Concerns Raised by Students About Year 1 Issues
(and a few faculty concerns as well)

MEC Meeting
February 2009
Major Themes Teased Out:

Students (and faculty) suggest improving

- Content and learning/teaching styles
- Coordination and organization
- Culture for students and faculty
- Help for struggling students
Content and learning/teaching styles

• There is a huge amount of material to learn; need to delete unplanned, excessive duplication
• Make each lecture have some demonstrated clinical relevance
• Update lectures more frequently
• Provide learning objectives for each lecture
• Provide more small groups and conferences (faculty concerns about added time and availability)
• Course directors should keep one eye on helping students prepare for Step 1 (faculty concerns about “teaching to the boards”)
• Some notes and powerpoints need to be improved
• Some powerpoints especially have much too much detail per hour of lecture (or too many slides/hour) (faculty perspectives on their particular favorite areas of research)
Coordination and Organization of Year 1

- It would be helpful to have a stronger central coordination for Year 1, similar to the arrangement within SBM for Year 2 (although these courses are offered by departments, not a program such as SBM)
- Handbook with common policies concerning exams, criteria for passing, review periods, etc
- Centralized schedule (already done)
- Common approach to styles for exam questions
- How long to keep open end-of-course evaluations
- Change scale on course evaluations?
- (Use of student group to document areas of overlap)
Improving the Culture for Students and Faculty

- Students stress about overload of material, and entering with very different backgrounds and preparation (e.g. biochem)
- Changing grades to Pass/Fail could help reduce student stress, and get focus back to learning material rather than competing for Honors
  - Could also be positive for admissions
  - Help encourage collegial and cooperative learning
  - (Danger of regression to mediocrity)
  - Would we be encouraging “just getting by”? (Faculty concern about lack of importance of Y1 material)
- Value of another way to earn honors? Harm?

- (Are students ready to move on to Year 2? Use of “overall GPA” to help ascertain strength of foundation.)
- Improve responsiveness of course directors to student concerns
- Utility of faculty development workshops
- (Possibility of new, expanded Y1 orientation in August 2010)
Help for Struggling Students in Year 1

• Need a stronger system to help students who are struggling, or “falling through the cracks”

• Use of society advisors to help with social, financial, cultural, other issues
  – Meet at least once each term with each student

• Unclear roles of different faculty for students struggling academically
  – Threshold for involvement?
    • Faculty contact students, or vice versa?
  – Year 1 coordinator
  – Individual course directors
  – Society advisor

• Student tutors vs tutorial group in each course

• (Concerns of Y2 course directors about students promoted to Year 2 who are not yet quite ready for more advanced material)
Likely MEC proposals: What do you think as our key Year 1 Course Directors?

• Course content and enhancing learning
  – Update lectures/notes yearly
  – Less density in ppt slides (for some)
  – Clinical example/vignette/case for each lecture: show relevance
  – Course need not “teach to the boards”, but should provide solid preparation for them (faculty need to know what will be covered on Step 1)
  – Improve exam questions (content, single best answer, vignettes, etc)

• Coordination and organization of terms and year
  – Keep courses supported/provided by discipline and department
  – Maintain 3 terms, 4 courses per term (plus OD)
  – Student handbook with common policies for Year 1 (similar to Year 2)

• Culture for students (cooperation vs competition)
  – Course directors respond to student suggestions and concerns
  – Faculty workshops (e.g. recent NBME workshop on writing exam questions)
  – Possible recommendation to move to Pass/Fail in Year 1

• Students struggling academically, socially, medically, etc.
  – Triggers for actively reaching out to students
  – Roles of course director, Year 1 coordinator, Society leader, student tutoring program, remedial groups within courses
  – Re-examine pass/fail boundary (readiness for Year 2)
MEC proposals (part 1):

• Course content and enhancing learning: Each teacher should strive to:
  – Update lectures/notes frequently, to keep up with changes in the field
  – Prepare powerpoint slides with appropriate density (less!)
  – Make sure that each lecture includes at least one clinical example or vignette, illustrating how that lecture’s content is directly relevant to the general physician
  – Cover the most important material that will be tested on USMLE Step 1, in addition to other topics felt to be important by the lecturer
  – Write exam questions that are similar in style to NBME questions (e.g. single best answer, vignettes, reasoning more than memorization, etc), are non-ambiguous, and that test core concepts within the course

• Coordination and organization of terms and year
  – Keep courses supported/provided by discipline and by department
  – Maintain 3 terms, 4 courses per term (plus OD)
  – Create a student handbook with common policies for Year 1 (similar to Year 2) concerning study periods, exam periods, absences from class or lab, delayed scheduling of exams, criteria for honors and passing, etc.
MEC proposals (part 2):

• Culture for students (cooperation vs competition)
  – Course directors should consider and respond directly to student suggestions each year provided by the course evaluation committee
  – DMS should offer occasional faculty workshops to help faculty with large and small group teaching, preparing powerpoint presentations, writing exam items, etc
  – DMS Grading (grades that appear on transcripts) should change from Honors/Pass/Fail to Pass/Fail during Year 1, while maintaining and communicating scores for each student in each course
  – The Year 1 Coordinator should track attendance, course mean scores, and Step 1 mean scores over time to make sure that this change in grading does not adversely impact student learning and striving for excellence

• Students struggling academically, socially, medically, etc.
  – DMS should better define the slightly different roles of the course director, Year 1 coordinator, Society leader, student tutoring program, and remedial groups within courses to help the student who is struggling academically
  – Each course director (with course committee if applicable) should re-examine the pass/fail boundary in his or her course to make sure that each student who passes has achieved a satisfactory minimal level of mastery of the material that will ensure a high probability of future success in Year 2 courses, Step 1 of the Boards, and eventually Year 3 clerkships