

Plains Year Exchange Program: An Innovative Approach to Collaboration Amongst Campuses

Ian Pelto, Anuja Riles MD

Purpose: Regional medical campuses are becoming more common as a way for medical schools to broaden their geographic reach and support increased enrollment. Students at these campuses can feel separated from their home institution and isolated from the greater student body. Likewise, students at the larger campus have very few opportunities to connect with students and faculty from the branch campus.

Objectives: The goal of this program was to provide students the opportunity to attend classes and foster relationships with students from their sister campus. Due to the immense time constraints of medical school and the geographic separation, few students had strong connections with individuals at the opposite campus prior to the experience.

Methods: In 2023 we piloted a student exchange program between CU Anschutz and the CU at CSU branch campus. In total 10 students, six from the Anschutz Campus and four from the Fort Collins Branch, participated in the program and spent a day at the opposite campus. Mondays were chosen because they presented the only day in which the program would not have to contend with clinical classes, and because they were the only full day of medical science classes to give students the biggest “bang for their buck” during the exchange.

Administrators at each campus helped students adjust their course schedules and provided access to PowerPoint slides, directions to classes, and parking passes at the CSU campus. Students who participated in the exchange self-selected, and all were familiar with at least one person at the opposite campus prior to the day of the exchange. A survey was conducted following the exchange to collect feedback.

Results: Design for the program was difficult due to differences in schedules. It was determined that it would be inappropriate for students to visit the other campus during doctoring and clinical skills classes due to their small group nature. However, we were still able to find spaces in the curriculum in which a swap was possible. Of the surveys sent, 8/9 were completed and overall the results were very positive. Students felt well-supported at the opposite campus and felt they connected with students that they would not have otherwise interacted with. Negative survey responses included one student being incorrectly marked “absent” for being at the opposite campus, and a noted discrepancy in medical science content between lecturers at each of the campuses. All of those who responded said they would recommend the exchange to a friend.

Conclusions: Based on responses, the campus exchange was socially meaningful and helped connect communities across campuses. However, the potential for a program like this to have a positive impact on educational practices should not be overlooked. Although it was not intended to capture data on educational practices, several survey responses from those who participated in this campus exchange noted considerable differences in their classroom experiences when compared to their home institutions. Most medical students will only ever study in their home institution which limits exposure to other pedagogical approaches. An exchange program, even within an institution, provides a unique opportunity for students to gauge best practices and advocate for the methodology they see as most valuable to their education."