

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: THE YALE SYSTEM

The Yale System of Medical Education remains unique among medical schools. It has been an important part of life at the Yale School of Medicine since 1931. Although it has undergone minor modifications in the intervening years, its essential spirit has remained intact, and it is a major reason why many students choose to come to Yale for their medical education.

The fundamental element of the system is the concept that medical students are mature individuals, strongly motivated to learn, requiring guidance and stimulation rather than compulsion or competition for relative standing in a group. The corollary of this concept is that students must assume more than usual responsibility for their education. Students should be considered adults in a graduate school and be permitted to enjoy as large a degree of freedom as is consistent with the fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. Memorization of facts should be far less important than a well-rounded education in fundamental principles, training in methods of investigation, and the acquisition of the scientific habit of mind.

During the pre-clerkship years, students acquire knowledge and develop clinical skills. In the integrated basic and clinical science courses, lectures are held to a minimum, and there is a focus on interactive learning in small-group workshops and conferences. Performance is assessed by the faculty within small-group sessions and structured activities, by anonymous qualifying examinations at the end of each course, and by the passing of the United States Medical Licensing Examinations. Competency in performing a complete history and physical examination is assessed at the end of the pre-clerkship period using standardized patients in an observed structured clinical examination (P-OSCE). Student attendance is expected in all skill-building sessions and sessions in which interactive learning, clinical reasoning, or collaboration are necessary for optimal learning.

In the pre-clerkship period (first eighteen months), there are no grades and there is no class ranking throughout medical school. Formative feedback is an important part of the educational process. YSM faculty consider small-group sessions with formative feedback to be the most effective means of teaching and evaluation. Students should expect direct questioning in workshops and labs as an important adjunct to the evaluation process. The final decision of acceptable performance for a given course or clerkship is determined by the course/clerkship director based upon the successful completion of the assessments described above.

Freed from the usual anxieties provoked by high-stakes summative examinations, students tend to learn for their future rather than for tests. Competition for grades is eliminated and students are eager to help one another. Class spirit is remarkably high year after year. Upon completing a course, all students are expected to submit a programmatic evaluation so that course/clerkship directors can make changes based on student feedback.

Students are encouraged to allocate their time to further their own interests, within the framework of the Yale curriculum. Some students pursue elective courses or a joint-

degree program in another school at Yale University, such as management, public health, divinity, or law.

Finally, the Yale School of Medicine requires each student to design, carry out, and successfully complete a research thesis, intended to foster the development of a lifelong commitment to learning (see Required Thesis, in the chapter Degree Programs).