Chapter 3
Advising and Mentoring Disadvantaged Students Through the Medical School Admissions Process:
When Students Don't Know What They Don't Know

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds can find the adjustment to college academics and other collegiate expectations confusing and disconcerting. They must learn to understand and navigate what has been referred to as the Hidden Curriculum: the ideas, norms, and expectations that are not overtly stated, but which the student must implicitly understand. These students don't even know what they don't know when they arrive on campus. This chapter focuses on aspects of the undergraduate hidden curriculum, particularly as they affect the career of the pre-medical student and the student's potential for becoming a competitive applicant to medical school. Several illustrative case studies are presented and analyzed in light of what is referred to as the Bachelors Hidden Curriculum (BHC). The chapter closes with a discussion of approaches that pre-medical advisors and student mentors may take to try to mitigate the impact of the BHC on these worthy students.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1468-9.ch003

BACKGROUND

The institutions providing undergraduate medical education seek to increase the diversity of the future physician workforce. (AAMC n.d.). To this end many medical schools disseminate programming to educate high school and college students, representing diverse populations, about medicine as a career and the pathway to that career. However, the expansion of the diversity of the future physician workforce can only be accomplished if those students are accepted to medical school and matriculate. Students finding the application process complicated and incomprehensible become at risk for entering the formal medical education process with a reduced level of confidence and less affirmation of their abilities, compared with their classmates. Disadvantaged, rural, and students from minority communities are at greatest risk regarding the application process to medical school and the completion of a medical school education. This will impact their potential for success during their undergraduate medical education. (Miller, 2014).

One, of many things, that becomes a potential roadblock to academic success and a career in medicine for these students is the Hidden Curriculum. This chapter will address the Hidden Curriculum as it pertains to becoming a competitive applicant to medical school. Understanding the Hidden curriculum and its effects will allow for better admissions decisions regarding students from disadvantaged backgrounds and hopefully increase retention rates in medical school for this population (Kusobuski et. al., 2017).

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN UNDERGRADUATE BACHELORS EDUCATION

The Hidden Curriculum *includes values, intergroup relations and celebrations that enable students' socialization processes* (Kentli, 2009, p. 83). This concept of the Hidden Curriculum came to the forefront after the publication of Phillip Jackson's work, *Life in Classrooms.* Now, 50 years later, this concept embodies the attitudes, behaviors, values, and institutional expectations that students must successfully navigate to ensure satisfactory progress through the formal education curriculum (Margolis et al., 2001, Kentli, 2009; Smith, 2013). The Hidden Curriculum became the focus of a great deal of educational research since Jackson's book. Unfortunately, the Hidden Curriculum pertaining to higher education, particularly undergraduate bachelor level education, here referred to as "Bachelors Hidden Curriculum (BHC)," received much less attention in the intervening years, albeit works by White and Lowenthall (2019), Smith (2013), and Margolis et al. (2001) continue to shed light on the intricate mechanisms that affect students' ability to move forward within an educational system.

Students navigating the college experience need to master the formal curriculum as outlined on individual course syllabi and institutional requirements for graduation. In addition, they need to understand the informal curriculum encompassing co-curricular activities, student life expectations, work-study programs and financial aid. Lastly, they must acclimatize to the BHC, which includes unspoken messages and implied behaviors, necessitating the understanding of unfamiliar values and attitudes depending upon the students' background (Elliot, Baumfield, Reic, & Makara, 2016).

The BHC in most undergraduate colleges and universities is mercurial. The expected skills attitudes and values will be constantly evolving and shifting due to the influence of changing power structures within the institution and changing societal norms and issues such as gender, race, and class will continue to shape hidden curricula (Esposito, 2011).

The academic culture which evolved on most college and university campuses drew fundamentally from white, middle-class and upper middle-class norms, expectations, and values (Smith, 2013). For