not supportive of taking time off for medical appointments:

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9. Managing school obligations during residency interview season:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please identify any specific difficulties regarding managing school obligations during residency interview season and how we may mitigate these stressors:
10. Career advising opportunities:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on how career advising opportunities could be improved:

Items for ALL students:

1. The general culture of medical school or at XSOM/COM
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of the general culture of medical school or at XSOM/COM and if there is anything we can do to help:
2. Interactions with faculty or staff:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of interactions with faculty or staff:
3. Loneliness or lack of social interaction with peers:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of loneliness or lack of social interaction with peers and if there is anything we can do to help:
4. Concerns about contracting COVID-19 in the classroom or on rotations:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of concerns about contracting COVID-19 in learning environments and if there is anything we can do to help:
5. How the school is addressing racial injustice:
 - a. [If rating is Significant or Excessive] Please elaborate on the stress of how the school is addressing racial injustice and if there is anything we can do to help:

Additional open-ended questions for ALL students:

1. Have you experienced microaggressions from students, faculty, staff or patients? Please be specific regarding the source. Please remember this survey is confidential and you will not be personally identified.
2. Have you experienced rudeness, lack of respect, unkindness, or lack of professionalism from students, residents, faculty, staff, or patients? Please be specific regarding the source. Please remember this survey is confidential and you will not be personally identified.
3. Which aspects of the curriculum work to support your wellbeing?
4. Which aspects of the curriculum work against well-being?
5. What has been the most stressful thing that has happened to you in medical school so far?
6. What specific things could the school do to reduce your stress?