

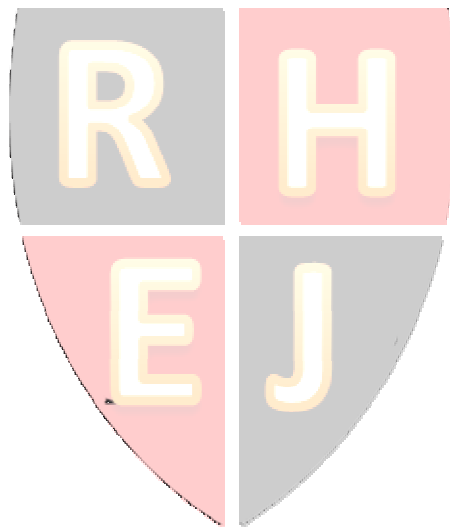
“Rounding” with students: A model for class advising and leadership building

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ABSTRACT:

This article outlines an approach to class advising which draws on research-based techniques to elicit feedback and discussion from students. The purpose of using this method is to enhance communication, increase student engagement, and improve the relationship between the faculty and the class of students.

Keywords: advising, leadership, communication, group discussion, student engagement



INTRODUCTION

The University of Minnesota, College of Pharmacy (CoP) offers a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) to over 170 new students every year. Each new class of students is assigned two faculty “class advisors” – one advisor for the students based on the Twin Cities campus, and one advisor for the students on the Duluth campus. The ostensible purpose of the class advisors is to help students sort out the many problems and issues that can arise during the course of the program. The class advisor’s role is distinct from organizational or academic advising, because the advisor serves as a faculty advocate for the class as a whole through the entire four years of the professional program. The role of advising this many students simultaneously provides many challenges that were addressed using a research-based model. It is important to note that this class advisor is not an academic advisor, nor are the duties of this role in any way associated with counseling or therapy. The university provides academic advising and counseling services by additional faculty and staff.

The goal of the research was to develop a model for advising a large group of adult health care students in an institution of higher learning. In the past, class advisors have taken a more reactionary approach, dealing with issues after they become critical. One reason for the lack of a specific approach may be the dearth of scholarly literature addressing models for advising large groups in academia. The class advisor from the Duluth campus implemented the new approach outlined in this article. It uses a more formal structure around the student-class advisor relationship as a way to encourage greater cohesion and satisfaction among the students and the faculty.

The model is based on Quint Studer’s Rounding for Outcomes method. This approach suggests the use of a specific questioning process to promote open communication, improved engagement, and enhanced problem solving among students and faculty to create positive outcomes. Through the use of this technique, it was also hoped that the class advisor would provide an opportunity to better connect with the class of 59 students and consistently learn more about their specific needs.

Background

Incoming students to the four-year University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy program are classified as PD1 or first-year pharmacy students. (Second year students are PD2s, third year students are PD3s, and so on.) During a two-day orientation session, new students are introduced to their faculty class advisor, and provided a brief description of the advisor’s role at the university and their contact information. The class advisor also participates in the students’ White Coat ceremony, which signifies the students’ entry into the profession. The author of this paper has personally taken part in this process.

The class advisor in this college functions primarily as a liaison between students and faculty. However, specific expectations of the class advisor have not been well defined. Based on anecdotal discussions with other faculty and students it has been determined that some advisors choose only to attend class meetings while others meet with students in small groups. For the most part, it appears students receive only general advice about how to interact with their class advisor. The only guidance is provided in a “troubleshooting guide” given to students on their first day of orientation:

“Class-related: If you experience a problem in a class that affects the whole class, please approach your class representatives. They will help your class address this issue either directly with the faculty member, or in coordination with your faculty class advisor.

Professor-related: Please do your best to resolve any problems you have with a professor by dealing directly with him or her. If this is not successful, you can approach your faculty class advisor for help in dealing with the professor.” (“Trouble shooting guide for PharmD. students,” n.d.).

An example of the uncertain nature of the class advisor role is how the class advisor communicates with the class. Based on discussion with faculty advisors and faculty discussions during meetings some advisors have primarily meet with the students during scheduled appointments or when students need information. Some advisors also attend class meetings, including student elections, class meetings with the dean, or meetings called for specific purposes. There is no standard or specified method of activity.

Modeling Leadership

It was determined that a new approach should be implemented with the class of 2015, which uses research-based practices from the field of organizational development. Adapting the business model of “Rounding for Outcomes,” methodical questions were tailored specifically for students. The process, developed by Quint Studer (2003), gives leaders a way to gather information from others, thereby leading to greater satisfaction for both employee and manager.

Studer (2003) suggests that managers can encourage long-term satisfaction, better performance, and efficient systems by engaging a process in which employees become valued stakeholders in problem solving, and leaders demonstrate genuine interest and appreciation for them. He identifies the key leadership areas that are developed as a result of the Rounding process as: 1) a good relationship; 2) approachability; 3) willingness to work side by side; 4) efficient systems; 5) training and development; 6) tools and equipment to do the job; 7) and appreciation (p. 143-144).

Methods

The class advisor first met with the entire class of 59 students on their second day of class. Because leadership is an area of expertise for the class advisor it was explained to the students that leadership was a key part of mutual growth and development. Lussier and Achua (2007) argue, “Leadership is the influencing process of leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives through change” (p. 6). Using this definition as the foundation of the process allowed for the articulation of clear objectives for the advisor-student relationship. Students were free to share with the advisor anything they felt would be pertinent to improve or enhance their educational experience. The advisor created a structured advising environment based upon Studer’s “rounding” technique: asking a group an intentional set of questions crafted to build trust and a sense of relationship between students and faculty. This was also used to identify problems and generate a shared pathway to solving those problems.

A series of small-group sessions, scheduled once in fall semester and once in spring, formed the core of the “rounding with students” process. In the fall semester, students signed up for one of eight small-group sessions, held in groups of eight to ten students each. A session sign-up list was provided for students in the student commons, an area where students gather,

study, and have their campus mailboxes. Since this was the first rounding session, it truly was an opportunity to get to know the students and learn more about them as individuals.

Studer recommends beginning each group session with a personal question, in order to give each group member an opportunity to participate. Such sharing also helps participants learn more about each other and create greater understanding. Studer's standard Rounding for Outcomes questions include a designated personal question and four "core" questions.

- Designated personal question: To be determined by the group needs.
- Four "core" questions: Tell me what is working well today? Are there any individuals who I should be recognizing? Is there anything we can do better? Do you have the tools and equipment to do your job? (p. 144)

In an academic environment, it was determined that these questions should be adjusted accordingly, while still reflecting the same purpose and intention. These prompting questions are designed to elicit actionable feedback.

In the October session the following questions were asked:

- Designated personal question: Share something great that happened during your first month at the college.
- Four core questions: Explain what works well at the College of Pharmacy. Are there any individuals who should be recognized? Describe what the College of Pharmacy can improve. Is there anything you need as a student to improve your learning experiences at the College of Pharmacy?

Group meetings were scheduled again in February and held in six sessions of 10 to 12 students each. Again the sign-up list was posted in the student commons. The core rounding questions remained the same.

- Designated personal question: What do you do in order to survive the stress and have fun?
- Four core questions: Explain what works well at the College of Pharmacy. Are there any individuals who should be recognized? Describe what the College of Pharmacy can improve. Is there anything you need as a student to improve your learning experiences at the College of Pharmacy? An additional question was asked to elicit feedback about the students' experience of the student committees: How do you feel about your involvement in the committees?

In addition to the small group rounding sessions, the class advisor also met twice per semester with the two student-elected class representatives. These meetings also focused on identifying class-specific issues. From the small group meetings, and the meetings with the class reps, specific areas of interest and issues were identified. The class advisor recommended that the class representatives set up committees to engage the class, address the issues, and help identify solutions.

This process presented an opportunity to introduce students to other leadership concepts, expressed by Kouzes and Posner's (2008) Five Leadership Practices: 1) model the way; 2) inspire a shared vision; 3) challenge the process; 4) enable others to act; and 5) encourage the heart (p. 10). While the work of the committees touched on all of the practices, it was primarily meant to help the students identify areas for improvement in their educational environment, and, where the opportunities existed, enable them to act. Engaging this concept created the opportunity for students to drive the initiatives that are important to them as a group.

With guidance from the rounding sessions and other class discussions, the class representatives identified the focus areas of each committee. In the end, 13 committees were

developed that aimed to resolve short-term issues for the class. Other committees were established with the intent of creating long-term processes for the class. The themes of the committees ranged from connecting relationships within the class, improving the classroom technology, and involvement/engagement in the profession.

An explanation of each committee and sign-up sheets were provided for the class. Those students who wanted to lead a committee simply put an asterisk by their names on the sign-up sheet. Each of the committees were student-driven, the students involved determined the time to meet and the specific outcomes of each committee. It was made clear at the outset that committees could be short-term, and that once the task at hand was complete, that particular committee could disband. Also, other committees could be formed if additional needs emerged.

Outcomes

Though attendance dropped off somewhat over the course of the year, the majority of students continued to be engaged, as indicated in Table 1 (appendix).

Several positive outcomes emerged during the sessions. First, the meetings provided a way for the class advisors to get to know the students in a more intimate setting, facilitating open communication. Second, the students shared ideas that could be synthesized into one collective “voice” and conveyed immediately to the Senior Associate Dean and faculty. It was important to follow-up on identified issues right away; all action plans from rounding sessions were initiated within a week following the session.

Examples of issues the rounding process was able to identify proactively included issues with the college’s honor code, course/curriculum alignment and student outcomes, and food allergy issues that prevented some students from partaking in provided lunch learning sessions.

Identifying these issues in advance made the class advisor more prepared to respond when the issues were raised in faculty meetings.

Through an informal discussion with the class representatives, student feedback was obtained regarding the overall rounding process. Students liked the creative structure and format of the rounding sessions, and they appreciated the committees as a valuable way to get involved. Class representatives’ perceptions of their own roles also validated the importance of introducing leadership concepts into the process.

Discussion

In its first year of implementation, the rounding for outcomes process exceeded the intended outcomes of creating a proactive class advisor-student relationship. This was achieved through structuring a venue to understand students’ learning needs, and introducing leadership concepts to students.

This process demonstrates the importance of integrating leadership concepts and practices into the non-pedagogical aspects of the learning environment; a professional program’s learning environment is much wider than only academics. By creating a holistic professional learning environment that engages the whole person, the college aims to produce graduates who are not only well equipped to enter the profession as excellent clinicians/pharmacists/practitioners, but as leaders possessing the skills and confidence needed to shape and lead health care into the future.

But the formation of committees was perhaps the most enduring and important outcome, because it enabled more students to be engaged in leadership roles and allowed them to address the most significant concerns of the class.

Conclusion

This article presents an overview of early results from “rounding” with students. The experiences described may serve as a framework for future class advisors and as a starting point from which the group advising process may be refined to create more effective advisor-to-class relationships. Student perceptions were observed to be positive, which may yield insights into the first-year experience in general, leading to an improved learning environment and preparation for leadership in the pharmacy profession.

Implementing rounding techniques in class advising is one way of modeling and providing students with leadership skills. Starting early with a class cohort, creating value around leadership as a practice, and framing student experience is critical to conveying the importance of leadership. In so doing, it achieves the college’s goal to turn out generalist practitioners equipped to lead and make a difference in health care.

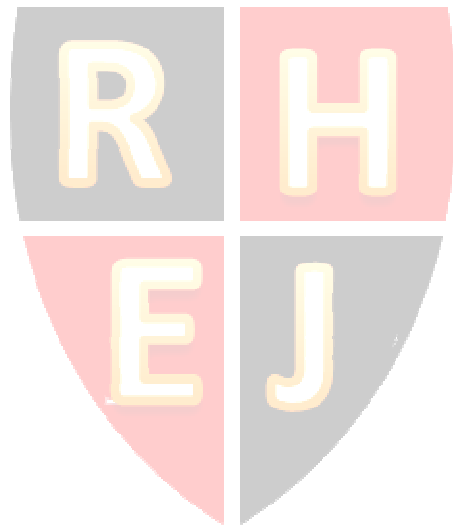
Future Research

The possibilities of future research include longitudinal trends with the class, since the class advisor will be with the students for an additional three years. This would allow the potential to track the rounding questions and outcomes of the committees.

Another future research opportunity available would be to determine if there are differences between the students of both campuses. Since the rounding model was only implemented on one of the campuses, the overall class would have different class advising experiences that could be researched. This could be done by collecting data from the students in order to determine the effectiveness of the model.

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Appendix

Table 1: Attendance at Each Session

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|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Day 1 – Large group | October– 8 small groups | February – 6 small groups |
| 59 students – 100% | 54 students – 92% | 41 students – 73% |

