Development and Implementation of a Conceptual Framework for Mentoring Students in Academic Difficulty

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Background

- An estimated 15% of health professions students experience academic difficulty at some point during their education.
- Pharmacy school attrition rates have averaged 10.8% for the past 6 years.1
- The opening of new pharmacy schools combined with a relatively stable national applicant pool has resulted in pharmacy schools admitting larger numbers of “at risk” students in order to fill their classes.
- Among student pharmacists, academic difficulty is most likely to occur during the first 2 years of the curriculum with the highest attrition occurring during the first professional year.2,3
- The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) standards require development of strategies to promote progression through the pharmacy curriculum and plans created for early intervention with students at risk for unsuccessful academic advancement.4
- Standards 2016 highlights the responsibilities of colleges and schools of pharmacy to provide an environment that supports success. Corrective actions are required by schools with excessive attrition levels.5,6
- Strategies to minimize academic difficulty include curriculum orientation, supplemental instruction, early performance deficiency detection, academic advising, and counseling.
- One approach highly encouraged at the Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy (AUHSOP) is academic mentoring.
- Mentoring is described as "a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and personal development."7
- Currently, mentoring programs in health profession education are more associated with a process to assist academically achieving students rather than helping students experiencing difficulties.

Objective

To develop a conceptual framework to be used by faculty involved in mentoring students in academic difficulty.

Methods

Literature Evaluation
- A literature search was conducted using PubMed and ERIC with the keywords mentoring, guidelines, and academic difficulty.
- Table of contents in pharmacy, undergraduate education, and student service journals were reviewed.
- A comprehensive search of academic and student affairs departments’ mentoring programs was conducted.
- AUHSOP Framework for Guidelines
- Resources and studies identified were reviewed and adapted to create standards of practice for mentoring
- Guidelines were developed to facilitate effective behaviors between mentor and mentee.
- Figure 1 demonstrates the process of faculty mentorship including activities suggested in the mentoring guidelines
- Figures 2 and 3 are examples of worksheets developed to assess student barriers to success

Figure 1: The Process of Faculty Mentorship

- Set regular meetings
- Identify ways to overcome barriers and strategies for achievement
- Maintain record of mentoring activities
- Discuss the student’s entire academic course load
- Provide accountability

Figure 2: Suboptimal Performance Self-Assessment

Figure 3: Barriers to Achievement Checklist

Results/Outcomes

- One mentoring program designed specifically for academic difficulty was located during the review of literature and mentoring programs.
- AUHSOP Guidelines
- Students in academic difficulty at AUHSOP are assigned a faculty mentor as a term of their Academic Recovery Contract (ARC).
- Mentors are assigned according to individual student needs.
- Guidelines are distributed to the faculty mentor at the beginning of the mentor-mentee assignment and yearly.
- A list of internal and external resources pertinent to AUHSOP is included in the document.
- Resources include those for counseling, testing accommodations, and tips for study skills.
- During the 2014-2015 academic year, there were 28 mentor-mentee assignments at AUHSOP.

Implications

- A conceptual framework for development and guidelines to assist faculty mentoring of students experiencing academic difficulties are presented.
- These unique guidelines provide pharmacy faculty and students a structured guidelines for the mentoring process.
- These guidelines could be utilized as a model for schools to utilize to develop and implement effective academic mentorships.
- These guidelines enhance the education of student pharmacists and demonstrates AUHSOP’s commitment to student retention and academic progress.

Future Directions

- Guidelines are maintained and updated continuously to provide a relevant and evidence-based resource for academic mentors.
- Evaluation of the program is ongoing:
  - Qualitative evaluation of mentor satisfaction of the guidelines
  - Assessment of mentor and student satisfaction with the academic mentorship program
  - Evaluation for a correlation between guideline use and academic progression

References