

Capstone for Impact Submission | GY2021

Project Title: Building Successful Medical Student Organizations by Optimizing Leadership Transitions

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If this project can be continued by another UMMS student, please include your contact information or any other details you would like to share here:

Summary (~250-500 words): Leadership transition is not only essential to the continuity of the organizations themselves but to the continuity of the programming and values that make them a significant part of a student's experience. Therefore, leadership transitions must be a major part of every leadership team's long-term planning. Throughout the analysis of medical student organization transitions, especially with consideration to the one-year preclinical curriculum, several factors were commonly cited as helpful in making transitions as seamless as possible: (1) creating expectations for transition early in new leadership term, which entails early planning and keeping transition in the back of one's mind; (2) establish a committee specifically tasked with creating, developing, and/or maintaining organization documents and guides throughout the year as well as the onboarding process for new leaders; (3) maintain and update organization documents and materials for the next group of leaders; (4) communicate frequently with current & prior leaders, and look for support from willing groups as regular check-ins with the prior leadership was shown to be very helpful to the new leaders; (5) set and stick to benchmark dates for achieving goals of transition set by transition committee, which should be updated and revisited regularly along with organization mission and values; (6) begin onboarding process for new leaders continued with ongoing support with the prior leadership team aware that they will be a necessary aspect of maintaining the organization over time. Onboarding is most effective when it is organized, focused, and continued weeks to months after the formal transition period. By creating this framework for future student groups, along with a sample calendar, future students will be able to use this information to hopefully improve student groups and the services they perform for the community and each other's learning between class years and beyond.

Methodology: Student group leaders were informally and formally interviewed with standardized open-ended questions that addressed five areas of leadership transitions: (1) perception of the transition process when they first became leaders, (2) how they changed the transition process as leaders, (3) how much the student group was impacted by positive and/or negative transition experiences, (4) how the new curriculum impacted transitions, and (5) recommendations for student groups for future leadership transitions.

Results: Students almost universally noted the importance of transitions in maintaining organization effectiveness over years. They also noted that smoother transitions seemed to have a good impact on the team overall. They also noted that the onboarding process was essential to the organization and leaders in general. On reflection, they believed that planning ahead, being creative, such as having multiple transition times during the year (Fall and Spring) and reaching out to former student group leaders for guidance and for taking on their prior roles as third or fourth-year students were essential to the group's long-term success.

Conclusion (~250-500 words): In reviewing the results and trends of these conversations, I utilized best practice studies and the results of the surveys to create guides for student groups. Successful leadership transitions lead to a higher chance of meeting performance goals and increases leader retention. Therefore,

crafting a meaningful transition plan, whether perceived or not, can have a large impact on the experience of students and stakeholders in the organization. In the survey results, onboarding is an essential part of the transition process but often is insufficient for full understanding of new leadership. Therefore, new leaders should have “ongoing onboarding” rather than one or two brief onboarding days. One of the most impactful practices to help with that process is having the prior and new leadership partner in creating and implementing programming together. Additionally, during this period of onboarding and practice, reestablishing the mission and values of the organization helps to make new leaders more comfortable with guiding the organization. Important to the process of preparing for transitions is “starting early.” While some leaders recommend starting the process of planning for the new group of leaders “as soon as their onboarding is complete,” at the very least it should start months ahead of the actual recruitment and onboarding period. Creating a leadership role, or preferably, a committee on transitions is a proven tool in the management space to prepare effectively for leadership exit and new leadership entrance. Having this committee meet frequently throughout the year is an effective way to keep every leader ready for the transition period. Also, constantly reviewing and revising organization documents and processes is essential for effective transition as it leads to less confusion and better long-term success. Finally, one area that almost all groups would benefit from implementing is measuring program outcomes throughout the year. This is not just limited to the direct leadership transition process but also in programming throughout and between years.

Reflection/Impact Statement:

You may use the following questions to guide your reflection:

1. How did the process of conducting this research confront any limitations of your prior thinking?
This CFI project helped me to explore areas of medicine that are not generally studied in medical school, such as leadership skills and maintaining service programs over the long-term. I was able to engage with classmates, and future colleagues, and find a cohesive theme in all of their responses. Producing a deliverable, such as a guide or sample calendar is an effective way to help other quality improvement projects in my future career.
2. Who could potentially benefit from this CFI project over different timescales and how?
This would most benefit student group leaders and their organizations. As a downstream effect, the organizations and individuals that those groups serve will also be impacted. Additionally, faculty and administrators, especially for student groups, will have an additional way to guide incoming medical student group leaders.
3. What actions will you take afterwards to continue the momentum of this project, and maximize the likelihood of the identified benefits being achieved?
I will continue to identify what aspects of teams and leaders could improve, and hopefully this work will translate to my medical career.
4. What advice would you give to another student completing their CFI?
Be persistent with surveying people, especially classmates, and be creative. Be willing to sit down with some, send surveys to others, and being flexible in general. Also, draft questions multiple times before finalizing them.