

BECOMING SIMPATICO: THE CIRCUITOUS ROUTE TO MEDICAL SCHOOL AND WHY IT MATTERS

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

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BACKGROUND

DIVERSITY in both patient population and medical school student body is one of Wayne State School of Medicine's strengths.

- Average age of United States medical school matriculants: 24 years¹, suggesting a shift toward more non-traditional student acceptances
- **What does it mean to be “non-traditional”?**
 - *Anecdotally*: “The weird ones” who always sit in the front row and never come to social events
 - *In practice*: Students with a 2+ year gap between completing an undergraduate degree and medical school matriculation; also includes first-generation medical student or students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds
 - *Bottom line*: **ANYONE can self-identify as non-traditional!**
 - For example:
 - First in family to go to medical school
 - Under-represented minority in medicine
 - Undergraduate major unrelated to the basic sciences

Questions:

- What value do non-traditional students bring to medical schools?
- What challenges do these students face?
- **How can we leverage the experiences of non-traditional students to enhance medical education?**

METHODS

- Lit review to identify challenges faced by non-traditional students
- Benchmarking and mentorship from another Midwest institution (Feinberg SOM in Chicago, IL)
- Workshop with current medical students of all years → pinpointed WSUSOM-specific gaps in support for non-traditional students
- Guidance from WSUSOM administration → expanded our understanding of the process to become a new student organization

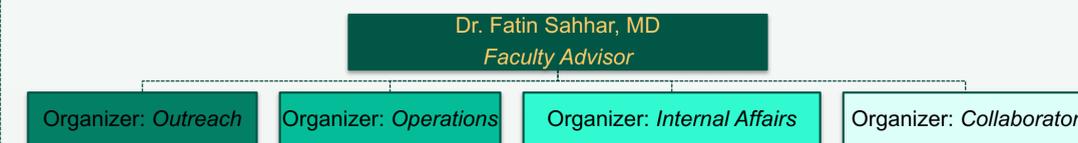
RESULTS

SIMPATICO: a new organization for non-traditional medical students

- “Simpatico” means “getting along & having mutual understanding with one another”
- Organization approved by Student Senate on February 17, 2021
- **Mission Statement**: Simpatico provides a supportive space as we discuss challenges, celebrate success, and explore what holding multiple identities means while pursuing our medical education. In doing so, we provide an outlet to celebrate the many (often circuitous!) routes to medicine. Our **goals** include:



Structure



What value do non-traditional students bring?

- Expertise in a prior career, often outside healthcare
- Well-defined hobbies and support-systems
- Lived experience of navigating the healthcare system
- Confidence and determination that is gained from an understanding of what a future career entails



What challenges do non-traditional students face?

- “Small, persistent academic lag” in the first 2 years of medical school²
- Balancing family responsibilities
- Mourning the loss of pre-medical school careers (and income!)
- Combating feelings of isolation and “alienation” in medical school based on their unique background³

DISCUSSION

Simpatico continues to search for unique ways to apply non-traditional students' experiences to enhance the community at Wayne State

What can YOU do?

- **Be cognizant** of how administrators, faculty, and peers address students. For example: “you are too young to remember this reference” is not always true!
- **Involve** our support systems - extend invitations to student body picnics, organizational meetings, and other group activities to the spouses, children, and families of medical students
- **Identify new ways** to create a supportive environment. What research can better inform our approach to supporting non-traditional students?
- **Ask us** about how our backgrounds or previous careers could contribute to your research or organization

Ultimately: our shared goal of improving medical education requires embracing diversity in all its forms – including the non-traditional medical students!

NEXT STEPS

Future Simpatico initiatives include:

- Generate a contact list of providers who welcome non-trad students for shadowing or mentorship
- Collaboration with Mothers in Medicine
- Partnership with WSUSOM Office of Diversity and Inclusion
- Speaker series: hear from “non-traditional” faculty & clinicians
- Advocacy & volunteer opportunities for non-traditional students
- Undergraduate panels, “Lightning talks”, game nights, podcasts
- Continued data collection to provide further support for non-trads

References:

1. Table A-6: Age of Applicants to U.S. Medical Schools at Anticipated Matriculation by Sex and Race/Ethnicity, 2014-2015 through 2017-2018. Association of American Medical Colleges. <https://www.aamc.org/system/files/d/1/321468-factstablea6.pdf>. Published 2017. Accessed October 13, 2021.
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3. Beagan B.L. (2005). Everyday classroom in medical school: experiencing marginality and resistance. *Medical Education*, 39: 777-784. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2005.02225.x>

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We want your feedback and ideas!

