

Planning for a Developmental Curriculum

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.

--William Butler Yeats

Introduction:

The College of Medicine and the Office of Medical Student Education consistently strive to improve the learning experiences of our medical students. While the curriculum underwent a significant reform in 2006, effort is made to continually build upon and improve the established curriculum. One of the ways in which we are striving to improve students' learning experiences is by promoting a "developmental curriculum" in order to facilitate students' development from passive learners to self-directed learners who demonstrate autonomy and self-critical reasoning skills. To accomplish this, it is hoped that planning for all learning activities will include consideration of developmental challenges appropriate to students' academic and professional advancement.

What is a "Developmental Curriculum"?

The expression of a developmental curriculum requires certain generalizations to be made with respect to the advancement of students' learning and professional skills across the curriculum. It is understood that not all students possess the same levels of skill entering or exiting the medical program; likewise, not all students demonstrate a linear developmental progression as they move through the curriculum. Nevertheless, it can be said that the most successful students *do* demonstrate increasing levels of sophistication with respect to their skills and the application of those skills to content challenges.

The purpose for operationalizing the developmental curriculum is two-fold: first is to make sure the expression of the curriculum does not inhibit the development of students' higher-level cognitive skills and behaviors; the second is to identify those characteristics desired of an "ideal" graduate and to create a longitudinal strategy for the educational program that fosters students' development and builds upon those characteristics.

With those goals in mind, the planning task is to articulate desired levels of developmental sophistication and to identify the general points in the academic program where those levels can be reached. Students benefit the most when their progression is constantly challenged. Gains are easily lost if acquired sophistication is not subsequently supported and reinforced by the program as students advance. For this reason, it is essential to consider ways to challenge students in order to promote development, as well as to identify the types of support students will need as they work to attain new levels of sophistication.

The developmental curriculum is also expressed in psychosocial, ethical and professional development domains. Expectations for student maturation in these domains are to be reflected in learning objectives, types of interpersonal encounters and practical skills for the practicum-based curriculum.

Vision for Student Development using the Developmental Curriculum:

Instructional, assessment and self-assessment modalities designed for the educational program employ deliberate, documented attention to student development concerns. Those concerns involve fostering students' increasing sophistication as autonomous learners, as evaluators of their own preparation, and as confident practitioners.

Developmental Curriculum Plan Objectives for Years 1 and 2:

1. For the purposes of defining developmental concerns, the first two years are divided into three “trimesters”, each comprised of three-to-four blocks in sequence (the first trimester would include the Prologue, Foundations, and Nervous System blocks; the second trimester would include the MSS, CPR and DMH blocks; the third trimester would include the I & I, Life Cycle and Advanced Topics blocks).
2. Developmental expectations will be identified for each trimester, and reflect increasing levels of student sophistication and responsibility with each succeeding trimester.
3. Instructional methodologies for each trimester will reflect the developmental expectations identified for that trimester. As a consequence, instructional methodologies and assessments reflect increasingly sophisticated expectations for student learning and demonstrations of that learning across the years.
4. The success of this developmental curriculum effort requires an unbroken continuum of increasing challenges for students. A system for implementation and oversight will be established to ensure these goals are met.

Years 1 & 2 Trimester General Expectations:

	1st Trimester	2nd Trimester	3rd Trimester
Learner Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Directed
Developmental Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, define, describe relevant elements • Explain relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze relevant features • Apply knowledge in a variety of contexts • Predict outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze ill-defined problems • Draw and support conclusions
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly structured problems • Direct cause/effect relationships • Single “best” answer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured problems • Cause-effect relationships dependent on context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ill-defined problems • Solution(s) dependent on context
Assessment Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant in evaluation • Process guided/facilitated by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner in self-evaluation • Self-evaluation confirmed by others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal, reflective self-evaluation