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Research

Assessment of the research component in an 11-month interprofessional faculty development program for early career faculty[☆]

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Abstract

Objectives: This study examined department chairs' perceptions about the importance of an interprofessional mentor and the completion of a Scholarship in Progress (SiP) pilot research study for early career faculty (ECF) in an 11-month Faculty Leadership Program (FLP) at an Academic Health Center (AHC).

Background: FLP is a faculty development program for ECF that includes a series of workshops focused on teaching, research/scholarship, and service/leadership skills and roles needed within the AHC environment. FLP participants are required to complete a research pilot project with the help of a research mentor.

Methods: A 21-question, web-based survey instrument was developed to assess the value of FLP's research mentorship and project and was administered to 53 department chairs across the 6 AHC colleges who had FLP participants graduate during 2008 to 2013.

Results: A total of 24 out of 53 (45%) of the department chairs completed the study questionnaire representing 5 of the 6 colleges. Of those responders, 61% reported that having research mentors, such as biostatisticians and 80% reported that having pilot research projects for ECF were important for faculty success at the AHC.

Conclusions: This requirement is important as department chairs report the importance of research mentors, such as biostatisticians and having pilot research projects for faculty success at the AHC.

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Keywords: Faculty development; Interprofessional; Research training

Introduction

Research training is critical for developing Academic Health Center (AHC) faculty members who can conduct

[☆]Department Chairs' Perceptions of the Research Component in an Interprofessional Faculty Development Program for Early Career Faculty.

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studies that improve patient outcomes, secure federal funding, and successfully pursue promotion and/or tenure.¹ In fact, skill development and mentoring of medical educators was identified as a major area of focus in the strategic plan of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Group on Educational Affairs (GEA).² Although some early career faculty may have received research training as a student or resident, research has shown that many feel their formal training in research skills is lacking and they report lower confidence in their ability to meet research expectations of their department.³ Faculty

development programs are growing more common across the nation, and research topics are a basic element of many of these intensive faculty development programs.^{4,5}

One study by Brand et al.⁶ demonstrated that mid-career general internist faculty who participated in a ten-month faculty development program focused on teaching research skills rated the program highly. There was an increase in their aggregate research productivity from one publication over a three-year period prior to entering the program to six publications three years after completing the program. This can be compared to matched peers whose productivity changed little between the first and second measurement periods. Studies such as this offer evidence that faculty development programs that include research training can increase participants' research productivity. However, it is not well established in the literature if there is any benefit of including a pilot research project requirement [Scholarship-in-Progress (SiP)] with the mentorship of an interprofessional research mentor to the faculty development program.

Adding a SiP requirement to a faculty development program could help ECF early in their academic appointment to engage in research and scholarship, invite peer review, and practice presenting to diverse audiences about why their research is important in a systematic and evidence-based way. Adding a research mentor for the ECF's SiP would help the ECF understand how to utilize statistical consultation at the beginning of a research project, formulate a research question and design a quantitative or qualitative study, search the literature, manage study data, measure outcomes with validity and reliability, conduct ethical research, and receive Institutional Review Board or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) approval. While these are common research skills topics for faculty development programs,^{7,8} there is little in the literature that describes how the importance of working on a SiP research project under the direct guidance of an interprofessional research mentor is perceived by department chairs.

This research question is essential because AHC department chairs hold the main responsibility for recruitment, retention, and the career progression of the faculty. However, the demands placed on department chairs in these environments have also increased, and financial and management responsibilities loom increasingly large among the duties of the department chair. As these responsibilities grow, department chairs have been compelled to provide more oversight and be more systematic and outcome focused, and due to constraints of time, they may find that they are less directly engaged in the day-to-day guidance of career development and progression for their faculty.⁹ A more structured approach to identifying, supporting, and tracking early career faculty progress on research may be useful to AHC department chairs in this situation. Therefore, the following study was designed to evaluate department chair perceptions about the importance of interprofessional mentors and the completion of a SiP pilot research project, specifically:

1. Do department chairs perceive the value of early career faculty having an interprofessional research mentor?
2. Do department chairs perceive the value of early career faculty completing a SiP pilot research project?

Materials and methods

Program description

The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center has offered a Faculty Leadership Program (FLP) since 1990. The FLP is an 11-month interprofessional faculty development program consisting of a series of workshops (128 professional development hours) focused on the tripartite mission (teaching, research/scholarship, and service skills) and roles needed within the Academic Health Center environment. All early career faculty (ECF) who are assistant professors (tenure/non-tenure track and clinical/basic science) in at least their second year may apply to the program after their first year with support from their department chair and college Dean. Eligible faculty often approach their department chairs when the program announcement is released each year to determine if the program addresses their career goals. Participation in the FLP is voluntary. The faculty member's supervisor, typically the department chair, becomes the participant's "sponsor" with whom mission-specific goals, including research goals, are negotiated. Approximately two to three faculty members from each college are accepted annually, resulting in an interprofessional class of approximately 16 FLP fellows. FLP is run by a program director who oversees requirements, delivers workshops, and mentors faculty on all areas of the tripartite mission.

To date, over 300 ECF have graduated, representing all six professional programs at the AHC (Table). The main goals of the program are to help ECF: Acquire the skills needed to address faculty roles vital to their career progression, establish mid- and long-term goals aligned with the academic mission, engage as strong intraprofessional/interprofessional team members, take on leadership roles that advance their disciplines and the AHC, and successfully pursue academic advancement.

SiP project description

Once admitted to the program, ECF become faculty fellows who must articulate a research goal and develop a scholarship-in-progress plan and proposal under the guidance of an assigned research mentor affiliated with the FLP program and meets the requirements of a research mentor described previously. At the end of the program, the fellows must also effectively communicate the relevance and results of the project to an interprofessional, layperson, and/or community-based audience through a scientific presentation and a poster presentation.⁷ Faculty fellows complete a short

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