Assessing the Learning Environment at the University of Michigan Medical School Through a National Collaboration

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The Learning Environment Study

The University of Michigan is one of 28 medical schools in the US and Canada that are part of the Innovative Strategies for Transforming the Education of Physicians (ISTEP) at the American Medical Association.

The Learning Environment Study (LES) examines the undergraduate medical education environment as a longitudinal survey using many established measures of student attitudes, personalities, and perceptions.

University of Michigan has 122 students participating in the class of 2014 and 109 in the class of 2015: participation rates of 81% and 73% respectively.

Here are some measures gathered during students’ first year of medical school.

### Measures

#### The Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy

The Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy assesses patients' thoughts and emotions being clinically relevant.

Higher scores indicate more belief that patients’ thoughts and emotions is an important part of clinical skill and effective treatment.

Scores can range from 20 to 140.

#### Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale

The Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale measures how comfortable a student is with open situations and goals involving adaptation, ambiguous or undefined goals, and no clear instruction.

Scores can range from 16 to 112.

#### Patient-Physician Orientation Scale

The Patient-Physician Orientation Scale assesses how much the student feels that patients should direct and control a clinical interaction.

Scores range from 10 to 100.

#### Ways of Coping Scale

The Ways of Coping Scale measures different ways of coping with stress.

- **Confrontive coping:** Aggressive, proactive manipulation of the situation
- **Self-controlling:** Preventing feelings from influencing the situation
- **Accepted responsibility:** Accepting one’s role in the situation
- **Planful problem-solving:** Deliberate, conscious action
- **Positive reappraisal:** Thinking of the situation as personal growth
- **Escape avoidance:** Hiding from the situation
- **Seeking social support:** Obtaining help from other people

Scores range from 0 to 50.

### Discussion

There is a lot of diversity in participants’ attitudes and perceptions.

- **Tolerance for ambiguity and the ways of coping subscales have very wide variance.**
- **Overall, students have high empathy scores and are only slightly patient-oriented.**
- **Overall, students perceive the University of Michigan Medical School positively.**

These results will be compared with other medical schools to give a better picture of how to improve the learning environment to facilitate clinical learning with less distraction and stress.

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