

ABSTRACT: 2023 ELAM Institutional Action Project

**Expanding Opportunities for Medical Students to Earn Distinction**

Jeanette L. Morrison, MD FACP

Chicago Medical School, Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science

**Collaborators and Mentors:** Kimberly Fasula, PhD MS MPH, Melissa Bernstein, PhD, Melissa Chen, MD, Carl Correll, PhD, Leo Kelly, MD MHA, Archana Chatterjee, MD PhD

**Category:** Education

**Background/Significance:** Distinction programs are optional educational paths that allow medical students to pursue areas of interest beyond what is required in the curriculum. Distinction programs also provide a way for medical students to distinguish themselves in the increasingly competitive residency match environment. Through structured coursework and activities, students can prepare for a special focus in their career and develop additional skills, expertise, and scholarship without increasing the cost or duration of medical school. Though Chicago Medical School currently offers three distinction programs (Research, Basic Science, and Interprofessional Healthcare), these are limited in variety and there is no framework in place for expansion.

**Purpose/Goal/Objectives:** Our goal was to establish a framework, timeline, and approval process for adding distinction programs, including topics relevant to established curricular threads as well as new topics of interest to students and faculty. We also sought ways to increase awareness of distinction amongst students and faculty.

**Methods/Approach/Evaluation Strategy:** A Distinction Oversight Team was established to drive the process. Initial work focused on program design, faculty responsibilities, necessary resources, dissemination, topics, and timeline to implementation. Student input was collected with two focus groups and an M1 class survey. Faculty input was collected at the Dean's Cabinet, the Innovation and Design subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee, and the Curriculum Committee. Program effectiveness will be measured by student engagement and completion, addition of new distinction paths over time, and feedback from graduates and residency program directors.

**Outcomes/Results to date:** The Distinction Oversight Team identified initial topics for distinction as established "threads", contemporary topics in healthcare woven throughout our curriculum, including health promotion, patient safety and quality improvement, ethics, and population health. Faculty and students suggested additional topics of medical education, social justice, health equity, lifestyle medicine, community service, and leadership. Faculty concerns about administrative support, additional workload, and appropriate rigor were incorporated into the framework. Key features of the program are:

- Each distinction has defined objectives and requirements, comparable workload, a blinded application process, dedicated administrative support, and will be led by a small team of faculty
- Each student must complete a capstone project to demonstrate learning
- Distinction will be included in the summary section of the MSPE, on the students' academic transcript, and in the graduation program.

**Discussion:** Students and faculty are enthusiastic about adding more distinction programs. Input from both groups, including topics, faculty time commitment, student workload, and optimal timeline, helped inform the plan. The Curriculum Committee will vote on the overall framework and the first new program, Distinction in Medical Education, in April.

**Summary/Conclusion:** Expanding distinction programs at Chicago Medical School will provide benefits for students and faculty. Students will gain knowledge and skills as well as opportunities for scholarship, career development, and recognition. Faculty will develop longitudinal mentoring relationships with students in areas of mutual interest. Additional distinction programs may also aid recruitment by highlighting unique features of our curriculum and areas of faculty expertise.