Educating the Educator: Evaluation and Review of the ADMSEP Education Scholars Program

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Abstract

Objective This report examines the first 8 years of the Association of Directors of Medical Student Education in Psychiatry (ADMSEP) Education Scholars Program (ESP) to determine the impact of the program on alumni careers and scholarship and their reception of the ESP. The 2-year longitudinal professional development program, launched in 2012, provides foundational knowledge to improve scholarship skills for faculty in psychiatry medical student education. The program is unique among national faculty development programs for psychiatry medical educators in its focus on scholarship and its requirement of completion of a research project in medical education.

Methods All 19 graduates of the program were sent a 30-question survey that explored alumni perceptions of the impact of the program on their confidence to engage in educational scholarship and on their careers. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to examine responses to the multiple choice and open-ended questions. A PubMed search was used to ascertain papers published by alumni since completion of the program.

Results Graduate survey responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with the key elements of the program. Alumni respondents reported positive perceptions of participation in the program on their careers as well as on their interest, confidence, knowledge, and skills to engage in scholarship. Nine alumni have had scholarly work published since completion of the program.

Conclusions The ADMSEP ESP was highly valued by participants. It fills an important need for faculty in psychiatry medical student education by providing a national professional development program focused on scholarship.

Keywords Faculty development · Education scholars · Mentorship · Program evaluation

Scholarship is necessary for faculty medical educators, both for academic promotion and to assess outcomes of educational interventions. The need for developing scholarship skills in medical education faculty has been identified across a number of specialties, including psychiatry [1–7]. Many faculty members in psychiatry medical student education lack the confidence, knowledge, and skills to engage in education scholarship. To meet this need, a number of academic medical centers have created faculty development programs focused on education scholarship skills, as well as master’s programs in health professions education [8–11]. Yet, faculty often lack the time to devote to a comprehensive master’s program. Consequently, there is a need for alternative avenues for medical education faculty to gain the requisite knowledge and skills for scholarship. The Association for Academic Psychiatry’s Master Educator Program is a national professional development program focused on creating a national cadre of exemplary teachers. Participants gain knowledge about teaching skills, curriculum development, and educational leadership, but the program does not emphasize educational research skills and does not require completion of a scholarly project [12, 13].

In 2012, the Association of Directors of Medical Student Education in Psychiatry (ADMSEP) created the Education Scholars Program (ESP) to provide participants with the foundational knowledge necessary to accomplish scholarly work in medical student education [14, 15]. The program aims to help early career faculty grow in confidence to engage in scholarship by providing guided mentorship.
Methods

A 30-item survey was developed, using Qualtrics, to assess alumni reflections on the program and their perspectives on the impact of the ESP on their academic careers. Questions 1–5 collected participant demographic data regarding their current academic position and role in medical education. Questions 6–10 asked alumni to respond using a 5-point Likert scale about their perceived impact of participation on their academic careers, interest in doing educational scholarship, confidence level for engaging in scholarship, and knowledge and skills for scholarship. Questions 11–18 explored scholarly accomplishments since completing the program. Questions 19–21 asked about participants’ career trajectories since completing the program. Question 22 inquired about constraints participants may have encountered in doing education research since finishing the program. Questions 23–29 asked alumni to use a 5-point Likert scale to rate their perceptions regarding how helpful specific elements of the program were, including use of a timeline, mentors, annual meeting workshops, and conference calls. Question 30 solicited suggestions for program improvement via optional narrative feedback.

In July 2020, all 19 faculty alumni of the ADMSEP ESP, including cohorts completing the program in 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020, were sent an email inviting them to participate in an outcome survey study. The email informed alumni about the purpose of the study and indicated that participation was voluntary and that responses would remain anonymous. The email contained a link to the 30-item Qualtrics survey and noted that completion of the online survey served as consent to participate. The survey was available for completion for a 4-week period. A reminder email was sent to alumni 2 weeks after the original email, for a total of two emails.

IRB approval was obtained for this study, which qualified as exempt research. Data from the alumni survey questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations. A qualitative approach was used to identify key themes from participants’ narrative feedback about their experiences with the ESP. Themes were identified by the authors from review of the narrative feedback, and like themes were grouped together.

In addition, a PubMed search of published articles was done for scholars who finished the program in 2014, 2016, and 2018 to determine the number of papers published since completion of the program. Scholars from the 2020 cohort were not included as not enough time had elapsed since their graduation.

Results

One individual was unreachable because of a change of employment status, and eight alumni did not complete the survey. Of the ten alumni completing the survey, four respondents indicated that they are currently associate professors and six are assistant professors. Three of the respondents are directors of medical student education in psychiatry, five are clerkship directors or site directors for a psychiatry clerkship, one is a clinical attending in a psychiatry clerkship, and one holds a medical general education position. Eight respondents affirmed that they are still involved in
medical student education in psychiatry, while one did not have a current role in psychiatry education, and one is working at a new medical school that does not have a psychiatry department established yet. Seven respondents indicated that they currently have a role in education in their school of medicine; three do not. Five respondents completed the program in 2020, two in 2018, two in 2016, and one in 2014. Since completing the program, all ten of the respondents indicated that they have presented scholarly presentations at local, state, or national conferences.

Table 1 provides the mean ratings of alumni perspectives on the helpfulness of program components and perceived impacts on their careers. ESP alumni indicated that they feel the program positively influenced their academic careers, their academic portfolios, their interest in doing educational scholarship, their confidence to do educational scholarship, and their knowledge and skills related to educational scholarship. Participants were most satisfied with the structure of the program provided by the timeline and conference calls and least satisfied with the recommended readings.

Five respondents indicated that they have been promoted or started a new job since completing the ESP, and four of these five indicated they felt that participating in the ESP helped in obtaining their academic promotion.

Review of the narrative comments from participants about what they gained from the program identified key themes of skills for research, confidence for research, and networking: Examples of responses include the following:

I gained critical knowledge and skills in design, implementation, and assessment of educational research, a better appreciation for the role of research in medical education.

I gained an increased confidence in my ability to carry out educational research.

I really valued the connection with others in ADMSEP that I gained from the Scholars Program.

Narrative comments identified the program leadership, structure, and mentorship as strengths:

The program had well-organized and dedicated leadership.

The programs structure timeline and conference calls help with accountability and keeping me on a good timeline.

I appreciated the connection with senior mentors and peer colleagues.

Alumni respondents also noted current constraints for doing research included:

Time constraints due to adjusting curriculum for COVID-19 pandemic.

Limited mentorship for department-based scholarship.

Program improvement suggestions included requests for additional guidance for turning scholarly work into written manuscripts.

A PubMed search of publications by alumni who graduated from the program in 2014, 2016, and 2018 revealed that 9 of 12 alumni have published papers since the completion of the program. The number of publications ranged from 1 to 27, with a mean of 8.6.

Discussion

In this review of the first 8 years of the ADMSEP ESP, participants expressed high levels of overall satisfaction with the quality of the program. Survey results show that respondents continue to be involved in medical student education in their department and are involved in medical education in their academic institution. There was a high level of agreement by respondents that participation in the ADMSEP ESP had improved their interest, confidence, knowledge, and skills for pursuing scholarly work. All ten respondents reported that they have engaged in scholarship since the conclusion of the program in the form of presentations at local and national levels and/or academic papers. Alumni respondents had a high level of endorsement regarding the positive impact of the program on their academic careers. Of note, respondents strongly valued having mentors. They

| Participating in the ADMSEP ESP | Mean ± SD |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Positively influenced my academic career | 4.70 ± 0.46 |
| Positive impact on my academic portfolio | 4.70 ± 0.46 |
| Increased my interest in doing educational scholarship | 4.60 ± 0.80 |
| Increased my confidence to do educational scholarship | 4.60 ± 0.66 |
| Increased my knowledge and skills related to educational scholarship | 4.50 ± 0.67 |

| Most helpful elements of the ADMSEP ESP | Mean ± SD |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|
| Having a timeline | 4.70 ± 0.46 |
| ADMSEP mentor | 4.20 ± 0.60 |
| Local mentor | 4.00 ± 1.00 |
| Workshops | 4.30 ± 0.64 |
| Readings | 3.80 ± 0.60 |
| Conference calls | 4.70 ± 0.64 |

Survey respondents rated statements as 5, strongly agree; 4, agree; 3, neutral; 2, disagree; 1, strongly disagree

SD, standard deviation
affirmed the use of a timeline and scheduled conference calls throughout the program as being especially beneficial.

Narrative feedback responses amplify the quantitative results and further describe respondents’ appreciation for the benefits of working with a collegial cohort and of networking opportunities that the program afforded. Review of publications on PubMed for the 2014, 2016, and 2018 cohorts indicate that nine alumni have continued to engage in scholarly work that has led to publication.

The ADMSEP ESP is unique as a national professional development program in being specifically focused on the scholarship needs of psychiatry medical student educators and incorporating a longitudinal format that requires the design and completion of a scholarly research project in psychiatry medical education.

The strengths of the program are that it integrates active mentorship using local and ADMSEP faculty leaders within a structured framework that facilitates accomplishment of a scholarship project. It requires a 2-year commitment, yet it is less intensive than a master’s program in health profession education. It provides a national professional development opportunity for medical student education faculty who lack such a program at their home institution.

The study has some limitations. The number of graduates is small, and the study did not include a control group, limiting ability to do statistical analysis of survey results. Another limitation is that the alumni survey was completed by 10 of 19 graduates, limiting ability to assess impact of the program on those alumni who did not respond. The 10/19 response rate may have positively skewed the very positive satisfaction results. Certainly, the program attracted faculty educators who were motivated to improve their scholarship skills and, therefore, were a self-selected group who may have been more likely to become more productive in scholarly output. It is also possible that alumni who are continuing to pursue academic careers involving scholarship were more likely to respond to the survey. In addition, the PubMed search likely missed publications that alumni may have had in journals not indexed in PubMed or were under review or in press at the time of the study.

Despite these limitations, findings from this report indicate that the ADMSEP ESP has succeeded in meeting its objectives to improve psychiatry medical student educators’ interest, confidence, and skills to engage in scholarship. Based on findings derived from this review, future plans include transforming all longitudinal scholar meetings from conference calls to video conference format, as well as adding more specific mentorship on turning scholarly projects into manuscripts for publication.

In conclusion, the ADMSEP ESP fills an important professional development need for faculty in psychiatry medical student education and strengthens collegial and networking relationships that will enhance future scholarship work. ESP graduates have the potential to be academic leaders in medical student education as they continue in their academic careers.

Declarations

Disclosures On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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