To: Members of Medical Education Committee
From: David W. Nierenberg
Subject: Minutes - Meeting held Tues., June 21, 2011 - 4:00 to 5:30 pm, Borwell 758

Voting Members Present: Rich Comi, Matt Crowson (Year 2), Scottie Eliassen, Sarah Johansen, Carolyn Koulouris (Year 2), Tim Lahey, Dave Nierenberg, Laura Ostapenko (Year 3), Todd Poret, and Eric Shirley. (n =10)

Voting Members Absent: Jessie Bay (Year 1), Kathleen Chaimberg, Aniko Fejes-Toth, Tom Frandsen (Year 4), Virginia Lyons, Greg Ogrinc, Bijan Osmani (Year 1), Virginia Reed, Judy Rees, Erin Sullivan (Year 4), and Jonathan Zipursky (Year 3) (n = 11)

Guests and Non-Voting Members: Lori Avery (OB), Ann Davis, Diane Grollman, Cynthia Hahn, Wade Harrison (DMS ’14), Mikki Jaeger, Tony Kidder, Brooks Motley (DMS ’14), Rebecca Pschirrer (OB), Brian Reid, Cindy Stewart, and Kalindi Trietley. (n = 12)

Scheduled Meetings:

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I. **Discussion of Pass/Fail Proposal for Year 2:**

A. Dr. Nierenberg introduced a proposal from several of the MEC curriculum and student reps for changing the grading system in Year 2 from Honors/Pass/Fail (3 tier system) to Pass/Fail (2 tier system). This proposal had been discussed earlier by all the Year 2 course directors, and had received a strong endorsement.

B. Students from Years 1 and 2 presented information about why this would be helpful including the following points (See attachment – PFProposal):

1. It would reduce stress in the Y2 students;
2. reduce the likelihood of depression and burnout, and
3. encourage an environment of collaborative learning rather than competition for honors grades.

C. The students reported that 100% of the Year 1 class approved this proposed change for their second year (beginning August 2011), while 88% of the current Year 2 students voted that this change would have been helpful to them during their second year (now just completed).

D. Questions or concerns raised by faculty (and senior students) during discussion included these:

1. In the absence of grades for Y2 courses, students will likely feel more pressure to do well on Step 1 of the Boards, which now becomes the only metric by which their mastery of material in Y2 can be judged.

2. Absence of honors grades in Y2 will mean that students who have a bad day when they take Step 1 will not be able to demonstrate their achievements during Year 2 via this mechanism.

3. Grades on clerkships can be quite subjective, while grades earned in Y2 courses tend to be more objective (based on exams and assignments).

4. Faculty continue to worry about a possible drop-off in student interest in class and attendance; a decline in student performance on internal DMS exams; and a decline in student performance on Step 1. As was true two years ago when Y1 grading changed to pass/fail, faculty would reserve the right to revisit this possible conversion if any of these possible outcomes come to pass.

5. Even under a pass/fail system, students would continue to be informed of their precise scores in each course, along with the class mean and SD for each course, along with a breakdown of how their final scores were
calculated, and how they did in various portions of the final SBM exams. This should allow students the best chance to identify any areas of relative weakness and remediate those.

6. The Y1 and Y2 coordinators would continue to keep a detailed list of each student’s final scores in each course, with an overall "GPA" for each student. These lists would NOT result in any formal class ranking, and would NOT be turned over to the Registrar’s office. However, such lists could be used in a number of "need to know" situations, which could include:

   a) helping the CSPC plan an optimal remediation strategy for a student who fails a course;
   b) helping to advise students who are preparing for the board exams;
   c) helping students apply for research opportunities that require that a student demonstrate that he or she is in the "top half" of the class academically;
   d) helping the MD/PhD program make sure that their students remain in the top 67% of each class academically;
   e) helping Dr. Harper with the AOA nomination process, and the process of selecting students who graduate with honors, so that these distinctions will not depend solely on student performance in Years 3 and 4.

7. Many sources of stress in Year 2 (e.g. taking 3 or 4 difficult courses at the same time; preparing for final exams; preparing for the boards; preparing for clerkships; juggling school tasks with life tasks; etc.) would still be present even after shifting to a pass/fail grading system.

E. Students proposing this change said that their colleagues were aware of all of these concerns, but still felt that this change would be helpful to them.

F. A motion was made and seconded to change the formal (transcript) reporting of grades for all Year 2 courses from Honors/Pass/Fail to Pass/Fail.

VOTE: The membership voted unanimously in favor of the proposal.

G. Dr. Nierenberg will report this formal MEC decision to the Dean for further action, preferably to result in a change in the grading system to begin in August 2011 if possible.

II. Review of OB/Gyn Clerkship:

Laura Ostapenko, Dr. Nierenberg, and Rebecca Pschirrer presented a review of the OB/Gyn Clerkship (see attached – Summary Ob-Gyn Clerkship).