

Using Improv as a Tool for Fostering Mentorship Among Medical and Pre-medical Students

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Problem Statement

There are few current opportunities for direct mentorship between medical students at the Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership (Medical Partnership) and pre-medical students at the University of Georgia (UGA), despite the fact that the two campuses are in the same city and only minutes apart. It is unclear what barriers exist to mentorship and how mentorship can best benefit students.

Background

- Current interactions between pre-medical students at UGA and Medical Partnership students are mostly limited to occasional Q&A panels, open houses, and “walk-in hours”. These events can be useful, but are not always interactive.
- A group of Medical Partnership students researched and identified pre-medical student needs from their own experience and conversations with pre-medical students. Needs included MCAT preparation, improved comfort with interviewing, communication skills, and mentorship.
- Previous studies have shown that the techniques of improvisational theatre can be used as a tool for improving communication skills.^{1,2}
- Literature supports communication skill development as an identified need in pre-medical students. Medical students who participated in improv workshops previously wanted to use improv as a tool to develop this skillset and facilitate mentorship between medical students and pre-medical students.
- Our goal was to create a judgment-free atmosphere for pre-medical students to develop communication skills such as responding appropriately to various emotional cues and adapting to unexpected situations. We also wished to better connect with pre-medical students via these workshops.

Methods

- Two series of improv workshops were held: one in the fall on the UGA campus and one in the spring on the AU/UGA Medical Partnership campus.
- Students were contacted via email on the pre-medical student list-servs, and advertisements were delivered to pre-medical advising classes.
- The workshop format was loosely based on the project previously done using improv to improve communication skills among medical students.³
- A focus group session was held at the conclusion of the workshops to assess the viability of using improv as a tool to foster mentorship and to perform a needs assessment for future interventions.

Results

Fall workshop series:

- 4 sessions were held, with average attendance of 5 pre-medical students
- Overall, the students enjoyed the sessions and had positive feedback

Spring workshop series:

- None of the sessions were attended by pre-medical students

Barriers to implementation identified:

- Scheduling was difficult because of lack of access to a complete UGA academic calendar
- Holding sessions on Medical Partnership campus was a deterrent for pre-medical students
- Medical student availability was difficult to ascertain and work around

Focus group suggestions and feedback:

- Great degree of satisfaction with improv workshops
- Offer food!
- Advertise development of Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) skills
- Interest in MCAT, interview, and AMCAS advice was high

Summary

- Improv theatre has the potential to be an effective way to foster mentorship among students throughout their medical training.
- Several barriers and suggestions for improvement were identified which provide a direction for future study.
- Additional data will help determine the most effective way to utilize improv to foster mentorship among pre-medical and medical students.

References

1. Boesen, K. P., Herrier, R. N., Apgar, D. A., & Jackowski, R. M. (2009). Improvisational exercises to improve pharmacy students' professional communication skills. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 73(2), 35.
2. Watson, K., & Fu, B. (2016). Medical Improv: A Novel Approach to Teaching Communication and Professionalism Skills. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 165(8), 591. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M15-2239>
3. Baldwin, A., Feeney, J., Herring, K., & Sperr, E. (2018, June). Using Improv to Develop Communication Skills for Medical Students. Presented at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the International Association of Medical Science Educators. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10724/38317>



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The first meeting is
Tuesday, Oct. 23rd from 5:30 – 7:30 PM
in **Sanford Hall, room 309** (main campus).

The UGA Pre-Med program & Women in Medicine invite all students to meet them on main campus October 23rd.

There you'll find a workshop series that uses the techniques of *improvisational theater* to help you improve your communication skills!

Subsequent sessions will be at the Miller Learning Center, room 267 from 5:30 – 7:30 PM on October 26th, November 6th and November 16th.

