MIND THE GAP: MAPPING HOLES IN COMMUNICATION AT WAYNE STATE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to map and examine WSU SOM's communication system and processes from medical students' perspective. Study findings identified strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and opportunities for productive change. A unique aspect of this study involved its inclusion of members of the student body in the research team. Overall, students on the research team believed peer-to-peer data collection would result in more honest answers than if interviews were conducted by administrative staff.

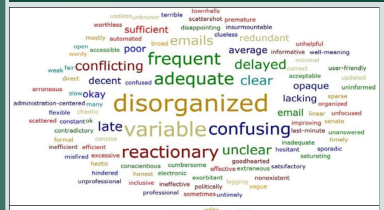
This particular abstract focuses on the communication gaps. Through qualitative data organization, we were able to dig straight to the heart of what it is students feel is lacking on the communication front.

METHODS

This study used a qualitative methodology with descriptive data to illuminate how medical students experience and navigate the WSU SOM communication system. We developed an interview guide to explore the nuances of students' experiences. Students were prompted to reflect on how they experience the complex communication system within the WSU SOM.

Student co-investigators conducted analyses of questionnaire data using Excel and Atlas.ti 8.0 analytical software. We also engaged in a triangulation process, which means that themes are based on data from more than one dataset.

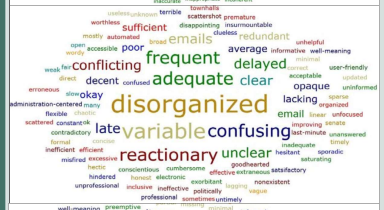
WORD CLOUDS



Communication descriptors (Class of 2023)

- The larger the word, the more prevalent it was in survey results

Communication descriptors (Class of 2022)



Communication descriptors (Class of 2021)

Communication descriptors (Class of 2020)

RESULTS

After reviewing student feedback, the following perceived gaps were identified: (1) lack of coordination/organization, (2) ambiguous point-persons, (3) lack of student involvement, (4) lack of centralization (5) lack of consistency and (6) mental health bridges. The most concerning of the six was the perceived lack of coordination/organization between communication sources.

Words students selected as "best descriptors" for WSU SOM's organizational communication included "disorganized" as the most frequent (44/804 descriptors). Closely related descriptors (disarray, disconnected, disjointed, disordered, uncoordinated, and unorganized as well as contradictory and conflicting), were supported by 10% (81/804) of all descriptors.

CONCLUSIONS

Examples provided by students suggest the apparent lack of communication among faculty/administrators/staff prior to communicating with the student body. Consequences include confusion and misinformation among the student body. Further, students express concerns about how the lack of communication affects curricular organization and the communication culture and climate in the WSU SOM.

Results suggest that full or partial resolution of the communication gap would increase school cohesiveness and decrease unnecessary stress placed on students.